

M. in Hell 241

Chapter 241 - Remnant (2)

Belphegor stood up with Sloth wrapped around him.

A breathtaking amount of demonic energy that couldn't be compared to before surged out of him.

Balrog's expression hardened.

'This is where it truly begins.'

While clenching his fist, which was blazing with dark-red flames, he got in position. He'd been able to face Belphegor until now because of luck. It was a completely different story if Belphegor went all out.

[Now, let us see if you have become strong enough to dare say such things to me.]

Belphegor slowly raised his hand and created formless blades. The amount could not even be compared to before; there were more than a thousand of them. The blades, which distorted the flow of time, poured down on Balrog like rainfall.

Pour!!

The blades tore the ground apart as they made contact with it. Although it was weird to see the ground being torn apart just because the flow of time was twisted, it was not that weird if one thought about it.

Earth rotated, moving endlessly. The Authority of Stillness drastically slowed down whatever it touched, so the distortion arose from the difference in the movement speed of the Earth and the affected area. In other words...

'If those blades touch me...'

Not even Balrog with the Demonic Armor would be able to avoid fatal injuries.

Balrog spread his demonic energy and closed his eyes. He focused on the changing flow of demonic energy and dodged the blades.

Crunch!

[Kuh.]

Even if he could feel them all, it was almost impossible to dodge over a thousand attacks. His skin contorted where the formless blade touched.

[Die, Balrog.]

Belphegor spread his arms wide.

The power of the Authority that twisted time spread like a tent.

Crack! Crush!

The land that had been swept away by the landslide was warped, creating a massive impact.

Balrog bit his lip while dodging the blades pouring down on him.

'I guess he's not a prince of Hell for nothing.'

Up until now, he'd faced countless demons with Authorities, but Belphegor was on a completely different level.

Balrog stomped on the ground. If he stopped even for a second, he'd be devoured whole by the Authority of Stillness. If that happened, it would be the end of him. The distortions of time would contort his entire body, and he would explode.

Balrog scanned Belphegor while continuing to move.

'There is a way.'

The Authority of Stillness wasn't absolute. Although it was extremely overpowered, it had many restrictions. For example, it could only be used on targets within Belphegor's field of vision, and...

'It's slow.'

That was its biggest weakness. As long as the opponent was fast, dodging the Authority of Stillness wasn't actually that hard. Belphegor had created thousands of formless blades to conceal that weakness.

Boom! Rumble!!

The formless blades destroyed the ground covering more than a few hundred meters. Balrog kept moving endlessly, and then...

'Now!'

Belphegor revealed an opening. He was not able to move while using the Authority of Stillness. It was the perfect chance to counterattack.

Bam!

Balrog lowered his body and launched himself forward. The formless blades grazed him. His skin was split open, and his muscles were torn apart, but he ignored the attacks and clenched his fist, gathering demonic energy around it. A demonic energy gauntlet was made.

He had to attack Belphegor with perfect timing.

Balrog shot forward at supersonic speed, and he swung his fist, which was covered by his Demonic Armor. He was aiming for Belphegor's head.

He felt his fist make contact with the Authority protecting Belphegor. His fist momentarily lost its momentum.

'And now...'

Balrog's eyes shone. The moment his fist made contact with the Authority of Stillness, he would make the Demonic Armor covering his fist explode. The black demonic energy would spread radially and obstruct Belphegor's vision.

The Authority of Stillness could only influence the area Belphegor's sight reached. If he made his demonic energy explode to obstruct Belphegor's vision the moment his fist reached the Authority, he would be able to land the attack.

Crack!

'It worked!'

He felt a sensation in his fist. Balrog's eyes shone. However...

[Aha, that was a clever trick,] Belphegor ridiculed.

The white armor covering his body spread out as if a spider had opened its legs wide or if a predator had opened its mouth.

The armor spread and wrapped around Balrog's arm, and...

Crunch!!

[Kurgh!!]

Balrog's arm was torn apart from the elbow, and black blood poured out like a fountain.

Belphegor clicked his tongue and leisurely crossed his arms.

[Tear him apart.]

Belphegor gave a command to someone, and Balrog soon realized who it had been directed to.

Crack! Grind!

The white armor enveloping Belphegor changed form, and eight arms resembling skeleton arms took shape. The hands gripped Balrog and pulled his body in different directions.

[Gaaaaaaahh!!] A painful scream left Balrog's mouth, and the Demonic Armor protecting him cracked.

The functions of the transcendental Hell Armament Sloth were rather simple.

It did not have overwhelmingly destructive power or special abilities. The power of Sloth was that it did things in the place of its wielder within the confines of possibility. If the wielder did not want to use their two legs, it would become a wheelchair. If they wanted to protect themselves, it would turn into armor; and a weapon if they wanted to kill their enemies.

While Sloth was moving, its wielder didn't have to do anything.

[Kurghhh!!]

The eight arms pulled Balrog in all directions with immense grip strength.

The Hell Armament was simple, but it certainly wasn't weak.

Sloth, possessing enough raw strength to overpower Balrog, was able to perfectly cover for the weakness of Belphegor's Authority of Stillness, which made him unable to move while using it.

Crack! Crack!

Balrog's bones broke, and black blood poured from his split skin. His eyes were bloodshot, and his muscles inflated as if they were about to explode. Still, he couldn't free himself from the strength of Sloth.

Belphegor laughed mockingly at him.

[Hmph. Is this all you can do after acting so high and mighty?]

Tsk tsk.

He clicked his tongue and shook his head.

[Did you really believe you would be able to defeat a prince of Hell?]

It was an unbelievable thought. Not only that, but thanks to having absorbed the Demonic Origin, Belphegor had become even stronger than his past self. A mere subordinate of the demon king was no match for him.

Belphegor looked at Balrog in disappointment, but his eyes soon shone.

[Oh, come to think of it, using you would be more effective than that human, Kim Si-Hun.]

[More effective?]

[For calling the demon king there.]

Belphegor snickered.

Balrog smirked. He wasn't sure what Belphegor was planning, but it was pointless. [Do you... seriously believe that taking a hostage... would work on him?]

[Of course it will. Have you forgotten why the demon king started the thousand-year war in the first place, Balrog?]

[...]

[Kihihi. Despite being a lunatic, he greatly cares for his subordinates. Oh, maybe this is exactly because he is a lunatic. In any case, I am sure the demon king would hesitate if you were the hostage.]

Belphegor smiled brightly.

If they had Balrog as a hostage, the chances of their plan's success would drastically rise. They would be able to kill that monster, the demon king.

[Well, then... how about I rip off your other limbs before I take you to the demon king?]

Crack!!

[Kuh!!! Kargh!!]

[Hahahaha!! You will be able to see your master die before your eyes once again!]

Balrog screamed.

Sloth's arms were pulling his arms and legs in all four directions.

'At this rate...'

Balrog bit his lip even while being in immense pain.

'I will likely...'

His eyes sank. He recalled his battle against Belphegor, and a chilling fear ran down his spine.

'... Lose.'

There was no doubt about it. The princes of Hell were fundamentally different from regular demons. No matter how hard one tried or how much they struggled, it was impossible for a regular demon to defeat a prince of Hell.

'It makes sense.'

If it were simple, there would have been no way the position of a prince of Hell would have changed only once since the creation of the Nine Hells.

The princes were born as princes from the beginning—they were absolute beings born to be rulers.

Only two beings had been able to break that mold.

'Bael and the demon king.'

During the long history of the Nine Hells, only those two had been able to break that mold.

'No...'

Balrog smiled. He clenched his fist and summoned the demonic energy inside his body.

Only?

'Two have already managed to break the mold.'

The chances weren't zero, and the princes of Hell weren't invincible—they'd lost in the past. It didn't matter how high and mighty they talked and acted.

'The demon king beat them.'

Kang-Woo had beaten them.

Of course, it wasn't like he had suffered no losses in the process. No, he had actually suffered countless losses.

Many of his subordinates had died, a few of whom the demon king had cherished.

All... had died.

"Balrog..."

A memory of the past came back to him from when he'd already spent a lot of time with Kang-Woo. Just like how Balrog's eyes had looked when they had met for the first time, Kang-Woo's eyes also looked dead.

"I'm tired of it all."

It was what Kang-Woo had said while sitting over countless corpses and weeping.

Balrog remembered that time.

They'd gone through a vast amount of despair, failure, and grief. However, even despite the overwhelming difference in the scale of their forces and the countless despairing situations they had been placed in, he had stood up. He had moved forward, and...

He had won.

'In that case...'

Balrog would be able to break the mold as well.

No, as someone who served the demon king, he had to break it.

He had to make the impossible possible. If he couldn't, he didn't have the right to serve him—to walk next to him. He couldn't lessen the burden on his shoulders.

"Don't get full of yourself. I don't need your help."

That was probably what Kang-Woo would say if he were looking at Balrog right now. He would ask Balrog why he hadn't asked for help.

Asking for his help actually wasn't hard at all. Balrog had the communication device Kang-Woo had given him to use in emergencies.

Kang-Woo would probably appear in the blink of an eye in any situation if Balrog called for him.

And...

'He would try to shoulder everything on his own again.'

He would walk alone while shouldering everything on his shoulders. He would rise to the top, just like he had countless times during the last thousand years.

He would walk farther and farther.

[I am sick of it,] Balrog said.

[What?]

[I am sick and tired of being unable to protect my master.]

Balrog smiled.

Crack!!

The sound of something breaking and tearing apart echoed.

What was torn apart wasn't Balrog's arms and legs...

[What the...?]

The eight arms of Sloth were cracking and falling apart.

BOOM!

Balrog's giant body fell to the ground. Black demonic energy wrapped around him to form armor that resembled that of western knights.

He flapped the bat wings on his back.

Balrog's two eyes widened. His irises, which could be seen from behind the helm of the full-plated armor, were yellow. His black pupils were torn horizontally, similar to the goat eyes of Kang-Woo, his master.

[From now on...]

He recalled the time he had drunk with Kang-Woo.

At that time, Kang-Woo was smiling. He seemed truly happy.

It was a smile Balrog had never seen him make back in Hell.

'I've already failed once.'

He hadn't been able to protect his master.

It would not happen a second time.

[I will protect him.]

He would protect his king.

Chapter 242 - Remnant (3)

[Shit! What the...?!]

Belphegor's expression hardened.

He put his hand over Sloth, the destroyed Hell Armament. It changed form and was restored to its original appearance once he infused it with demonic energy.

Unlike other Hell Armaments, Sloth was not indestructible. However, it could be restored immediately even when it was destroyed, and it could also change form to exterminate the enemy.

'Even so, there is no way Balrog should be able to destroy my Hell Armament.'

If Balrog could destroy a Hell Armament, that meant he could rival a prince of Hell. Sloth wasn't an Armament that an average demon could destroy, but Balrog had destroyed it with raw strength, which only meant one thing.

'He has truly gained power on par with a prince of Hell.'

[You dare...]

Belphegor's eyes flared in anger—his pride as a prince, which had been consolidated over hundreds of thousands of years, had been stepped on.

Not even the demon king had made him feel that way.

Although the demon king was human, he had the overpowered Authority of Predation, so one could say he was born to be a ruler just like a prince.

But Balrog's case was different. He was rumored to be unmatched among regular demons, but that was all there was to it.

[How dare a remnant like you aim for the seat of a prince of Hell!!]

Balrog did not possess an Authority. Although he had the Demonic Armor, that was more like a characteristic—it wasn't an Authority.

Balrog had not been born a ruler; he was destined to forever be under the princes from birth.

It was unforgivable to Belphegor for a lowly being to bare their teeth at a prince of Hell.

[Die!!]

The power of the Authority of Stillness spread like a tent and pressured Balrog from all sides.

Sloth returned to its original state, and the eight arms rushed toward Balrog.

[Fuuu.]

Balrog took a deep breath. He could feel enormous power from the black armor wrapped around him. He had never felt such a power before.

'It must be thanks to my king.'

Balrog narrowed his eyes.

His soul was linked to Oh Kang-Woo's.

After Kang-Woo had attained power greater than when he was in Hell, Balrog had also become stronger.

'I am sure it is more than that.'

He smirked.

The only thing that Kang-Woo could give him was demonic energy.

Just because his demonic energy increased didn't mean he would be able to use a brand new power out of the blue.

One could say that the new power had been created by the addition of Balrog's resolve for his king to his rise in demonic energy.

'Either way, it does not matter.'

Balrog turned around.

He clenched his fists and felt the black armor's power surround him. It didn't matter why he'd awakened such power. What mattered was that it enabled him to fight on par with Belphegor.

In addition...

'My king.'

He saw an image of Kang-Woo walking alone far above him. He had far too many things on his shoulders.

It was always like that.

Kang-Woo always walked down a lonely road that no one else could follow while carrying everything on his own.

'From now on...'

Balrog's eyes shone sharply.

Crunch!!

The Demonic Armor covering his body moved.

Tsssss!

Demonic energy flowed out of the armor's joints like steam.

'... I will walk alongside you.'

BOOM!!

The black steam fumed out explosively. Balrog, who was covered in black armor, shot forward at an incredible speed.

The Authority of Stillness spread like a tent and pressured him from all sides.

'I'll go down.'

There was only one way he'd be able to dodge.

Balrog raised his right fist. Although his right arm had been torn apart by Sloth, the black armor was moving in its place.

'Fascinating.'

Although it was armor made of demonic energy, it moved as naturally as if it were his own arm.

Balrog smirked and smashed down with the fist he had raised.

The ground was upturned as if an explosion had occurred, and Balrog passed through the dirt and rubble, moving through the ground at an incredible speed. It was so fast that one wouldn't think he was traveling underground.

The earth rippled like waves.

Bash!

The soil scattered. As Balrog emerged, the eight arms of Sloth applied pressure on him. His eyes shone sharply.

