

M. in Hell 311

Chapter 311 - Into the Rift

“What? You want to do this?” Cha Yeon-Joo asked in absurdity.

There was a limit to being insane; even if Guardians possessed enough authority to exert control over countries all over the world, the chances of closing a Gate that they didn’t even know where it could be was far too low. It was like finding a needle in a desert, so it was difficult to do even if they mobilized every single Player in the world to find it.

“If my thoughts are correct, I can pinpoint where the Rift is to an extent,” Oh Kang-Woo said calmly.

He of course did not know to an extent; he knew exactly where it was.

‘The E-rank Gate that I first met Seol-Ah in.’

He was sure that the Rift was in the Gate inhabited by Goblins.

‘But I can’t just say that outright.’

He couldn’t afford to answer that he knew because he was the Demon of Prophecy if they happened to ask how he knew.

‘I can’t be the one to find the Rift.’

It needed to be found by someone else. Only then would he be able to escape suspicion.

“How can you pinpoint where the Rift is, hyung-nim?” asked Kim Si-Hun while tilting his head.

Kang-Woo slowly answered after taking some time to settle, “You know that demonic beasts appear in Gates, don’t you, Si-Hun?”

“Ah... Yes, of course.”

Unlike monsters that had mana stones within them, demonic beasts moved with the power of demonic energy. These beasts were known as variant monsters within the Gates, and were considered a form of *disaster*.

Demonic beasts appeared in all Gates, regardless of rank. In other words, demonic beasts of around the Fifth to Sixth Hell appeared within C-rank Gates. Not just that, since they did not drop the expensive energy sources that were mana stones, many Players naturally avoided them, to the point that they avoided hunting in that Gate even after the demonic beast had been subjugated.

“If we assume that demonic beasts started to appear in Gates because the Demon of Prophecy crossed into Earth, it’s highly likely that it is due to the influence of those Rifts,” Kang-Woo surmised.

“Oh, if that’s the case...” Si-Hun’s eyes shone as if he had noticed what Kang-Woo was trying to get at. “The Rift must be within one of the Gates that a demonic beast had been reported in.”

“Exactly,” Kang-Woo answered while nodding.

Not even he knew exactly if there was a connection between the two, but the important thing was to package it as something that resembles the truth. However, it was not without its flaws.

“But there are tons of Gates with unconfirmed demonic beast appearances. It’s not like every single Gate on Earth has been checked.”

Yeon-Joo pointed out the flaw in his deduction. Like she had said, the only Gates with confirmed demonic beast appearances were the ones with high Player traffic. Earth had not yet been able to reclaim all the land that had been taken by monsters, and there were hundreds of Gates that were restricted to Players. Since the operation was unbelievably risky, simply relying on probability was suicide.

“That’s why I have a proposition,” Kang-Woo suggested.

Since he had expected such a rebuttal, he continued without hesitation. He turned his gaze toward Gaia.

“Gaia, could you tell the gods to turn off Earth’s protection for three hours instead of three days?”

“Ah... That should be possible,” Gaia answered.

“If we’re unable to find the Rift within those three hours, let’s give up on this operation.”

Silence fell. Si-Hun, Yeon-Joo and Uriel fell into thought.

“Three hours should be enough to somewhat resist the otherworldly interference, right?” Kang-Woo remarked.

“Since they had brought up three days in the beginning, if it’s three hours... There may be some consequences, but I believe it’s more than possible. But...” Gaia continued in worry. “Would we really be able to... find it in just three hours?”

“We have to,” Kang-Woo replied with composure. “We can’t just stand around while the Demon of Prophecy and his subordinates slowly grow stronger.”

“That’s...”

“I also agree with Kang-Woo,” the blue-haired boy interjected while raising his hand. “I don’t know why Lady Seraph decided to take the Demon of Prophecy’s side, but... If that is what they had planned to happen, I can’t just let it be.”

Uriel still couldn't believe that Seraph had taken the side of demons, but he did not doubt the revelation of a goddess that possessed top-grade Divinity.

'I have to buy time.'

He needed enough time to let Michael know of the situation and think up a countermeasure. Restoring Earth's protection and returning Gaia's power to an extent would buy more than enough of that time.