'If I destroyed them once...'

He could do it a second time. He ignored the arms and rushed forward.

[U-Urgh!!]

Belphegor's face crumpled.

Balrog was charging as if he were a train. Belphegor created a barrier with the Authority of Stillness.

TSSSS!!!

An explosive amount of black steam fumed out of the armor, blocking Belphegor's vision.

The Authority of Stillness was dismissed.

[N—]

[Serious...]

Balrog twisted his body and pulled his arm back to the limit.

Clack.

Balrog's black armor widened at the elbow, and black steam fumed out of it as if to give his punch a boost. He stepped forward with his left foot and released the punch that had been pulled back to its limit.

[Punch.]

CRACK!!

He punched Belphegor's head with all his might.

* * *

Riiing.

[Retainer 'Balrog' has learned 'Overlord Armor.']

"Hm?"

A blue message window appeared in front of Kang-Woo. He tilted his head.

"The hell is this out of the blue?"

Balrog had obtained a new technique. It was certainly good news, of course, but the timing was a bit weird.

'Son of a bitch, don't tell me...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He'd commanded Balrog to figure out Belphegor's location and report to him.

'Did he fight Belphegor?'

If he hadn't, receiving such a message made no sense.

"Damn, muscle pig."

He frowned and felt anxious.

Balrog was strong.

'But...'

That was all. If he faced Belphegor one-on-one, he would most definitely lose.

"Damn," Kang-Woo cursed and anxiously bit his lips.

Balrog was his retainer; he was not Kang-Woo's Familiar bound to him by the Authority of Subordination, so he could not share vision with him.

'Authority of the Beholder.'

The spectrum of what he could see expanded—it was as if he had a bird's eye view.

He looked at where Balrog and Belphegor were fighting.

"Fuuu."

He was finally able to sigh in relief.

'You idiot.'

He had clearly told Balrog to report to him as soon as he discovered Belphegor. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and turned his head.

"U-Urghh. Arghh."

The man covered in bloodstained bandages was staggering while holding a rusted saber that had broken in half.

"Just... how?"

Crimson Fiend looked at Kang-Woo in confusion. He'd heard a lot about the demon king, and he knew how much of an incredibly strong and abnormal being he was. However...

"Cough! Cough!"

Crimson Fiend vomited blood.

'To think that he'd be... this overwhelming.'

He had not even been able to put up a decent fight. His demonic art, which he'd trained for a thousand years, had not been able to reach the demon king.

Step, step.

The demon king walked toward Crimson Fiend, who raised his head to look up at him. Other than the sharpness in Kang-Woo's eyes, he didn't have any other particularly unique features... but right now, his face looked more terrifying than any other.

"A-Aaaaaaaahh!!"

Crimson Fiend screamed like a madman.

He leaped forward, his rusty, broken saber gripped in his hands.

The blood-red demonic energy that he had trained for a thousand years wrapped around the rusty saber.

Blood Demon Art; it was a demonic art that allowed one to turn one's grudge dyed within their blood into demonic energy.

He'd gone through much suffering to be able to control that grudge, and he had resisted the voices of the dead and withstood horrible nightmares for a thousand years.

Even Satan had acknowledged his power and given him the seat of 'Aspect.'

'But...'

How could he have lost so powerlessly?

"Dieeeeeee!!"

He targeted Kang-Woo's head with the rusty, broken saber, aiming to cut him in half.

Kang-Woo smirked and raised his arm, grabbing the rusty saber with his bare hand.

Tap.

"Gasp!!"

"Mm..."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes while touching the blood-red demonic energy.

'This must be how demonic energy is accumulated in Huan.'

It piqued his curiosity, so he infused his own demonic energy into Crimson Fiend to analyze the blood-red demonic energy's structure.

Kang-Woo nodded his head in amazement.

"Turning negative emotions into demonic energy, huh? I didn't know there was a method like this."

The ability to turn one's grudge into demonic energy by dying it with blood was certainly interesting.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue as he checked the demonic energy's structure.

"It's so goddamn inefficient."

The process itself of extracting one's grudge from the blood and then turning it into demonic energy was very shabby. There was no way that converting an intangible emotion like a grudge into physical power would be easy.

It was trifling and crude.

'The Heavenly Dragon Cultivation Technique is way better.'

The cultivation technique allowed one to gather the energy spread out in the atmosphere extremely efficiently and accumulate it into one's dantian.

Compared to that, the Blood Demon Art was severely limited and inefficient.

"What... did you say?" Crimson Fiend asked.

"I said, your martial art is trash, dude."

"W-Wait. How did you know that I convert grudges into demonic energy...?"

Crimson Fiend's eyes trembled.

Converting grudges into demonic energy was an arcanum exclusive to the Blood Demon Art, but the demon king had somehow found out about it.

"W-Were you able to figure that out just from touching my demonic energy?" Crimson Fiend asked in confusion.

Kang-Woo smirked.

"It isn't as hard as you think. It's of a different kind, but they're both demonic energy."

"..."

"You can easily figure it out once you check the arrangement of demonic energy."

"What...?"

What was he talking about?

"I'm saying that I can figure out the structure and principle of your demonic energy just by checking how your demonic energy moves within your body."

"Wh-What are you talking about? There is no way that is possible..."

The Blood Demon Art used blood as a medium to circulate demonic energy. To actualize what Kang-Woo had mentioned, one would need to figure out the flow of demonic energy moving through hundreds of thousands of blood vessels.

The entire human circulatory system would be 120,000 km long if laid out in a single line. That was more than enough to go around Earth twice.

How had he been able to analyze the demonic energy moving over such a distance in an instant?

"It's possible if you try hard enough, man."

Kang-Woo smirked.

"Nonsense!! There is no way something like that is possible just by working on it!!" Crimson Fiend shouted like a madman.

"I'm telling you, it is. People who have never made the effort always say shit like that."

Tsk tsk.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

'Sheesh, kids these days don't know what effort is.'

He shook his head.

Crimson Fiend said, "How dare you lie to m—"

"Have you ever contained a sea within your body?"

"What?"

"You know, a sea that you will never know when it will overflow."

An endless sea of demonic energy.

"The sea only has three embankments too. Not just that, they don't even work properly, so there is risk of flooding at any time. If you don't pour your entire being into keeping it under control, you get flooded by the sea and die instantly."

"..."

"So, every single moment of your life, when you eat, take a shit, sleep, laugh in joy, cry in sadness, rampage in anger..."

Even while breathing...

He had to keep the rampaging demonic energy under control at all times if he wanted to survive. Once one got used to doing such a thing...

"Something of that level becomes a piece of cake."

"..."

Crimson Fiend couldn't understand what he was talking about. It was far too out there for him to understand. However, if his comparison was true... If he truly had a sea within him that would run rampant at a moment's notice if he let up...

"Just... why?"

Why hadn't he given up?

Why do something so insane for all of eternity?

It was a crazy thing to do; it wasn't something that someone right in his mind would do. It was like suffering from Qi deviation every single second. There was no way for a human to endure such pain.

"Why ask the obvious?"

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief. There was no need to answer something so obvious.

"Because I don't wanna die."

"A-Aaaahh."

Crimson Fiend trembled.

He looked into the demon king's eyes and saw the powerful desires within.

'This is...'

He was aware of this desire. No, there was no living organism that wouldn't recognize this desire.

The desire to live. The desire to not die. The desire to survive even while painstakingly enduring every single breath.

Crimson Fiend read the desire in Kang-Woo's eyes.

"..."

Crimson Fiend remained silent.

It was not a matter of a millennium versus ten millennia; they were just in completely different leagues.

The voices of the dead were nothing compared to the demon king, who cheated death at every single moment of his living days.

"You are..."

He remembered Belphegor's words.

Crimson Fiend trembled.

"... Crazy."

"I told you." Kang-Woo laughed. "You're not ready yet."

Crack.

Crimson Fiend's head exploded.

Kang-Woo looked up into the sky.

The battle between Satan and Raphael was still going on.

"Satan, that son of a bitch, collapsed out of the blue earlier, but he's fighting just fine."

Satan had collapsed on the ground as if he had suffered from severe hypertension. Raphael had been destroying him initially due to that, but Satan seemed to have come back to his senses and was battling on par with Raphael again.

He'd definitely become stronger than how he used to be back in Hell.

"Well, then."

The tips of Kang-Woo's mouth went up, and he looked up at the battle between the two.

"I wonder who's gonna win."

The result would soon make itself known.

Chapter 243 - The Truth Comes To Light

Wham!

A pitch-black sword and a spear of light clashed, shaking the sky.

"A-Aaaahh."

"Lord Raphael...!"

The angels and the Watchers of Light clenched their fists as they watched Raphael clash with Satan.

"Lord Shalgiel..."

"I-Is standing around like this all we can do?"

Shalgiel remained silent. He looked up at the sky. They could not interfere in the battle because the two beings were on a whole other level.

'Titans...'

He recalled the story of the giants that used to rule the world in the most distant past, the era of myths.

Satan and Raphael were fighting so intensely that it looked like a fight between those giants of myth. They were leaving destruction in their wake.

"There is nothing we can do at the moment."

Shalgiel shook his head and anxiously bit his lip.

'Lord Raphael.'

He prayed for the light to win.

"Leave the Demon of Prophecy to Lord Raphael. We will eradicate the other demons."

Shalgiel turned around.

There was still a large portion of the Demon Cult's forces still standing.

'Damn demons...'

He glared with resentment at the Demon Cult and commanded the angels and Watchers of Light.

"Kill them all. As long as they side with darkness, it does not matter if they are children or the elderly. Let those tainted by darkness receive the judgment of light!"

"Judgment of light!"

"Judgment of light!"

The angels grabbed their weapons and flew toward the cultists.

Shalgiel panted. Fatigue had accumulated after facing thousands of demons at the forefront.

'If only Lady Seraph were here...'

Shalgiel recalled the Celestial Goddess, who had sacrificed her body to seal away great darkness during the era of myths.

He shook his head.

'This is not the time to think about that kind of thing.'

Even at this moment, the forces tainted by darkness were devouring the light. He gripped his silver-shining sword.

"Judgment of light."

He stomped on the ground without hesitation.

* * *

Meanwhile, Satan and Raphael were fighting to the death higher up the mountain.

[Raaaaaaaaahhh!]

Satan roared angrily. He swung Wrath, his eyes gleaming like those of a madman.

Raphael blocked his attack with difficulty. The Authority of Extinction, a destructive Authority that split everything that it touched into pieces, could threaten Raphael's life.

[Kuh.]

Satan's power was incredible.

Raphael gulped.

'This is the power of the Demon of Prophecy.'

Raphael kept the battle going while swinging the spear of light. He calmly blocked all of Satan's attacks. Each time he blocked an attack, a huge impact shook his body.

'Where in the world did he gain such power?'

The thousand-year war that had occurred within the deepest layer of the Nine Hells... it had not been recorded who had started the war or who had won, but the angels knew that it had brought the demon realm to the brink of extinction. In the wake of this war, the angels had taken the chance to diligently grow their forces under Michael's command.

'But...'

Lucifer and even Satan had become even stronger than in the records.

Raphael looked at Satan with a troubled expression, thinking that Satan wasn't something he couldn't handle. No, even if Satan possessed power that he couldn't handle, he could not back down.

"Ludwig," Raphael mumbled. Glaring, he pointed his spear at Satan. "Satan! Free Ludwig!"

Ludwig had been reduced to an Undead. An honest apostle of light could not meet such a tragic end.

[I told you! I have no idea who or where that son of a bitch is!!]

"How dare you tell such a blatant lie!" Raphael bellowed. He couldn't believe that Satan was making excuses after telling him to come to him and that he, Satan, wouldn't run or hide.

"What sly trick are you trying to pull this time?!"

[No! I am not! I am saying that I'm not the one who corrupted Ludwig!!]

"Bull! I saw you corrupting Ludwig with my own eyes!!"

[And I am telling you that was not me!!]

Satan was making absurd excuses.

Raphael's expression crumpled.

"How shameless can you demons be?!"

[It was not meeeeeeeeeeeee!!!]

Satan twisted his body as if he were about to go crazy. He screamed in agony as he shot out pitch-black sword energies at random.

[Come out, demon king! Hurry up, you deplorable scumbag!! I will expose the entire truth here today!! I will tear apart your disgusting facade!!]

Satan fired sword energies at random to find the demon king, who was nowhere to be seen.

Rumble!!

The land was upturned, split, and distorted as if a natural disaster were occurring. The Demon Cult's and Guardians' forces were both swept into the destruction.

"Stop!"

Raphael spread his wings as he clenched the spear of light. His eight wings poured light, and he shot toward Satan at incredible speed.

'Why is he going this far?'

Raphael couldn't understand it. The Satan he'd seen in the video was far too different from the one in front of him right now.

'Perhaps...'

The Satan in the video might not have actually been the true Satan.

"Kuh," Raphael grunted, his mind in jumbles.

'Do not listen.'

Michael had told him not to be enticed by the whispers of demons. Their tongues were like a flower with deadly poison. If one was deceived by the sweet scent and approached the flower, the poison would spread through their body and kill them.

[Urgh,] Satan screamed intensely. He trembled as he grabbed the back of his neck again.

Raphael stared at him in confusion.

"..."

He remained silent as his head became even more jumbled.

'They are different.'

The difference between the Satan he'd seen in the video and the one in front of him now was too big. The eyes of the Satan in the video had been full of boundless evil, but the Satan in front of him was acting so unsightly that it was hard to watch.

Satan's desperate cries made Raphael even more confused.

'If...!' The seed of doubt sprouted within him. 'If the demon I saw back then was not Satan...'

If he was being deceived by the demon king that Satan was crying out to...

Just what in the world was the truth?

'Is Oh Kang-Woo the demon king?'

Raphael shook his head.

It was not like Kang-Woo had his unwavering trust, but Kang-Woo had been with him when they were watching the video of Satan. Not just that, if he really were the demon king, there was no way he wouldn't be able to feel his demonic energy.

There was absolutely no evidence pointing to Kang-Woo being the demon king.

[Aaarrggghhh!! Oh Kang-Woo, you fucking scumbag!! Get out here!!!] Satan screamed like a madman.

"..."

Raphael could feel the rage and frustration in his voice. His eyes wavered.

'What if it had all been an act?'

What if he had planned for all of this to happen?

Raphael closed his eyes. He could feel that Satan's attacks were gradually weakening.

'O Light...'

Raphael glared at Satan with a troubled expression.

'Grant me an answer.'

The darkness concealing the truth was too dark to see through.

Raphael couldn't see a thing.

* * *

"The angels are doing a great job."

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction.

The angels, not afraid of death, were fighting the demons more intensely than anyone else.

Since he couldn't fully trust the angels, being able to conserve the forces of Guardians was great news.

'They're also leveling up like crazy.'

EXP, which could be considered a Player's special privilege, was drastically leveling the Players participating in the war.

"Hm?"

At that moment, Kang-Woo saw Raphael.

Raphael's movements had become noticeably slower.

'He doesn't seem tired.'

The light exuding from Raphael's wings was still as intense as ever.

"Tsk." Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. "He must've been enticed by the whispers of a demon."

Satan was an evil being—he would endlessly lie to conceal the truth.

"Pathetic bastard."

How could the words of a demon so easily shake up an archangel?

'I guess I have no choice.'

As an apostle of the God of Heroes, he couldn't stand still and watch light being corrupted.

'I will bring the truth to light.'

Kang-Woo grabbed his communication crystal orb.

* * *

"Satan," Raphael said in a low voice while clenching his spear. "Do you have proof that Oh Kang-Woo is the demon king?"

[Haaa, haaa. Proof? Proof, you say?]

Satan's eyes trembled. The proof that Oh Kang-Woo was the demon king was obviously the Demonic Sea that he possessed.

'But...'

The Demonic Sea had not been discovered despite the demon king having been right beside Raphael. Meaning, Kang-Woo had a way to completely conceal the Demonic Sea. If that were the case, there was a chance that the Demonic Sea would not be able to serve as proof.

'Shit.'

To perfect his plan, he needed to drag the demon king here.

He clenched the fragment of the Root in his bosom.

'Oh.'

At that moment, a certain thought crossed his mind. He recalled how the demon king was waving light sticks while watching their battle, mocking him.

[Look at what he is doing right now! He is watching our battle while mocking—]

Satan raised his hand and pointed at where the demon king had been. Behind his mask, his eyes trembled.

[Huh?]

Kang-Woo was gone; all that was left were bloodstains that Satan had no idea whom they belonged to.

BOOM!

Just then, an explosion sounded.

Step, step.

A being tainted by darkness walked out from the rubble.

Raphael's eyes shook after seeing who it was.

"Lud...wig."

He saw Ludwig covered in horrifying green tentacles, and angel corpses were being held in his hands.

"Aaaahh!"

Ludwig kneeled, spread out his arms, and looked at Satan.

"O great Satan!!"

[Huh?]

"My master, my king!"

[Wait.]

"Just like you have commanded, I have stained the ground with angel blood!"

[You son of a...]

Ludwig ripped apart the corpse of one of the dead angels he was holding. The wings were torn apart, the feathers scattering. White blood wet the floor.

"Sa...tan."

Raphael trembled.

The corrupted Ludwig had become even more hideous than before. Not a single ounce of sacred power could be felt from him.

A single tear dripped down Raphael's cheek.

He had been wavering due to the whispers of a demon while his apostle, the child who had been so loyal to him, had been reduced to something like that.

'You were right, Lord Michael.'

Demons were not worth listening to.

Raphael clenched his spear tighter and reinforced his resolve to never be swayed again.

[H-Haha.]

Satan feigned laughter.

[Fucking hell... Seriously... Haha.]

He clenched his head with both hands and then grabbed his sword, letting out an empty laugh.

[Yes! I corrupted Ludwig!]

His yellow eyes behind the red mask teared up.

[HAHAHA!!! Fine! Yes! I fucking did it all!! HAHAHAHAHA!!!]

A single tear dripped down from behind the mask.

Finally...

The truth had come to light.

Chapter 244 - You Still Don't Know Who I Am After All You've Been Through? (1)

[Hahaha! Yes! I did it all!!] Satan screamed out in agony.

Oh Kang-Woo, who was looking up at him, nodded.

'He finally admitted it.'

Satan seemed to have finally reached a point where he couldn't lie anymore. He had finally shown his true colors after playing dumb all this time.

'I knew it.'

The truth never died. Even if Satan tried to cover the truth with lies, it was as futile as trying to block the sun with the palms of one's hands.

His shoddy lies had been exposed to the world.

"SATAAAAANN!!!"

Anger brimming from his very core, Raphael charged toward Satan.

Kang-Woo sat on the debris with his legs crossed and watched the battle while using the Authority of Stealth.

'It would be perfect if I had some popcorn.'

There was nothing more entertaining than watching fire and fights. Although Kang-Woo had never watched a film in a cinema before, he was sure that it wouldn't be more entertaining than what was going on in front of him.

'Hm?'

Kang-Woo turned his head.

"Lud...wig..."

He saw Kim Si-Hun, who had rejoined the battle after stopping the landslide from pouring toward the Guardians' rearguard.

Si-Hun stood in front of Ludwig while clenching his holy sword, which was shining with a white light.

Ludwig looked at Si-Hun with blank eyes.

"Mm..." Kang-Woo fell into thought.

'Should I make Ludwig retreat?'

Ludwig's role in his strategy was already over. If he wanted to use Ludwig in the future, having him retreat would be the correct choice.

"Shit, shit, shiiiiit!!!" Si-Hun screamed. Seeing the first friend he had made as an Undead was making him suffer.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

'Making Ludwig retreat could be worse.'

An Abyss Knight was quite useful in terms of combat prowess. After a simple test, Kang-Woo concluded that it was as powerful as Si-Hun, who had awakened Sword Control.

'But...'

That was Ludwig's limit. Unlike Si-Hun who had a bright future, Ludwig couldn't advance any further now that he was an Undead.

'Pushing Si-Hun to the edge all the time wouldn't be good.'

Si-Hun had continuously been on the losing end of Satan's evil plans and had not been able to overcome a single one of them.

'At this rate...'

Even if it were Si-Hun, he would end up breaking, and he would fall into an inescapable pit of shame for not being able to do anything.

'That won't do.'

The carrot and the stick needed to be balanced.

Granting his friend, who had been turned into an undead at Satan's hand, eternal rest would be a great opportunity for Si-Hun to shed the massive baggage weighing down his heart.

'So this is it for Ludwig.'

- Master.

Kang-Woo suddenly received a call from Vaal Zahak.

- Should I command Ludwig to escape?

"No, let him fight."

- Hmm.

Vaal Zahak didn't seem to understand why.

- Understood. In that case, I will command him to fight while holding back so that he does not injure the human.

"No need for that. Make him fight with everything he has."

- ... Are you sure? Vaal Zahak asked in a worried voice.

Kang-Woo nodded without hesitation.

Based on the situation, the one who was at a disadvantage was Si-Hun. Although they were similar in terms of strength, Si-Hun had just come back after stopping a landslide with his sword. It was incredible he'd made it here without exhausting himself.

'But...'

Kang-Woo smirked.

'Si-Hun will win.'

He didn't have a reason for thinking that—it was just a guess based on his intuition.

One could call it trust.

'That's just the way he is.'

It wasn't just because his talent was incredible. Si-Hun also had an unshakable will.

'He's reckless enough to use my power, after all.'

Si-Hun would win at all costs.

"You don't need to worry about Si-Hun."

- Understood. As for me...

"Don't show yourself on the front lines. Just use the Undead to gather the angel corpses."

Numerous angels were taking part in the war, so it would be better if Vaal Zahak didn't appear.

- May your will be done, my king.

The communication ended.

Kang-Woo raised his head.

Explosive sounds were echoing throughout the battlefield from Satan and Raphael's clashes.

"How long are they gonna keep fighting?"

Kang-Woo was getting sick of waiting.

'Should I join in?'

The moment he began wondering if he should back up Raphael...

Roaaaaaar!!!

"Hm?"

He heard a sound similar to violent rapids. Frowning, he turned toward the sound.

'That's...'

Satan was holding something black that was the size of his fist. A massive torrent of demonic energy was raging around the black item.

'What the hell is that?'

Kang-Woo's expression hardened.

It wasn't a demonic crystal—it felt far too different in nature for that to be the case.

'What could it be?'

He narrowed his eyes.

Ba-dump. Ba-dump.

His heart beat fast. He felt his lips go dry and sensed a powerful thirst desiring to be quenched.

'Why does it feel so familiar?'

Darkness was raging.

He was certain that he had never seen such a thing before, not in the Nine Hells or on Earth.

But...

For some reason...

'I know what it is.'

His head hurt.

The demonic energy within the Ten Thousand Demon Core rampaged.

Just like he always did, he kept it in check.

'Calm down.'

He had to maintain his rationality. The moment he let it go, he would be devoured by his own rampant demonic energy and die.

He took a deep breath while clenching his chest. He stared at the raging darkness.

"Kuh! What the—?!"

Raphael was also bewildered. He felt a spine-chilling fear when he laid eyes on the darkness Satan had taken out.

'That is...'

His two eyes widened.

'Why is that here...?'

Raphael trembled.

It was the Primordial Darkness, which had been split into three and sealed by Celestial Goddess Seraph, Gaia, and Heavenly Dragon Tai Wuji in the world of gods and giants during the era of myths.

Primordial Darkness, the root of all evil. A fragment of it was wriggling in Satan's hand.

"Sa...tan... You bastard..."

Raphael's expression paled.

Satan vomited black blood as he held the darkness.

[Kuh, kargh, urgh.]

Satan was not able to endure the enormous power of the rampaging demonic energy.

[Shit! Shit!] Satan cursed aggressively.

He hadn't planned to use it like this, but since he couldn't see the demon king anywhere, he had to at least get rid of Raphael.

'I have no time.'

He could only control the power within the Demonic Origin[1] for a few seconds, so he had to finish things before time ran out.

'First, I will eliminate Raphael.'

After that...

Black blood spurted out of Satan's mouth, dying his red mask black.

To stick to his original plan, he would have needed to face the demon king and Raphael at the same time. His plan, however, had gone awry because the demon king hadn't appeared and was mocking him from a distance.

His plan had already failed.

'It is not over yet.'

Satan's eyes shone.

He knew very well how crazy the demon king was. Satan had already presumed the worst possible scenario of the demon king not dying even after he used the Demonic Origin.

'If I can drag the demon king to that place...'

He would win.

Satan accepted the rampaging demonic energy into his body and raised Wrath. Demonic energy traveled up the pitch-black sword, creating an enormous vortex.

[Die, Raphael.]

"Where did you awaken that terrible evil?!" Raphael bellowed.

His eight wings shone with brilliant light. He pointed his holy spear of light at Satan.

BOOM!

A loud nightmarish sound boomed through the sky.

Kang-Woo returned to his senses after hearing it.

"This must be Satan's trump card."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes at Satan, who was wrapped in darkness of unknown origin. He had thought that Satan would have something up his sleeve as long as Satan wasn't stupid.

'Which was why I sent Raphael first.'

Kang-Woo scanned Satan with sharp eyes. As he had expected, Satan had revealed the trump card he had been hiding.

'That must be... how the princes of Hell were able to regain their power on Earth despite there being no demonic energy.'

To be honest, Kang-Woo was considerably surprised.

He had expected the princes of Hell to have a trump card.

Just like a sprout didn't grow in a dry land, there was no way the Demon Cult could have grown so much in a place with no demonic energy like Earth, but...

'I didn't expect anything like this.'

Satan was able to overwhelm Raphael as the raging darkness surrounded him.

If Kang-Woo had faced him upfront, he would have been no match for Satan without unleashing the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be in good condition either."

Satan was vomiting blood as he fought Raphael.

Kang-Woo was sure that within that darkness was a power that not even a prince of Hell could control.

'Wow.'

His thirst desired to be quenched. His mouth filled with saliva. His heart began beating faster, and his body felt hot.

'I wonder what would happen if I ate that?'

"Fuuu."

Kang-Woo took a deep breath and quelled his boiling desires.

Crack!

"Kurgh! Urgh!"

He heard something being crushed. He raised his head while wetting his dry lips.

'Is it over?'

Raphael was shouting in pain after being pierced by the pitch-black sword.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'Is he dead?'

He saw that Raphael was losing a lot of white blood.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

'He's alive.'

Although very slight, Raphael was still flapping his wings. He'd been critically wounded, but he hadn't died.

Kang-Woo turned his head toward Satan.

[Huff! Huff! Cough!]

Satan kept vomiting black blood. Although he had targeted Raphael's vital point, he had failed to hit it and had pierced another part of his body.

Satan grimaced.

'I cannot go any further than this.'

It was too bad he couldn't finish off Raphael, but using more of the Demonic Origin's power was too dangerous.

[Kuh.]

Satan looked around and spotted the demon king sitting on top of some debris. Although the demon king was concealing himself with an Authority, Satan could currently see through it perfectly.

'Demon king.'

Satan glared at him. He had no choice but to use the last resort that he had prepared for the absolute worst-case scenario.

Crack!

He used the raging darkness to create a black Rift.

"Argh!"

"R-Run!!"

Demons and Players screamed as they were sucked into the darkness. It was as if a mini black hole had appeared.

Satan threw himself into the black Rift.