Gaia clenched her small fists while shutting her lips tight.

She said while softly nodding, "... I understand. In exchange, I will tell Lady Gaia to reactivate Earth's protection after three hours pass, no matter what."

"Understood."

Kang-Woo nodded. He slowly got up and slowly turned around.

'Now, then...'

It was time to prepare for the operation.

There was not much action that Kang-Woo himself needed to take for this operation. Players of Guardians had been dispatched in parties to every Gate that had been reported of demonic beast appearances. Of course, a party had also been dispatched to the E-rank Gate through which Kang-Woo had first arrived on Earth. Even though Kang-Woo had not done anything, Si-Hun had gone to that Gate himself because it had been deemed a dangerous Gate with more than five demonic beast appearances.

'There's no way that Si-Hun wouldn't be able to find the Rift.'

Although there was a chance that the Rift wouldn't be found since each Gate differed in interior size, there was absolutely no need to worry in Si-Hun's case; he could use Sword Control, albeit limited, to fly into the sky to look around.

"Right, then."

With the commencement of the operation imminent, Kang-Woo raised his right hand to take a look at the black ring on his middle finger. The three of the five geometric symbols were shining faintly.

'To acquire the fourth key...'

Kang-Woo recalled the message windows that had popped up back when Han Seol-Ah had fallen from grace. He had not been able to check them at the time, but message windows were able to be checked later.

[You must complete a prerequisite quest to acquire the fourth key of the Demonic Sea, 'Greed'.]

[Prerequisite Quest: 'Light-Craving Demon']

[Create one or more techniques that combine sacred power and demonic energy.]

"Holy fuck, what a fucking name for a quest."

Kang-Woo couldn't help but cringe no matter how many times he looked at it. He sighed as he read the quest description.

He had thought at first that it was actually simpler compared to what he had to do to acquire the second and third keys because he was sure that there was no one better than him when it came to controlling energies within himself, whether that be sacred power or demonic energy.

It was not wrong; his control over demonic energy was so impressive that he had even forced the Demon God back into the Abyss of the Demonic Sea, and that control was improving even more through sleeping with Seol-Ah.

'But...'

That had not been the case after actually trying it out. Combining sacred power and demonic energy was impossible; it was like being told to make a cold fire.

'I didn't think it'd be this difficult.'

It was possible to maneuver them so that they did not clash with each other, and to use each of them separately. However, creating a technique that combined them was impossible. The power aside, it was not feasible since they violently rejected one another as soon as they came into contact.

"What an annoyance."

Kang-Woo wondered if it was possible to clear the quest in the first place.

'There is... one way.'

There was a way to combine the two energies. If he just made them clash by force instead of trying to mix them together, the power generated from such an attack would be unreal.

'But the problem is whether or not that would count as a technique.'

Kang-Woo was just adding two chemicals that reacted aggressively with one another and throwing it. And like he had expected, the system did not acknowledge such a thing to be a technique.

"... I'll have to leave it aside for now."

He honestly did not know how. There could be a way if he raised his demonic energy control some more, but if it could be raised so easily, he would never have had to go through that shitshow known as molting.

"Mm... Come to think of it, the symptoms are kind of similar to molting."

When he had tried to mix demonic energy and sacred power by force, pain akin to his skin being ripped off radiated through his entire body like what had happened with molting. It had been so bad to the point that he was worried that Seol-Ah would fall again if she ever saw him like that.

'The effects of mixing demonic energy and sacred power is... similar to molting.'

Kang-Woo fell into thought with his arms crossed. It was very stifling to feel like something was about to come to mind, but wasn't.

"Tsk," Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and stood up.

This was not the time to be thinking about this. He looked over the details of the operation one last time and waited for Gaia's call.

Creak.

"Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah called.

"Yeah, darling?"

"They're all gathered in the living room."

"Okay."

Kang-Woo stood up and went out his room door. He was supposed to investigate whether a Rift had appeared in an SS-rank Gate in the Middle East, but he obviously did not go there.

'Since the Rift will be found in the E-rank Gate that Si-Hun is in.'

"My king. I, Balrog, have come in accordance to your summons to act as your swor—"

"Kang-Woo!"

"Master Kang-Woooooo!"