"... Hah."

Kang-Woo laughed in disbelief as he looked up at the black Rift.

"So that's your plan, huh?"

It was as if Satan was telling him to come into the Rift if he wanted to kill him.

Kang-Woo slowly got up and stared at the black Rift.

"It's obviously a trap."

The way Satan had glanced in his direction had made it obvious.

'How cute.'

Satan was a terrible actor.

"Well, then."

Kang-Woo turned away without a second thought.

'I have no reason to fall for an obvious trap on purpose.'

No one in their right mind would go in there.

'I'll keep making good use of Sata—'

His thoughts were cut short. Kang-Woo bent over like a bow, clenching his chest.

"A-Arrgghh."

His eyes widened. A powerful desire that he had never felt before was spreading through his body.

"What... the... fuck?"

He trembled. A horrifying thirst stimulated his throat.

- Eat it.

He heard someone's voice.

- Devour it.

Kang-Woo could not defy the voice. His consciousness blurred.

"Fucking... hell."

Kang-Woo crouched and plunged his hands into the ground, clenching the earth underneath.

"Fuck... This isn't some... Dragon of the Darkness Flame shit...[2]"

He was feeling a nightmarish, uncontrollable urge. It was as if a sealed Dragon of the Darkness Flame was about to be let loose within him. Kang-Woo desperately tried to rein in the demonic energy running amok inside him.

'Shit.'

His legs moved on their own as if he'd turned into a puppet.

Kang-Woo's expression crumpled.

'I can't go against it.'

He could instinctively feel that he didn't have the power to control his urges.

"Fuck," Kang-Woo cursed.

He stopped defying his urges.

'If I can't go against it...'

He would at least enter of his own accord.

Ignoring the urges pushing him to enter, he jumped into the Rift.

Riiing.

[Entering the nightmare of the 'Primordial Darkness.']

A blue message window appeared.

['Divinity' is forcibly interfering with the system.]

[Adjusting level to 1.]

[Adjusting all stats to 1.]

Chapter 245 - You Still Don't Know Who I Am After All You've Been Through? (2)

Oh Kang-Woo was in a giant cave made of transparent ice.

'Where is...'

He raised his head and looked around.

Although the cave was pitch black, the eyes of a demon were able to see in the darkness to some extent.

Kang-Woo began walking while looking around.

"Kuh!"

A weird sensation twisted his legs. His senses were disjointed the moment he strode as usual.

'The hell?'

He finally saw the blue message windows that had appeared. He grimaced aggressively.

Divinity had forcibly interfered with the system, and...

"Level 1..."

It wasn't just his level that had gone down.

Kang-Woo opened his status window with a hardened expression.

[Status Window]

Player Name: Oh Kang-Woo

Level: 1 [First Awakening]

First Awakening Trait: Authority of Predation (Rank: ???)

Strength: 1 Dexterity: 1

Health: 1 Mana: 1

Sacred Power: 1 Demonic Energy: 1

Intelligence: 1 Wisdom: 1

"Fuck," he naturally cursed.

'What the fuck is this?'

All his stats had forcibly been reduced to 1.

He felt powerless.

Despite all of his stats being one, his basic physical capabilities were still far above those of a human since he had a demon body, but that was all there was to it. His body had become so weak that he was just a little stronger than the average human.

'This is... the power of Divinity?'

He knew that Divinity was able to interfere with the system, the providence of the universe, but this was excessive.

'It wasn't this bad even when I had arrived on Earth.'

Even then, all of his stats had not been as low as 1.

"... What the hell is going on?"

Not even the Gaia System, which protected the world, had been able to fully seal his power, despite using so much Divinity it was overloaded. However, all of his power had just been sealed.

'It makes no sense.'

Leaving the Primordial Darkness or whatever aside, this should not be possible.

His head was in a jumble. It was as if he were trying to put together puzzle pieces that didn't match.

Splat, splat.

Kang-Woo heard footsteps behind him. It sounded as if something had just walked out of the water.

Kang-Woo lowered his body and turned around. He saw something walking out of the darkness.

"..."

He shut his mouth. The being's head was split in half, its brain was spewing out, and black blood was flowing down its body. It was a hideous Undead that looked as if it had been made by Vaal Zahak.

"A-Arrgghh."

A hand dripping rotten pus reached out toward Kang-Woo.

It was as if... it were trying to embrace him.

"Hah," Kang-Woo feigned laughter.

It wasn't an Undead. There was no way it was an Undead. After all, the demon walking toward him had disappeared without a trace long ago.

"M-My... king," the Undead desperately called out to Kang-Woo.

"..."

The demon whose head had been split in half walked toward Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo knew the name of the demon.

"Paimon."

He used to be Kang-Woo's subordinate. Kang-Woo remembered him being very timid, unlike a demon. Paimon had been scolded by Balrog many times. Kang-Woo used to pat him on the shoulder a few times when he was dejected after Balrog's scolding, which cheered him back up.

'Though a smiling demon doesn't look cute at all.'

He recalled his memories about Paimon.

'Fucking idiot.'

When they had been on the verge of being surrounded by Satan's army, he had charged into enemy lines with a bomb to buy time. Then, he had died.

That demon, who used to be so timid, who always used to be scolded by Balrog....

"Please run away!"

"Hah..."

"Hehe. Please make sure you win the war."

"Fuck."

Splat, splat.

Kang-Woo raised his head—there was more than one set of footsteps walking toward him. He heard footsteps all around him.

"Agares."

He was a boring fellow who remained stoic no matter what. Mammon had burned him to death.

"Verdin, Kelzas."

They were boisterous as hell. They had been captured and brainwashed by Asmodeus. Kang-Woo remembered killing them with his own hands.

"My... king."

"A-Aaaahh."

The voices sounded like they were in agony. They were walking toward him, their mangled bodies dripping blood.

It was a scene that could have come straight out of a cheap B-list zombie movie.

"... I see what happened."

He sighed.

He figured out why his level and stats had been set to 1 and how Satan had been able to do something that not even the system that protected this world had been able to do when depleting the majority of its Divinity. It had only seemed like his power had been sealed.

'This place isn't reality.'

It was somewhere between an illusion and reality—a place worthy of being called a nightmare.

'So that's why the message said I had entered a nightmare.'

He felt that he had finally put the puzzle together.

Kang-Woo raised his hand and tried to use the Authority of Blades.

"Tsk."

The Authority was not manifesting, and the Ten Thousand Demon Core within his heart was silent.

'No.'

He shook his head. He couldn't feel the Ten Thousand Demon Core at all. It was as if the soul of the human Oh Kang-Woo had left his body and been trapped in a nightmare.

The only things he had were his Authority of Predation and his Demonic Energy stat, which was set to 1.

Kang-Woo sighed and bit his finger.

Crunch.

He felt pain.

'The sensation of pain is fully intact.'

If that was the case...

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'I guess that if I die in this nightmare, I will die for real.'

It was an extreme hassle.

"Haaa." Kang-Woo sighed.

Even now, demons that used to be his subordinates were slowly walking toward him.

He looked at each of their faces and recalled the memories that they had shared together during the thousand-year war.

"Balrog..."

He saw himself sitting atop a mountain of corpses and weeping.

"I'm tired of it all."

"Fuck."

His face reddened. He shook his head at the memory.

'I was crazy.'

It was a humiliating memory, a dark past that would make him rip his blanket apart if he ever remembered it while sleeping.

"Man, I'm so fucking embarrassed."

The one who always told people to stop with the pity show had acted out the biggest pity show of them all. There was no darker past than that.

'What did Balrog say back then again?'

He couldn't quite think of it off the top of his head, but he was sure that it had been just as cringey as his line.

Step, step.

While he was trying to remember the past, he heard footsteps. Kang-Woo turned around and looked into the darkness to see a demon shrouded in darkness. The demon was wearing a red demon mask.

[How does it feel to reunite with your dead subordinates?]

A laugh came from behind the red demon mask.

Kang-Woo calmly said the demon's name, "Satan."

[It has been a while since we last spoke in private like this, demon king.]

Satan glared at Kang-Woo.

[I appreciate all the crazy deeds you committed. Thanks to you, my entire plan has crumbled.]

Satan's voice was filled with blazing rage.

[I do not know how you survived when you clashed against the dimensional wall, but... it all ends today.]

Satan raised his hand, and a pitch-black sword appeared.

"Where are we?" Kang-Woo calmly asked.

[The space that the Primordial Darkness occupies.]

"How am I supposed to understand that, dumbass?"

[...]

Satan's body trembled.

He took a deep breath to quell his rage.

[It is where the Demonic Origin... the corpse of Demon God Bauli rests.]

Demon God Bauli...

Kang-Woo naturally recalled the giant eye that had reached a kilometer in length.

'Is it the same guy?'

The unknown being that was in the Abyss of the Ten Thousand Demon Core...

He still didn't know if that was Bauli or not. He decided to stop thinking about it since it was complicating his thoughts.

'I'll leave it for later.'

It wasn't time to think about that.

First, he needed to solve the situation that was right in front of him.

Kang-Woo looked down at the dead, which were crawling toward him.

"You say that, but this place doesn't seem like it exists in reality."

[It is a place mixed with reality and illusions.]

Satan laughed.

[Although it is not completely real, your soul will be annihilated if you die here.]

Kang-Woo had more or less expected that. He nodded.

Satan frowned.

[You seem awfully calm.]

He couldn't understand it.

[You have absolutely nothing at your disposal right now. You do not have the infinite demonic energy of the Ten Thousand Demon Core, your hundreds of Authorities, or the system blessing known as Player.]

Only the soul of the human Oh Kang-Woo had been trapped here. All he had left were the Authority of Predation and the single point in his Demonic Energy stat.

[Have you accepted your defeat?]

The winner had already been decided.

The moment one stepped into this place, physical prowess meant nothing.

After the demon king had devoured his body, Satan had learned how to use his power even when he was nothing but a soul. He'd been absorbing the Demonic Origin for thousands of years while learning how to use his power within this space, which was mixed between reality and illusion.

However, this was not the case for the demon king—the source of the demon king's power was the Ten Thousand Demon Core's infinite demonic energy and the hundreds of different Authorities he possessed.

Since only his soul was left, he was more powerless than a normal human.

"..." Kang-Woo didn't answer.

Satan smirked.

[Well, fine.]

He walked slowly. He didn't intend to kill Kang-Woo quickly.

[I have suffered much because of you.]

Satan had many nightmarish memories; Kang-Woo had dirtied the title of prince of Hell, killed him gruesomely, and devoured his body. Satan had barely managed to escape with his soul.

[Even on Earth...]

Satan grabbed the back of his neck as rage overcame him. The countless agitations and fabrications had put him through hell. It was finally time to get his sweet revenge. There was only one thing he could think of as a suitable act of vengeance...

[Be devoured by your own subordinates.]

Satan snapped his fingers while smiling wide.

"A-Aaaahh."

Paimon approached Kang-Woo.

Agares, Verdin, and Kelzas also grabbed his clothes.

Paimon embraced him with arms dripping pus as tears dripped from his one remaining eye.

"A-Arrgghh. It... hurts, my... king."

"..."

"It hurts... so... much.."

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

This was not the real Paimon—it was just a doll the nightmare had created to act like Paimon. It was nothing but a cheap performance to squeeze out his sorrow.

"Please... save... me."

He knew it was fake, so it could never stir his emotions.

"A-Aaaahh. My... king."

It was already in the past. His dark past was already behind him. He wouldn't feel anything from such an illusion.

"It hurts, it hurts."

"My body... is burning."

"Hot, so hot."

The hands of the dead grabbed him. The horrible stench wafting from the rotten pus stimulated his nose.

"..."

He wasn't angry or sad.

It wouldn't have been any different even if these were the real corpses of his subordinates.

He'd caused a war. Whatever the reason, he'd declared war on every single prince of Hell. It would have been weirder if no one had died. No matter how miserably, wretchedly, or gruesomely they died, soldiers died in war. Even Kang-Woo himself had killed countless demons. Demons were not emotionless beings; they had likely been precious to others.

"My... king. I-It... hurts."

So, it did not matter.

"I'm tired of it all."

Once again, he recalled the past when he had broken down and wept like a crybaby.

A dark past... a cheap pity show... a common cliché... a cringey, childish story.

But...

But...

But...

"A-Aaaahh."

The dead were grabbing him, their eyes exuding strong bloodlust.

"You, you, you..."

"Killed... us."

"If it were not for you..."

Their eyes were full of resentment. Their voices were full of malice.

Crack.

Paimon grabbed his shoulder, his sharp claws piercing Kang-Woo's skin.

"Die, die!"

Agares clenched Kang-Woo's leg tighter, ripping off the flesh from his thigh.

"It is... all because of you!"

"If only... you had not... caused the war!"

The voices of the dead grew more intense.

Verdin and Kelzas each pulled one of his arms.

Crack.

His arms twisted in an unnatural direction.

"..."

Kang-Woo expressionlessly stared at his subordinates tearing him apart.

He opened his mouth.

"I remember now."

He finally remembered what Balrog had said to him back then.

"Do you remember what you told me when we first met? You said that whatever there is in the Ninth Hell, it does not change what you have to do."

Answer evil with greater evil.

Return bloodlust with even greater bloodlust.

Keep moving forward while devouring everything in the world.

"Fuck, it's more cringe than I remember."

Kang-Woo would smack Balrog in the head once this was over.

Crack.

He opened his mouth and bit down on Paimon's neck with all his might.

Crunch.

He devoured Paimon's skin from where the rotten pus was flowing out. He used his meager one stat point of Demonic Energy to activate his Authority.

'Authority of Predation.'

Crunch.

He converted Paimon's flesh that he devoured—or the illusion created by the Demonic Origin to be more exact—into demonic energy.

Riiing.

[Demonic Energy has risen to 27.]

[You have devoured the 'Demonic Origin.']

[The second condition of the final step to becoming a Demon God has been fulfilled.]

Message windows rang noisily.

His demonic energy grew explosively.

[Hm?]

Satan frowned.

Kang-Woo was devouring the dead instead of the other way around.

[What are you...]

Crunch, crunch.

"M-My... king."

"H-Help m..."

The bodies of the dead were being quickly devoured.

[Demonic Energy has risen to 48.]

Black liquid flowed from Kang-Woo.

[Demonic Energy has risen to 87.]

It was the black mucus that possessed countless teeth.

[Demonic Energy has risen to 129.]

The sharp teeth were devouring Paimon, Agares, Verdin, and Kelzas.

[What the...]

Satan's eyes widened.

The demon king was eating the illusions made by the Demonic Origin.

[Just... how?]

The demon king had absolutely nothing at the moment. The only thing he had left was a single Demonic Energy stat point. Although he had the Authority of Predation, it was impossible to eat the Demonic Origin with a single Demonic Energy stat point.

The correlation between demonic energy and the Authority of Predation was, to put it simply, the size of the mouths. The more demonic energy one had, the more and the harder the food they could eat.

However, the demon king's Demonic Energy stat was only at 1.

'But...'

It made no sense that he could eat the Demonic Origin of all things. It was like eating a bar of gold with a toothless mouth.

"You never fucking learn."

Tsk, tsk.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. His mangled body quickly regenerated.

[I-It cannot be, you...!]

"Or are princes of Hell just experts in making people power up? For fuck's sake, literally anyone you pathetic bastards fight will power up even if they're on the verge of death."

They always watched from the sidelines while doing nothing and went "How?" or "It cannot be!" when their opponent powered up.

At this point, he would feel bad for not powering up in such a situation.

'I mean, I wouldn't really call it a power-up.'

He wasn't Kim Si-Hun, so it wasn't like he powered up whenever there was a dangerous situation. This had simply been a mistake on Satan's part.

"You still don't know who I am after all you've been through?"

He stepped on the corpses of his subordinates and stood up. The whites of his eyes turned black, his irises turned yellow like a reptile's, and his pupils tore horizontally.

"If you wanted to kill me"—the tips of his mouth went up—"you should have made it 0."

[Demonic Energy has reached 150.]

Chapter 246 - You Were Unlucky

[Kuh...!]

Satan grimaced and stomped on the ground, still gripping his pitch-black sword.

The darkness shook wildly and spread out radially.

He raised his sword high and targeted the demon king's head.

'I have to kill him quickly.'

He was swept with anxiety—something had gone wrong. He didn't have time to think about sweet revenge or whatever.

'Just why?'

He couldn't help but question what had happened. Stuff about not knowing who the demon king was after all Satan had been through and that Satan should have made the Demonic Energy stat zero...

'Bull.'

Satan had not been careless; he had lost miserably to the demon king exactly because he had been careless back in Hell. He had been watching with his arms crossed, not because he was being careless but because he had truly won.

[Shit! Shit! Shit!]

He'd made sure the demon king couldn't use the Ten Thousand Demon Core, and he'd also blocked his hundreds of Authorities. He had not been able to completely eliminate the demon king's demonic energy due to the very thin connection between his soul and body, but the remaining demonic energy had been a negligible amount.

'There was nothing else I could have possibly done.'

The demon king had been nothing more than a beast with its limbs and teeth ripped off. Satan had thought that he could take some time to enjoy his sweet revenge after all the thorough preparations he had made.

Considering all the suffering he'd gone through at Oh Kang-Woo's hands, wasn't it okay to take some time to vent?

'Can I not even do that?'

Satan swung his sword while clenching his teeth.

Crack!

The demon king's body was split in half...

But only for a short while.

Gurgle.

The black mucus leaking from the demon king began devouring the surrounding darkness, and his body was instantly restored.

Satan kept cutting away.

Arms, legs, head, legs again...

He cut through the demon king's body again and again, but it kept restoring itself.

[Extinction.]

The Authority of Extinction could make everything it touched disintegrate. In terms of lethality, it was one of the strongest Authorities. This Authority, which could even kill a prince of Hell, spread through Wrath, Satan's Hell Armament. Sword energies poured down like rainfall.

Crackle!!

The demon king was cut to pieces. His body turned into mush after coming into contact with Satan's Authority, and then it scattered. The black blood splattered in all directions, Kang-Woo's internal organs and muscles littering the ground.

'He is dead.'

It was an amount of damage that not even the demon king should be able to survive. The sword energies infused with the Authority of Extinction completely disintegrated the demon king.

[...]

Satan remained silent—he'd won.

The demon king had been hit with the Authority of Extinction, an attack he wouldn't have been able to survive even at his peak with no defense. He didn't even have the Ten Thousand Demon Core at the moment, so there was no need to think twice.

'But...'

Satan trembled. He felt a foreboding, a strange incongruity, as if he were looking at a play that had gone wrong.

"Did all of your suffering give you PTSD?"

[...!!]

The voice came from right next to him. Satan's eyes widened, and he swung his sword again.

Crackle!!

The demon king's body disintegrated to the cellular level again while it was in the middle of regenerating itself.

[Huff, huff...]

Satan's breathing became heavier. His ominous sensation was spot-on—the demon king hadn't died yet.

'How?'

He was confused. He couldn't understand how the demon king was able to devour the Demonic Origin without the Ten Thousand Demon Core. He couldn't understand how the demon king had survived the Authority of Extinction despite disintegrating.

'It makes no sense.'

Satan felt like he was about to lose his mind. Even if the demon king was a monster-like being, it made no sense—it went beyond logic. Satan gulped and gripped his sword.

[How in the—]

"You see..."

He heard that voice again and reflexively swung Wrath. The demon king's head was cut in half, his brain splattering everywhere.

"You shouldn't have chosen this place."

Only the demon king's mouth moved on his split head.

Satan's expression paled. Someone being able to talk when their head was split in half instilled a fear that was hard for even a prince of Hell to handle.

[Mon...ster,] Satan cried out when he saw the demon king gradually regenerate.

The demon king's regeneration continued despite his head being split open and his body being torn to pieces.

If that didn't make him a monster, then what else could he be called?

"If you wanted to kill me, you should've trapped me in a place without any demonic energy."

Kang-Woo smiled while extending his hand. Mucus filled with sharp teeth flowed out of his hand and devoured the darkness surrounding them. His torn-apart body quickly regenerated.

Satan had made a fatal error. Leading the demon king to the Demonic Origin, to the corpse of the Demon God, had been a terrible decision. It had made adjusting Kang-Woo's stats and sealing the Ten Thousand Demon Core pointless.

'This place is...'

Kang-Woo licked his lip. His heart was beating fast, and an intense thirst dominated his body. He licked his lips.

'... Overflowing with food.'

The space was full of demonic energy—no, the space itself was made of demonic energy. It was so perfect that it was almost as if Satan had prepared a banquet for him.

'Shiiiet, it's a goddamn buffet.'

On top of helping him grow through the Demon Cult, Satan was also serving him such an amazing banquet. Kang-Woo honestly wondered if Satan had actually been an ally all along.

"You're the only one I can count on, my bro!"

Kang-Woo lightly leaped, instantly approaching Satan, and patted his shoulder.

Satan quickly swung his sword, and Kang-Woo's body scattered again.

[Y-you... son of a...]

Satan trembled as he glared at Kang-Woo. The trap he'd set up for the demon king had ended up helping the demon king.

'Impossible.'

The Demonic Origin wasn't made of normal demonic energy. It was the fragmented corpse of the Demon God, and its demonic energy contained Divinity. It had taken Satan a thousand years to absorb that special demonic energy.

Even if the demon king had the Authority of Predation...

'There is no way he could have eaten it so easily.'

[Just how...?]

No, the demon king shouldn't have been able to eat it.

[How are you able to eat the Demonic Origin?!] Satan angrily shouted.

Satan swung Wrath at random. Like a storm, the black sword energies wiped out everything around him. The darkness fluctuated.

Kang-Woo's regenerating body disintegrated yet again.

[Huff, huff, huff.]

Satan swung his sword like a madman. He didn't want to accept reality and wanted to think it was just a nightmare.

"I just could."

The pieces of the demon king's flesh gathered together.

Satan could see the demon king snickering.

[You just... could?]

It was nonsense.

Kang-Woo shrugged.

"No, for real. I was just able to eat it."

His exceptional skill in controlling demonic energy was likely part of it, as well as his overpowered Authority of Predation, but besides that...

"Honestly, I don't know either."

Although it had a grandiose name like Demonic Origin, he was able to eat it all too easily.

It was as if... it had been his from the beginning.

[...]

"Your preparations were better than I'd expected. I mean, I knew it was a trap, but... you exceeded my expectations."

Kang-Woo had never expected Satan to extract the soul out of his body and trap him in a space of reality mixed with illusions—with the majority of his power sealed, on top of that. He had honestly panicked a little when he saw that all his stats had been reduced to 1 and he couldn't use his Ten Thousand Demon Core.

"But..."

Kang-Woo laughed and raised his hand.

Crunch, crunch.

The black mucus that had scattered grew bigger. As space itself was devoured by the Authority of Predation, colossal amounts of demonic energy flowed into him.

This demonic energy was different from regular demonic energy. It wasn't like the demonic energy in the deep end of the Ten Thousand Demon Core either.

'This is...'

The deepest layer of the Ten Thousand Demon Core, where Kang-Woo had not been able to pull demonic energy out of yet...

'The Abyss.'

It was similar to the demonic energy of the place where that giant eye was asleep. The power contained within the demonic energy itself was in a league of its own.

"You were just unlucky."

Unlucky...

Was there a better way to describe the situation?

It wasn't perfect, but Satan had put off a lot of effort into this trap.

If it had worked, Kang-Woo's dead subordinates would have devoured him. But...

Rumble!!

The space made of demonic energy was distorted.

Riiing.

[The nightmare of the 'Primordial Darkness' is crumbling!]

A message appeared.

To be precise, it wasn't crumbling. It was being thoroughly eaten.

[A-Aaaahh.]

A desperate exclamation left Satan's mouth. He could feel the breakdown of the nightmare space as everything was returning to normal. The space of reality mixed with illusions was turning back into reality, and Satan wasn't dumb enough to not realize what that meant.

[The 'Divinity' interfering with the system has disappeared.]

[Restoring level and all stats to their former values.]

"I guess we're back."

Kang-Woo got up and smirked. He saw a black sphere about thirty meters in diameter in the middle of a giant cave surrounded by ice.

"This is your main body, huh?"

Kang-Woo placed his hand on the black sphere, sent his demonic energy into it, and checked what it was.

'Satan fused himself with the Demon God's corpse.'

He saw Satan inside the Demonic Origin and could finally understand why Satan was so confident within the nightmare. Unlike other princes of Hell, Satan had given up on restoring his body. Instead, he'd fused his soul with the Demonic Origin.

Meaning...

'That was his home ground.'

Satan was stronger than any other demon within that nightmare because he'd mixed his soul into it.

[A-Arrgghh.]

The huge black sphere grunted.

[Why, why, whyyyyyy!!!]

A desperate and agonizing scream spread through the cave.

It was only natural. He'd fused his soul with the Demonic Origin more than a thousand years ago to accept its power, fusing so much that he had given up his physical form for it. However, everything he'd built up until now had crumbled all too easily in the demon king's hands.

[I was... unlucky? Unlucky, you say?!]

He had put a lot of thought into the plan, but to think that the reason why it failed was that he was 'unlucky'...

[Urgh... Sniff.]

His sorrow overflowed.

After losing to the demon king and falling to Earth, he'd dreamt of his revival for over a thousand years. But then, the demon king had suddenly appeared and, while claiming to be him, had framed him for crimes he hadn't committed.

He had held back his rage and thought he'd finally been able to succeed in his revenge, but instead of revenge, he had ended up offering him a feast.

[Why... why are you doing this to me...?]

If there was a God, he wanted to ask him that.

[Waaaah. What... what did I do so wrong...?]

If, at least, he'd suffered a loss worthy of a prince of Hell... he wouldn't have been too sad.

[I am... fucking Satan... not some... worthless demon... I am Satan...]

He was the Prince of Wrath—the strongest prince of Hell after Bael.

[Waaaaaaaaah.]

His tears of sorrow did not stop.

Step, step.

Kang-Woo slowly walked toward him and looked up at the black sphere.

"So... if I eat this, I can devour the Demonic Origin and Satan's soul at the same time," he mumbled.

He made a satisfied smile and nodded as he spread his hand toward the black sphere. The Ten Thousand Demon Core had returned, so a huge amount of demonic energy surged from his body. As that black mucus gathered together, a mouth big enough to devour the thirty-meter black sphere appeared.

[N-No...! S-Stop!! Please stop!!]

"Thank you, Lord Satan, for giving me my daily bread."

Crunch!

The giant mouth devoured the black sphere whole.

'I guess this is what they call a "buy one, get one free." '

Chapter 247 - Stay The Fuck Down

[A-Aaaaaahh!!]

Oh Kang-Woo heard Satan's agonized scream. Ignoring it, he kept using the Authority of Predation.

Crunch. Crunch.

A giant mouth with thousands of white teeth chewed on the black sphere. Black blood poured out from its widening cracks.

The scene was grotesque enough to have been pulled straight from a horror film.

Kang-Woo, who had the role of said film's main monster, added more demonic energy to the Authority of Predation.

Crack!

The shell protecting the black sphere was completely destroyed, and a thick smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face.

He'd broken the egg's shell.

'All that's left is to devour the demonic energy the hard shell had protected.'

"Haaa, haaa." His breathing became heavier, and he felt thirst burning his throat. He was drooling.