A little girl and a woman(?) ran toward Kang-Woo while cutting off Balrog, who had been speaking in seriousness while kneeling.

"It's been a while, guys. How did your training go?"

"Kang-Woo, I trained super hard," Echidna said while looking up at him with sparkling eyes.

Kang-Woo smirked and patted her head.

"Waaaaahh! I've missed you, Master Kang-Woo!"

"Y-Yeah."

Kang-Woo lightly pushed back Halcyon, who had run at him with terrifying speed. He gave it no concern and wrapped his arms around Kang-Woo's neck.

Kang-Woo quickly turned his head.

'Fuck.'

He could see the light disappearing from Seol-Ah's eyes.

"Urgh... Ngh. D-Did you m-miss me too, Master K-Kang-Woo?"

'No.'

"H-Hehehe. W-Would you like to sleep with m-me since it's been a while?"

'You'll die if you do.'

Not by Kang-Woo, but by his darling, currently holding a kitchen knife.

“Ahem,” Kang-Woo coughed while pushing off the clinging Halcyon.

The light in Seol-Ah’s eyes gradually returned. She put down the kitchen knife.

“Now... The operation is about to begin. Gather around. I have something to explain to all of you.”

Kang-Woo sat on the couch, and across him stood Seol-Ah, Balrog, Echidna and Halcyon. They were the ones who more or less knew about Kang-Woo’s true self, unlike Si-Hun and the other Guardians members. They were the ones that would join him in closing the Rift.

“Where’s Lilith and Vaal Zahak?” he asked.

“Lilith is regulating information from the Hall of Protection, and Vaal Zahak is keeping an eye on Lucis.”

Kang-Woo nodded.

“Balrog, have you succeeded in what I told you to do last time?”

“Yes. I have almost perfectly adapted to this human body,” Balrog answered while manifesting the Overlord Armor on his right arm.

Kang-Woo nodded again and continued, “You guys will be...”

He slowly explained the details of the plan.

Whoom!

Kang-Woo’s communication crystal rang. It was from Si-Hun.

- Hyung-nim! A purple Rift that we’ve never seen before has appeared!

“Got it,” Kang-Woo answered concisely and turned to his four party members. “Let’s head out.”

Chapter 312 - Satellite World (1)

In the suburbs of Seoul was an E-rank Gate very popular among low-level Players, bustling with Goblins that even an adult man could hunt as long as they had a weapon. However, that was mostly in the past; the rank of the Gate had been adjusted to S after the appearance of demonic beasts known as variant monsters.

The appearance of variant monsters was a problem in and of itself, but the bigger problem was that each of these demonic beasts were so strong that World Rankers needed to get involved. Even Sword Dragon Kim Si-Hun, the strongest Player in humanity and assumed to be far above World Rankers, had to be mobilized once.

“Hyung-nim! Over here!” Si-Hun shouted to Oh Kang-Woo, who had brought his subordinates.

Kang-Woo, after hearing him, followed Si-Hun’s voice. No, he did not even have to follow his voice to know where to go.

'It's been three years.'

Faint nostalgia hit him; the memories of feeling despair when he saw the message windows and Goblins in front of him, frantically running toward where he had heard Han Seol-Ah's scream, and shedding tears from the beauty of a woman he had met after ten millennia and asking her to marry him...

All sorts of memories flashed through his mind.

"Kang-Woo, this place is..." Seol-Ah whispered, having remembered where this place was.

Kang-Woo softly nodded. "Yeah. This is where we first met."

"Ah." Seol-Ah's face reddened, and she smiled. "Hehe. Back then, I'd never thought we would end up together like this."

"Really?" he smirked. "Come to think of it, what did you think of me on our first meeting? You know, your first impression of me."

"Mm..."

Seol-Ah fell into thought while lightly placing her right index finger on her lips. She was looking back on her first meeting with Kang-Woo.

"At first, I thought you were a weirdo."

"..."

"But back then... You tore off your clothes and treated my wound, didn't you?"

"Oh, yeah. I did."

Kang-Woo recalled doing that when he had seen that Seol-Ah's leg was injured.

"It was from that moment," Seol-Ah remarked.

"What?"