Kang-Woo briefly froze before devouring the Demonic Origin. He narrowed his eyes.

'It's weird.'

There was something he couldn't understand.

'Why is it so easy for me to eat?'

Satan had likely wondered the same thing.

Kang-Woo remained silent and fell into thought.

'The corpse of the Demon God, was it?'

He recalled the thoughts that he did not have the time to finish while stuck in the nightmare.

'The Demon God is probably that eye monster in the Abyss.'

Kang-Woo remembered the eye confidently revealing himself as the Demon God. Even at this very moment, Kang-Woo could feel the being inside him amplifying his desires.

- Eat it.

A voice spread through his ear. His lips dried, and horrible thirst stimulated his neck.

- Eat every last bit of it!

"For fuck's sake." He frowned and clicked his tongue in disapproval. "You're so fucking noisy."

The term corpse meant that the Demon God had most likely been killed and ripped apart at someone's hands.

Kang-Woo still couldn't understand why that Demon God was inside him, and he didn't know what his goal was or what exactly he was, but...

"Don't push me. I was gonna eat it anyway."

He smirked.

It didn't matter if he had the Demon God inside him or not. He could more or less guess what the god's goal was. After all, the Demon God had probably been the one to force him into the black Rift.

'I don't like it.'

The sense of losing control of his body was extremely unpleasant.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes.

- Eat it right now!

The voice echoed in his head, and his powerful thirst was drying up all the water in his body.

'Slowly...'

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and controlled the intense desire burning inside him. The burning thirst slowly quelled.

'Good.'

The gears in his head turned quicker.

The Demon God's amplification of Kang-Woo's desire and Kang-Woo's control were weighed against each other. Although he wasn't used to it at the beginning, as time went on, he was slowly

but surely regaining control. He was confident in his ability to control his desire and the rampaging demonic energy.

"Now, then..."

He raised his head. He ignored the loud voice echoing within his mind and disregarded the burning thirst and everything else. He took a deep breath and used the Authority of Predation, which devoured the interior of the black sphere after its shell had been shattered completely.

Crunch! Crunch!

There was a chilling sound, and demonic energy flowed into his body.

Riiing.

[Warning, warning.]

[This demonic energy contains 'Divinity.' You are currently unable to use it in its entirety.]

A message appeared in front of him.

He ignored it. No, to be more precise, he had no leeway to pay it any mind.

"Kuh."

He grunted and bent forward. As if water was being poured on arid land, a colossal amount of demonic energy flowed into the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

[Demonic Energy has risen to 153.]

[Demonic Energy has risen to 165.]

[Demonic Energy has risen to 172.]

Messages kept appearing, and his Demonic Energy stat was going up at an incredible pace.

'It's dangerous.'

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He couldn't be purely happy with the speed at which his stat was rising. The demonic energy locked within the Abyss, the deepest layer of the Ten Thousand Demon Core, was rampaging like crazy, and was about to flood.

'The Doors are about to shatter.'

He could feel that the three Doors protecting the entrance to the Ten Thousand Demon Core were cracking.

Kang-Woo's expression paled.

'At this rate, I'll be devoured.'

There was no need to even think about it. The moment the Doors were forcibly destroyed, he would be devoured by the demonic energy and...

'Everyone will die.'

If the Ten Thousand Demon Core was fully unleashed while his reason was not intact, there was no need to guess what would happen. His body, which would have nothing left but the desire to eat,

would not stop until he devoured every single living being on this star. No, he wasn't sure if he would be able to stop even after that.

- Ha... Hahahahaha!! Yes!! The time has finally come!!

He heard the maniacal laugh of the Demon God in his ear.

- It is still only one of the three, but... well, it is enough to let the beginning of the prophecy be known.

The Demon God kept snickering and mumbling things that Kang-Woo could not understand.

- The time of prophecy is upon us! Tremble in fear, mortals!

Kang-Woo felt something trying to rise from the Abyss with the voice.

The hand of the giant, whose body was so massive that it could not even be fathomed, stretched out from the Abyss.

- I am death. I am the end. I am...

"Fucking hell, here's another Satan."

Kang-Woo smiled widely while panting heavily.

- Oh? You are still conscious? asked the Demon God in surprise, letting out a low laugh.

- Now, your role ends here. From now on, I will take control of your b—

"Cut the bullshit."

Kang-Woo snickered.

He had expected the Demon God's goal to be something like this. It was an obvious development, and he had already thought of such a result. It had been so predictable without any twists that it couldn't get any more boring

"I told you..."

He recalled what he had said to the Demon God back in the Abyss.

"Go fuck yourself."

- ...

"The time you've been waiting for will never come. Whatever that time of prophecy bullshit is, you're never getting out of there."

- Do you have any idea who I a—

"And do you know me, dipshit?"

There was no way he would know.

Considering that the Demon God was talking about Kang-Woo being a puppet and that his role was over, he likely had a plan. However, he had no idea who the man he had made into his puppet was.

The Demon God wasn't aware of what kind of person Kang-Woo was, what he had been through, or what he was capable of.

"Huh? Do you?"

The Demon God didn't.

"If you don't, then shut up and stay the fuck down."

Demonic energy was surging out of Kang-Woo. He could feel himself losing hold of his consciousness.

'If I can't accept it...'

He would abandon it.

Kang-Woo couldn't keep the rampaging demonic energy in check, but he could guide it somewhere. He put his hand over his heart and directed the flooding demonic energy of the Ten Thousand Demon Core elsewhere.

'I can't send it out.'

He wasn't sure where this place was, but if he just let it burst out, he was sure that an unimaginable disaster would occur.

'In that case...'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone. If he couldn't let it out, there was only one place he could send it...

'I'll stuff it into the deepest layer—the place where the Demon God was resting, the deepest and largest region of the Ten Thousand Demon Core.'

[Demonic Energy has lowered to 168.]

[Demonic Energy has lowered to 159.]

[Demonic Energy has lowered to 153.]

He stuffed the rampaging demonic energy in the deepest region of the Ten Thousand Demon Core. It was as if he were stepping on garbage in a trash can to compress it. It was too bad that he couldn't use that power, but he had no choice.

'It's better than dying.'

Besides, he was not throwing it away. He would be able to use it in the future once he gained access to the Abyss.

- What the...?!

The Demon God, who had been excitedly crawling up, was being sucked back into the Abyss.

- How could something like this be pos...

The Demon God's voice grew weaker.

Kang-Woo trampled on him yet again without hesitation.

- N-No!!

And again...

- Just what are y—

And for the last time, with all his might...

- ...

All the demonic energy he'd absorbed with the Authority of Predation was shoved down, and the Door that led to the Abyss completely closed.

[Demonic Energy has lowered to 150.]

'This is enough.'

One of the conditions to become a Demon God was to reach 150 in the Demonic Energy stat.

There was likely a reason why it was 150.

'It must be the maximum limit that I can control at the moment.'

He likely wouldn't be able to 'perfectly' control any more than that.

Demonic energy became harmful to the wielder the moment that it couldn't be controlled.

"In any case..."

Kang-Woo stood up.

Even if it was at 150, his Demonic Energy stat used to be at 140, so it had increased by 10 points at once.

'I've also fulfilled two conditions.'

There was only one condition left to become a Demon God. He wasn't sure what it was yet, but having fulfilled two out of three was incredible.

Clack.

He picked up the pitch-black sword left in the place where the black sphere had been.

Wrath, Satan's Hell Armament.

Kang-Woo looked at the ring on his right middle finger.

"It hasn't fully digested Greed yet."

The Key of the Demonic Sea did not respond even when he infused demonic energy into it.

'Would it be okay to put more stuff into it?'

There was no way to know without trying. Just to test, he put the Key of the Demonic Sea close to Wrath.

Crunch!

The Key of the Demonic Sea suddenly reacted and devoured Wrath.

Riiing.

['Wrath' has been absorbed.]

[The time necessary for digestion has been extended.]

"I guess I should've known it would take longer."

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. But since there were no other particular penalties other than the fact that the digestion would take longer, it didn't matter much.

'It's not like I'm in desperate need of a weapon.'

He could always create weapons by merging Authorities.

"Right, then."

Kang-Woo turned his head.

Just then...

- You...

Someone's voice spread through his head, full of despair and resentment.

It was not the Demon God.

Kang-Woo frowned.

"Satan?"

- A-Aaaah.

His voice was so low that it sounded as if it would fade at any moment.

Kang-Woo shrugged.

'I guess he hasn't been fully digested.'

It made sense; since he had fused with the corpse of the Demon God, it would be weirder if he had been digested that easily.

'Well, regardless...'

It was a matter of time. Satan's soul would be dispersed soon enough and melt into the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

- Do you... seriously believe... you will... get away... with this?

"Hm?"

- For how long... do you think... your lies will...

"What are you talking about?" Kang-Woo asked, a frown on his face.

- Everything... you have... framed me for... will be...

"What have I framed you with?"

Kang-Woo tilted his head in confusion.

- ... What?

"You were the one who did it all. You killed Alec, Reynald, and even corrupted Ludwig."

- What... are you... talking... about?

"Hah," he laughed in disbelief.

'How shameless can he be?'

The truth about who was behind all those crimes had been revealed; Satan had also admitted to it.

"Don't try to blame an innocent person."

- You... son of... a...

"Fuuu. Seriously... You're unsightly to the very end, Satan. Isn't it time you admitted it?"

- You... mother... fucker...

"I guess there's no getting through to you."

Talking to someone who refused to admit his crimes would only stress him out.

"Well, then..."

Satan had died, but that didn't mean everything was over.

No. Things would only get more serious from now on.

"I might as well get out of here."

Kang-Woo turned his body and walked out of the icy cave.

- A-Aaaahh.

He could still hear Satan's voice lingering around his ear like an echo.

Satan already knew the demon king was this kind of man.

- But still, this is too...

Satan wailed while confined within an endless stretch of the sea made of demonic energy.

Chapter 248 - Unending Threat

Clang!!

The clear sound of metal echoed through the surroundings. A powerful shock was sent through Kim Si-Hun's hand from the holy sword.

"Kuh!"

Si-Hun was pushed back, his feet embedded deep into the ground.

"Haaa, haaa."

His hands trembled while gripping the sword.

"Ludwig..."

He raised his head and looked at Ludwig.

Ludwig's skin was as pale as a corpse's, and he was covered in green tentacles and demonic energy. He was too different from the Ludwig he remembered.

"Shit."

Si-Hun bit his lip. His hands trembled, and he was so tired that he felt he was about to faint at any moment. He'd used too much Qi to stop the second landslide caused by Satan's attack.

'No.'

Si-Hun held on to his fading consciousness.

'I can't collapse yet.'

He couldn't feel any human emotion in Ludwig's eyes anymore. Leaving his former friend in such a state would be wrong.

'I have to end it with my own hands.'

He had to finish what he had not been able to do. It had no meaning if he wasn't able to end it himself.

"Fuuu."

He took a deep breath and squeezed out more Qi from his dantian.

"G-Grarrgghh."

"..."

Ludwig was grunting like a monster. Si-Hun's friend resembled a zombie pulled straight from a B-list horror film.

'I always thought such scenes were too common.'

There was a reason why some things were cliché.

The corrupted Ludwig was imprinted in Si-Hun's mind.

"Graaaahhhh!!!"

Ludwig charged forward.

Si-Hun pressed his lips together and raised his sword. A white light shone from Holy Sword Ludwig, the sword named after his dear friend.

'Azure Dragon Dance.'

White sword energy shot out from the holy sword and swept the area like a storm.

Ludwig held a greatsword he had gotten from somewhere and charged toward the storm of sword energy.

Claaaaang!!!

Sparks poured in all directions. The sound of a hammer hitting steel resounded many times a second.

"Grrr!"

Ludwig stomped on the ground violently and swung his greatsword horizontally. He didn't use any special techniques or complex principles—it was just an attack that used overwhelming power.

"Kuh!"

Si-Hun lowered his head, and Ludwig's sword grazed his hair. Just the wind pressure generated from the swing of Ludwig's sword was enough to split his skin and make him bleed.

'I can't win in a head-on battle.'

Ludwig was far faster and stronger than him. On top of that, demonic energy continuously poured out of him, increasing his destructive power even more.

A head-on battle in such a situation was suicidal.

"..."

Si-Hun remained silent and took a deep breath. If a head-on battle was impossible, then he had only one choice...

'Sword Control.'

He raised his hand, and the weapons scattered over the battlefield rose into the sky. His already-low Qi stores rapidly decreased.

"G-Gaah."

Si-Hun started to tremble. His head hurt, and he felt like vomiting.

Riiing.

[Warning.]

[Insufficient Qi. Further usage of Qi will result in 'Qi deviation.']

"Kuh..."

His vision blurred, and his fingers trembled as powerlessness weighed him down.

'I don't... give a shit.'

He raised his head while clenching his fists. He didn't have time to worry about having a Qi deviation.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

He shot the floating weapons at Ludwig as if they were bullets.

"Graaaaaaaaahh!!"

Ludwig brutishly swung his greatsword, relying only on instincts.

Clang.

The greatsword shattered a spear, an iron mace, a scythe, and an axe. Weapons were split, warped, and sliced.

"Cough."

Si-Hun vomited blood. He was experiencing a Qi deviation due to squeezing out too much Qi. He felt his insides churning, and his blood was burning like lava as it circulated through his body.

"A-Arrgghh."

He spread his hands and tried to pick up his holy sword from the ground.

Clatter.

He dropped it. He couldn't put strength into his hands anymore.

"..."

The memory of when he had become unable to hold a sword after Mammon had destroyed his two arms came back to him naturally.

Fear rushed in.

"H-Hyung..." Si-Hun called out to Oh Kang-Woo.

He desperately looked around for him.

'At times like this, I always...'

Kang-Woo's face had always popped up ever since Kang-Woo had become more precious than his own flesh and blood.

Kang-Woo would always appear and help Si-Hun in such situations: when he was being corrupted by the seed Satan had sown within him, when he'd collapsed after losing both arms to Mammon, when Lucifer's subordinates brought him to the verge of death, and...

'When Kim Yeong-Hun almost killed me.'

Kang-Woo always helped him in his times of greatest need.

"Ha... haha," Si-Hun laughed. He lowered his head. "I'm such... a dumbass."

He was a pathetic piece of trash, a cowardly idiot. He knew it from the beginning—he had just ignored it. He'd just turned his eyes from what he didn't want to see.

'I...'

Not even once had he ever stood up on his own. He'd always received help. His talent, effort, beliefs, and will... he knew they would have meant nothing if it hadn't been for Kang-Woo.

"..."

Si-Hun reached out to grab the holy sword again.

'Get up.'

He stuck his sword into the ground and used it as a cane as he stood up with trembling legs.

'If not now...'

When would he ever be able to stand on his own?

Riiing.

[Warning, warning.]

[Entering a state of Qi deviation.]

"Shut up."

He cast aside the message windows and pointed his sword at Ludwig.

'Kang-Woo hyung.'

He saw Kang-Woo's lonely back as Kang-Woo walked ahead down a solitary road while carrying an immeasurable burden on his shoulders.

"From now on..."

For how long was he going to simply follow and watch Kang-Woo's back?

Si-Hun stood up while exerting more strength with his legs.

There would be no help from Kang-Woo or the Martial God.

For the first time...

Amidst the failure that he was sick and tired of...

He stood up on his own.

"... I will walk alongside you."

He took the first heavy step and ran toward Kang-Woo, who was walking far ahead of him.

* * *

"Cough! Cough!"

Red blood poured out in all directions. Si-Hun's legs trembled, and he felt like his eyes were about to close.

"A-Arrgghh."

"..."

He held onto his consciousness and raised his head. Ludwig had collapsed and was clenching his chest. The pure-white sword that had pierced his chest happened to have the same name as him.

"Kim... Si-Hun...?"

It seemed that his consciousness had returned for a brief moment. Ludwig raised his trembling hand toward Si-Hun.

"Be... careful of... he has... planned everything..."

Ludwig was trying to say something.

Si-Hun silently laid Ludwig down on the ground. It wasn't hard to predict what he wanted to say.

"I know, Ludwig."

"..."

"I will kill Satan with my own hands."

"No... that... is not..."

"Rest in peace."

He didn't want Ludwig to suffer any longer—Si-Hun twisted the holy sword that had pierced his heart.

Ludwig turned into black dust and scattered in the air.

"Kuh..."

He exerted more strength with his legs and stood up as he looked around the battlefield.

'Is it almost over?'

The war had entered its final stage. The combined forces of angels, Watchers of Light, and Guardians had managed to drive the forces of the Demon Cult into a corner. Even the demons who had resisted until the end were starting to collapse one by one, spewing black blood.

"..."

The long fight against the Demon Cult was reaching an end.

Si-Hun let go of the holy sword, which scattered into particles of light and entered his body. He climbed up the mountain with trembling legs. He saw Shalgiel, the angel with short, silver hair, running somewhere.

"Lord Raphael! Please wake up, Lord Raphael!!" Shalgiel shouted while holding Raphael, collapsed on the ground.

Si-Hun walked toward him.

"Did Satan do this?"

"... Yes."

Shalgiel nodded while biting his lips.

Si-Hun clenched his fists.

"What happened to Satan?"

"He created a black Rift and escaped. Also... the apostle of the God of Heroes Tirion chased after him."

"Wh-what?"

Si-Hun's eyes widened. The news struck him like lightning.

"H-Hyung-nim chased after Satan by himself?!"

"Yes."

Si-Hun felt as if the world was collapsing. He trembled. Even if Kang-Woo were strong, chasing after Satan alone was suicidal.

"Shit, shit!!"

He quickly looked around, but he couldn't see the black Rift.

"Where did that black Rift appear?!"

"It is already g—"

"Where?!" Si-Hun exclaimed while grabbing Shalgiel's collar.

Although his condition was worse than that of a rag after his battle with Ludwig, he couldn't stand still and do nothing.

'I have to save him.'

Exhaustion? Qi deviation? It didn't matter. If it were for Kang-Woo, he wouldn't mind if his body shattered.

"It appeared over th—"

Just as Shalgiel pointed somewhere while looking at Si-Hun's desperate expression...

Crack!

A black Rift appeared in thin air as if a glass pane were breaking.

Si-Hun, Shalgiel, and the nearby angels and Guardians members all looked toward the Rift.

"Kuh!"

"I-It's still not over yet?"

Everyone's expressions fell into despair.

"Hyung-nim!!"

Si-Hun rushed toward the Rift and gathered white light to form a sword. He looked at the black Rift anxiously.

Crack!

The Rift became bigger.

From inside it...

"Cough! Cough!"

"H-Hyung-nim?!"

Kang-Woo appeared, covered in wounds.

Si-Hun hurriedly supported Kang-Woo, who looked as if he were about to collapse at any moment.

Shalgiel also quickly walked toward Kang-Woo.

"Are you okay, hyung-nim?!"

"Kurgh... Yeah, I'm fine."

Kang-Woo's expression crumpled. Although he said he was okay, he didn't look to be. His clothes had become rags, and 'red' blood was pouring from all over his body.

"Did you... kill Satan?" Shalgiel asked while making a hard expression.

Angels and Players alike flinched.

The war's primary goal...

The Demon of Prophecy, Satan.

"..."

Kang-Woo's mouth remained closed. There was a heavy silence on the battlefield that had been noisy until then.

"Satan has"—Kang-Woo clenched his fists and bit his lip—"escaped."

He lowered his head as if he could not bear to have said the words.

"A-Aaaah."

Everyone around them let out exclamations of surprise.

After so much bloodshed and so many sacrifices...

Satan hadn't died.

The Demon of Prophecy was still alive. The threat had not ended yet.

Chapter 249 - After The War (1)

[Guardians emerge victorious against Demon Cult headquarters! Will peace finally dawn on humanity...?]

[Satan, the leader of the Demon Cult, escapes. Threat still looms over humanity...]

[All about the heroes of the victory: Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun, First Lady Grace McCubbin, and the angels.]

[Who is the golden hero that suddenly appeared on the battlefield?]

[The identity of the golden hero... revealed to be the sworn brother of Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun, Oh Kang-Woo.]

After the war against the Demon Cult ended, the world was up in a stir.

People showered Guardians with praise and awe, and they went wild for news related to the heroes who had been the protagonists of the war.

The Demon Cult was considered the biggest threat after the Day of Calamity, so it would be an obvious result.

The support each country offered to Guardians rose dramatically, and the number of Players who wanted to join also exploded. It felt as if they had finally earned the status of 'protectors of the world.'

After the Demon Cult was defeated, the average level of Players increased and the territories that monsters had conquered were recovered. People exclaimed in happiness, saying that the era of peace had finally come.

Of course, some people emphasized the fact that they couldn't relax yet because Satan, the leader of the Demon Cult, had escaped, but that didn't appeal to the masses.

People only saw what they wanted.

After all, it was better news that the cult that kidnapped people to use as sacrifices had been eradicated instead of the fact that they were still out there.

Regardless of the truth, countries worldwide were met with a time of peace they hadn't been able to enjoy since the Day of Calamity.

Commenter (Tresha writing a new): bros I heard the Demon Cult headquarters got fking bodied LMAO

↳ Concluded JerryM: LOL justice finally served

↳ Newbie Sagyesu: the national pride is unreal. I heard Sword Dragon did most of the work again

↳ Butterfly Valley's failed diet: didn't the angels do all the heavy lifting?? I bet they would've been floored without them

↳ Soon to be finished Wooden Spoon: there's that Oh Kang-Woo guy too. I heard he chased after Satan to the very end to fight him

↳ Reborn Woojin: it's an established fact that Oh Kang-Woo is the secret powerhouse of Guardians

"Mm..."

Kang-Woo scrolled down the comments on the news article on his smartphone.

Most of the messages were congratulating the victory, but some people were discussing the golden hero that had suddenly appeared on the battlefield. Even the press was posting his photos and making speculations about him.

"Well, I guess it's about time."

He didn't expect to be able to remain hidden until the end. Although not being known was comfortable, there was a limit. The only good thing was that he was receiving far less attention than Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun and the angels.

'I didn't show myself on the battlefield for long.'

Other than when he killed the Barbatos and during the last moments of the war, he hadn't appeared on the battlefield. He probably wouldn't receive more fame than necessary.

"Nice."

Kang-Woo lay on the bed; the ends of his mouth went up.

The Demon Cult had lost.

He'd told Guardians that Satan had escaped and that the threat wasn't over yet, but he knew the truth.

"Burp."

He'd killed Satan and devoured him without leaving anything behind. On top of that, Satan's wails, which he could hear due to the incomplete digestion, had mostly faded.

'I can finally rest a little.'

He felt as if he had finally been able to put down one of the weights that had been eating away at him.

'I feel a bit sorry for Si-Hun, but...'

Ever since Kang-Woo had told Si-Hun that Satan had escaped, he'd been undergoing harsh training. In his mind, he never knew when he would be able to get his revenge.

'It couldn't be helped.'

Kang-Woo slightly opened his eyes. He had a reason for telling everyone that Satan had survived despite having killed him.

'He has to remain as the Demon of Prophecy.'

If a god gave a revelation saying that the Demon of Prophecy was alive while people knew that Satan had died, the only one to suffer from the trolling would be Kang-Woo.

The Demon of Prophecy had to be Satan, and he must not be killed.

'That way...!' Kang-Woo smiled. 'I can keep using him.'

The Satan cheat code had become a very important resource for him.

Kang-Woo hummed while thinking about when and how he should use Satan again.

- Waaaaaaaah.

He heard faint wailing from somewhere far away. He ignored it.

"The only unfortunate thing is..."

He narrowed his eyes.

The plan had gone better than he'd expected. If there was one unfortunate thing, it was...

'Raphael survived.'

Not only that, but he had even sworn to bring more reinforcements to search for Satan. That meant that there was a chance of another archangel arriving on Earth.

"Ngh."

He didn't like it. It was true that he had a good relationship with angels for the moment, but he never knew when it would turn sour.

'I guess I have no choice but to play innocent.'

Oh Kang-Woo was the apostle of Tirion, God of Heroes. The best possible decision at the moment would be to use that fact to maintain collaborative relations.

'I still haven't taken care of all the princes of Hell. If angels get involved, things will become unnecessarily complicated.'

Things finally turned out for the better after he killed Satan, so he didn't want to create any more complications.

Kang-Woo clasped his hands together and used them as a pillow.

'Four left.'

The remaining princes of Hell were Leviathan, Asmodeus, Lucifer, and...

'Bael.'

Kang-Woo's expression slightly crumpled.

"Haaa... Fuck."

He couldn't help but curse.

'It wouldn't have been a problem if they were only as strong as before, but...'

He narrowed his eyes.

The princes of Hell had become stronger than they had been during the thousand-year war. Leaving Mammon and Belphegor aside, Satan had become significantly stronger.

'There are apparently two more of those Demonic Origins that I ate.'

Since the Demon God had said himself that he had acquired one of the three, it was most likely true.

'Princes of Hell and the angels... I can't relax yet.'

Kang-Woo had become stronger. Although he couldn't use the power known as Divinity yet, he'd become far stronger than he had been in Hell.

'The problem is...'

His enemies could have become just as strong as him.

'Also, opening the Doors has become far too risky.'

The Doors were his trump card to forcibly make the Ten Thousand Demon Core run rampant on purpose. It had always been risky, but that level of risk has risen far too much.

'I have too much demonic energy.'

Because he'd devoured Satan and the Demonic Origin simultaneously, he had reached the limit of the demonic energy that he could keep under control. It was to the point that it was honestly a miracle that he was able to keep the Ten Thousand Demon Core in check.

'If I open any of the Doors now...'

There was a large chance he'd be devoured by the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

"Tsk."

It was good news that he'd become stronger, but having such an overpowered ability like opening the Doors of the Ten Thousand Demon Core unavailable to him was unpleasant news.

'First, I have to improve my control over demonic energy.'

Kang-Woo took out a black gem the size of his fist from his pocket.

"So I can eat this."

The black gem was the condensed corpse of Belphegor.

His limit of demonic energy control had become so close to the limit that he couldn't devour the gem that contained the Authority and soul of a prince of Hell despite it being right in front of him.

'I'll think about it later.'

Kang-Woo unclasped his fingers and stood up from the bed.

There had only ever been one way to improve his demonic energy control; he was doing it even while he was lying down.

'I just have to keep working at it.'

Even in his peaceful days of eating and laughing, one part of Kang-Woo's mind was always frantically keeping the rampaging demonic energy in check.

'I'm sure I'll be able to go even higher soon enough.'

He raised his head. An intense thirst burned his throat. He'd surpassed his previous self, but it wasn't enough—there was no way he'd be satisfied with that.

He wanted to reach even higher.

He wanted to walk even further.

He had never stopped even once.

"Right then, I'm gonna have a date with my darling toda—"

Click.

"Master Kang-Woo."

"Gasp."

Kang-Woo became short of breath, his body trembled, and cold sweat dripped down his back. His expression hardened when he saw Lilith enter his room.

Lilith walked toward him while tilting her head in confusion.

"You seem unwell... Has something happened?"

"N-No, it's nothing. That aside, what brings you here?"

"Oh, I have come to give my report on what you had commanded me to investigate since I was more or less done."

"You're already done?"

She shone in fields other than battle, so Kang-Woo hadn't ordered her to participate in the battle.

"Yes. I have confirmed the general location of the remnants of the Demon Cult."

He'd asked her to infiltrate the Demon Cult branch and locate the remaining forces of the Demon Cult while the war was going on.

The Demon Cult was spread out all across the globe, so they wouldn't be dismantled just because their main force had been destroyed. To completely trample on their chances of a comeback, he had to eliminate the remaining forces as well.

Lilith said, "I have found the locations of nineteen small and medium-sized branches."

"Good work," Kang-Woo said as he looked at her.

He hadn't said that just out of courtesy. It had only been a week since the war had ended—the only one capable of gathering so much information in such a short period of time was probably Lilith. She'd likely done an unreal amount of work.

"Fufu. This does not even come to the level of an errand as long as it is for you, my king."

Kang-Woo started to feel guilty that he had become frightened when he had seen her enter the room.

'I'm sorry... I'm... so sorry...'

He felt like he'd done something he shouldn't have to someone as loyal as her. He lowered his head in guilt.

"Will you be taking action yourself, Master Kang-Woo?"

"Nope. They're only remnant forces, after all. Mobilize the Guardians Players so that they can level up. Actually, no. Give me the information you've gathered. I'll give it to Grace and have her take care of the mobilization."

It was Kang-Woo's way of showing his appreciation for her work, since she had not been able to take a break since the war.

Understanding his intentions, Lilith smiled and embraced his arm. A soft sensation spread through his arm.

"Thank you very much, my king."

"Now go get some rest."

"Ah, there is one more thing I have to report."

Kang-Woo looked at her while tilting his head.

She lowered her head as if she were sorry. "I have not been able to find the last remaining Aspect of Evil."

"Hmm... Do you know who it is?"

"It is a black mage known as Kalgia."

"A black mage... He's the one who used to be Satan's subordinate, right?"

"Yes."

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'An Aspect of Evil, huh?'

Since he used to be Satan's subordinate, he was probably only as strong as Crimson Fiend and Belphegor.

'I won't be able to get much out of it.'

He remembered Si-Hun's face.

'He could be a valuable experience for Si-Hun.'

Unlike Kang-Woo, who had almost reached the limit of his growth, Si-Hun could still grow a lot more.

After facing Ludwig, Si-Hun had apparently been able to reach a greater height.

"Let me know as soon as you find him."

"Yes, Master Kang-Woo."

"And don't forget to take a break."

Kang-Woo gently patted Lilith's head.

Lilith twisted her body and blushed.

"Fu... fufufufufufu."

'Oh, fuck.'

Her hair had begun moving on its own, and it wrapped around his finger.

Kang-Woo's expression hardened. He couldn't help but think he'd stepped on a landmine.

"No, I shouldn't. Fuuu, fuuu." Lilith took deep breaths to calm herself.

"... Huh?"

Kang-Woo was surprised at her reaction, and he looked at her with his eyes widened.

Lilith turned away.

"In that case, I will excuse myself."

"Uhh... S-Sure."

Close.

Lilith quickly walked out of the room.

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

Kang-Woo looked at the door while making a confused expression.

"Could it be..."

A thrill spread through his body.

"H-Has Lilith finally realized it?!"

Has she realized that he despised her tentacle mode?

Finally... Finally... Finally!!!!

"I finally have hope!!!!!"

Kang-Woo clenched his fist and raised it. Tears dripped down his cheeks.

He could see the end of the nightmare.

* * *

"My, I almost got aroused again."

Lilith raised her head after striding out of the apartment. She quickly began walking somewhere.

"Fu... Fufufufu."

She giggled uncontrollably.

"Please look forward to it, my king, my love."

Boosh.

A tentacle that appeared from her chest in her excitement burst, yellow pus trickling down from it.

"I will make you a memory you will never forget."

A wide smile appeared on Lilith's face.

Chapter 250 - After The War (2)

Clamor.

"Hey, hey, hey!! Thresh just used Flash!"

"Jungleerrr!!!!"

"Mid M.I.A.! Mid M.I.A.!"

"The enemy top is just living on our side up here, what the fuck is this jungler doing?!!"

Screaming and loud keyboard clicks resounded through the room, and the pungent odor of cigarettes intertwined with the aroma of all sorts of food.

A red-haired girl wearing a white baseball cap and a young man with sharp eyes were sitting in the corner seats partitioned off from the rest of the cafe.

"Hey, blue is mine," said Cha Yeon-Joo, the red-haired girl, while frowning. She was playing a phoenix made of ice.

Oh Kang-Woo, sitting next to her, didn't seem like he could hear her. He attacked the blue golem with a character that shot small venomous darts.

A vein bulged from Yeon-Joo's forehead.

"Son of a bitch! I told you not to take the blue!!!"

"But my mana regen increases if I take this."

"Who the fuck doesn't know that?! I'm asking why the fuck you're taking it!!!"

"I have to spread more shrooms."

Yeon-Joo clenched the back of her neck as Kang-Woo talked carefreely.

"Urgh, I think I'm gonna die. My blood pressure..."

She held back her tears and pressed the 'tab' key to check Kang-Woo's items.

"Wait, you're going AD...?"

"Yup."

"Son of a bitch! Why the fuck are you out here trolling when you're the one who called me out to an internet cafe?!"

Yeon-Joo grabbed Kang-Woo's collar and shook him. While she had her hands off the keyboard, an enemy champion killed her character.

"Arrgghh!" she screamed.

Yeon-Joo looked at the screen, which had turned gray, while holding back her tears.

"You... scumbag..."

"Man, this character sucks. Why is the mushroom damage so low?"

"It's your fucking head that sucks!"

The enemies soon reached their base and destroyed their nexus.

Defeat appeared on the screen in red letters.

"..."

Yeon-Joo trembled.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

"We lost again. Ah, I might as well order another portion of instant ramen. Plus a coke, dumplings, and a fish cake bar. You want some too, Yeon-Joo?"

"What did you even come here for?!"

"What do you mean?"

The answer couldn't be any more obvious.

He said, "To eat instant ramen."

"Ah..."

Yeon-Joo collapsed on the chair while grabbing the back of her neck. Intense rage stimulated her.

"Y-You son of a bitch... I ditched a meeting for this..."

It had been ten days since the war ended.

Although the world was going through an unprecedented time of peace since the Day of Calamity, that was not the case for major guilds like Red Rose. They had to deal with the aftermath of the war, the payments for the families of the deceased, and the welfare for the wounded.

Although most of it was handled with the money that was sent to Guardians from all around the world, she was still the master of a guild. She had been busy beyond imagination to make sure that her guild members who participated in the war received the best possible welfare and rewards.

'But...'

She was being treated like this after barely managing to free up some time from her absurdly packed schedule. She couldn't help but tremble from frustration and rage.

Kang-Woo smirked. "I've actually wanted to come here for a while."

"... What, an internet cafe?"

"This is where we first met. Now that I think about it, it was a rough start, but... well, I received a lot of help from you thanks to it, so I wanted to come here with you when I had the chance."

He'd received a lot of help from Yeon-Joo.

In the first few months when he'd become far weaker due to the seal on the Ten Thousand Demon Core, he had been able to become stronger extremely easily and quickly thanks to her during his most vulnerable period.

'Although we both had something to gain out of it, it doesn't change the fact that she was of great help.'

The S-rank Gate entry permit, the Unique-grade equipment, and many other things...

Although Lilith had been his informant as of late, Yeon-Joo had taken on that role before Lilith had come to Earth.

"Ah... U-Uhhh..."

Yeon-Joo was trembling, her mouth hanging open as if he'd said something she had never expected. Her cheeks turned as red as her hair.

"I-I was only trying to make use of you!"

"I knew it."

It was a textbook answer—truly Yeon-Joo-like.

Kang-Woo smirked and turned his gaze back to the computer.

"..."

Yeon-Joo glared at Kang-Woo in displeasure. For some reason, Han Seol-Ah's face popped up in her head.

"Haaa, what am I gonna do with you?"

She sighed deeply. But, surprisingly, she wasn't feeling annoyed. Rather, her heart was beating faster, and the ends of her mouth were trying to curl up.

'I must have lost my mind.'

Yeon-Joo frantically shook her head. She couldn't accept that her heart was beating faster from the words of a forever-virgin like him.

'But...'

A noisy internet cafe... it was a place she often went to enjoy playing games before she had Awakened as a Player. Coming to such a familiar place with Kang-Woo wasn't that unpleasant.

'We... haven't talked much lately either.'

He'd also become too distant; he had risen up to a height that she couldn't even see. When she first met him, she knew that such a day might come someday.

She had expected him to go so far away that she couldn't ever hope to catch up, but she was feeling bittersweet because that day had come sooner than expected—in just a few years. She couldn't even call him whenever she was bored now.

Yeon-Joo looked at Kang-Woo, who was excitedly eating his instant ramen.

'He shoulders... too big of a burden.'

He had to stop the world from being destroyed by the Demon of Prophecy. The scale of the burden was so big that she couldn't help but laugh in disbelief. Her burden was quite heavy in its own right because she was the master of a major guild, but her burden couldn't be compared to Kang-Woo's.

"... I want some instant ramen too."

"Fuuu. Fuuu. Slurp! Right? Instant ramen is a must in an internet cafe!"

"People don't usually come to an internet cafe to eat instant ramen, though."

Yeon-Joo turned to her monitor while making a bittersweet smile. The time she was spending with him cheered her up. She looked at the monitor while trying to hide her blushing cheeks.

On the screen....

[You have been demoted to Bronze II.]

"You motherfucker!!!!" Her voice rang out in the internet cafe. "You fucking asshooooooooole!!"

* * *

Clack.

"I'm home."

Kang-Woo opened the front door and entered his apartment.

Seol-Ah, who was sitting in the living room, tilted her head.

"You're early. Didn't you say you were going to hang out with Yeon-Joo?"

"Ah... Well, she suddenly got up and left," Kang-Woo said while scratching his head in confusion.

'She was looking at me as if I'd killed her parents.'

He couldn't understand what the point of rank in a game was. Wasn't the purpose of a game to enjoy playing?

Kang-Woo smirked as he recalled what happened in the internet cafe.

'Still, it was nice.'

Especially the instant ramen—it was delicious. The flavor of the instant ramen eaten while playing couldn't be compared to the flavor of instant ramen eaten at home.

'I guess it's similar to eating popcorn in cinemas.'

He had never been to the cinema, but for some reason, he felt it would be similar.

"... What did you say to Yeon-Joo?"

Seol-Ah looked at him suspiciously.

"I seriously have no idea. She seemed angry just because we lost a game."

"Mm."

Seol-Ah scratched her cheeks as if she found it confusing. She had also never played video games before, so she couldn't understand Yeon-Joo's attitude.

"Kang-Woo, does that mean you're free today?" Echidna asked.

"Oh, yup. We were gonna have dinner together, but she just ditched me."

Since his plans were canceled, he naturally gained some free time.

Echidna snorted in excitement.

"Hm! Hm! Then let's watch anime together!"

She pulled on Kang-Woo's clothes with shining eyes.

Smirking, Kang-Woo patted her head.

"Hm?"

Kang-Woo tilted his head while patting Echidna's head.

"Did you grow?"

Echidna had grown significantly taller. She nodded furiously and said, "I feel like... I've been overflowing with power ever since the war. Because of that, I grew taller, and this place grew too," Echidna said while pointing to her chest.

Was it because she was standing next to Seol-Ah?

'It's just a wall.'

To be honest, he couldn't tell the difference. He wondered if he should use the Authority of Insight to check.

"... Do you like them younger, Kang-Woo?"

"Absolutely not."

He shook his head.

Although he'd become a demon, that didn't mean he'd lost the basic moral values of a human.

'Even for Echidna...'

He couldn't see her as a member of the opposite sex in the slightest.

He knew that she was actually hundreds of years old, but due to her mannerisms and appearance, he couldn't think of her as a member of the opposite sex, which was also why he purposefully did not react to her constant attempts to seduce him.

"Hm! That's a relief."

Echidna snorted in relief and nodded.

'That aside...'

Kang-Woo looked at her.

'It's probably because of me, right?'

Her growth was probably related to him.

"Mm..."

He fell into thought.

According to Echidna's explanation, it would take her a couple hundred more years to grow from a hatchling to a mature dragon.

'Was it accelerated because of me?'

He wasn't sure whether that was good or bad news. After all, he had absolutely no information regarding dragons.

'I should ask Lilith to investigate later.'

Kang-Woo sat down.

As always, Echidna sat on his lap.

He couldn't see in front of him as well as before because she had become a bit taller.

"I'm going to get as fat as Seol-Ah soon!" Echidna said while clenching her fists, causing Seol-Ah's expression to pale.

"F-Fat..."

"Come on, Seol-Ah isn't fat," Kang-Woo said. He smirked as if he thought it was nonsense.

"I'm... fat?" Seol-Ah mumbled in a soulless voice. It seemed she didn't hear him. "C-Come to think of it, I haven't been hunting in Gates much lately..."

"Hello? Seol-Ah?"

"Kang-Woo eats a lot, so I've been eating a lot too..."

"Can you hear me?"

"Th-This won't do! Kang-Woo! It's dieting time! There is no kimchi stew tonight! I'm going to have you skip dinners with me!"

"Kurgh!"

Kang-Woo's eyes widened at her words as if he'd been struck by a bolt of lightning. Dripping in cold sweat, he did his best to change her mind.

"..."

After the storm-like incident passed, Kang-Woo sat quietly on the couch and silently looked around the living room. The life he'd always dreamed of was right in front of him.

'I hope days like this continue from now on.'

Kang-Woo smiled and closed his eyes.

* * *

Clack. Clack.

Small sounds echoed out.

Slice.

Lilith cut something with a kitchen knife, and a liquid as red as blood flowed out.

"Fu... Fufu."

She smiled wide while looking at the red dripping liquid.