A smile bloomed on Seol-Ah. "From that moment... I fell in love with you."

"Darling...!"

Kang-Woo's cheekbones ascended. His face burned hot from thinking of himself back then.

'Screw three kids.'

They needed at least five.

'After all, both Seol-Ah and I'll be living far too long.'

He couldn't stop smiling while thinking of his rosy future ahead.

Cha Yeon-Joo, who had joined them after meeting at the Gate entrance, stared daggers at them. She frowned and spat on the ground.

“Fuck.”

All couples should die by being skewered with bamboo spears and burned alive.

Crackle! Spark!

“... It’s certainly a color we’ve never seen before,” Kang-Woo stated.

“Yes. I’ve never seen a purple Rift before,” Si-Hun replied.

A purple Rift was in the air where Kang-Woo had first come to Earth and met Goblins. He carefully approached the Rift, picked up a rock near it and threw it in. The rock disappeared into the Rift as if it had been sucked inside.

“Mm.”

“Nothing... happened,” Si-Hun mumbled while staring at the purple Rift. He then said while looking down at his watch, “We don’t have much time left, hyung-nim.”

They had found the Rift right away, but they only had three hours for this operation. They had to close the Rift as soon as possible to minimize otherworldly influence on Earth.

“Let’s go inside right n—”

“Wait,” Kang-Woo grabbed Si-Hun’s shoulder as he was approaching the Rift impatiently. He turned his head to say, “All of you, stay back.”

After getting everyone to step away from the purple Rift, he carefully approached it.

‘It’s no different from regular Rifts just from its outer appearance.’

He needed to confirm whether it was just the color that was different, or if there was some other fundamental difference.

‘What energy has it been made with?’

For instance, black Rifts were made with demonic energy. Kang-Woo slowly extended his hand and touched the purple Rift.

Whoom!

Just then, the purple Rift fluctuated. A powerful force pulled him in.

“Kuh!”

Kang-Woo tried to pull out his arm while biting his lip, but it wouldn’t budge. He created a black blade with the Authority of Blades and swung down on his arm without hesitation.

Slash!

He cut off his arm, black blood spewing everywhere. He turned to look behind him; thankfully, Uriel had not arrived yet. He slightly grimaced from the pain shooting up from his arm.

“Hyung-nim!” Si-Hun shouted.

“Oh, I’m f—”

Whoom—!

Just as Kang-Woo was about to say that he was fine, the purple Rift expanded explosively and engulfed him.

“Shit, Kang-Woo hyung!”

Si-Hun jumped into the Rift after Kang-Woo.

“My king!”

“Kang-Woo!”

Balrog and Seol-Ah quickly approached the Rift.

“What... the hell?” Yeon-Joo mumbled.

Before they even had time to be shocked, the purple Rift expanding at tremendous speed swallowed everything around it whole. The E-rank Gate that had once been like a sanctuary for low-level Players was swallowed by the purple Rift.

“Kuh.”

Kang-Woo slowly opened his eyes. He narrowed his eyes from the pain shooting up from his arm. He raised himself up from the ground and looked around.

“Where...”

He was in a desolate area. The sky was ash-colored, and the ground was so dry that it was split everywhere. Giant rocks that seemed to be from wreckages were scattered all over the place.

Riiing.

[You have entered ‘Shade’, a satellite world of the Triad!]

“What the fuck is this?” Kang-Woo cursed as he read the message window that had popped up in front of him. First and foremost...

‘Authority of Regeneration.’

He grabbed his arm on the ground and placed it on his severed arm stump. The wound regenerated instantly as it bubbled.

“Now, then...”

Kang-Woo slowly read the message window in front of him again, and his eyes narrowed into slits.

‘What is this supposed to mean?’

He had no idea what the Triad or satellite world was. They were strange names that an author trying to act cool for no reason would have come up with.

'I seriously have no idea what Triad means. As for the satellite world... Is it like the satellites that orbit planets?'

He couldn't make anything out of these terms, but he could assume that there was a world known as the Triad, and he had entered one of the worlds that orbited it.

"Fucking hell, we're really raising the scales. Are we writing some kind of odyssey or something?"

Kang-Woo chuckled. He recalled the that had published over a thousand chapters over the span of ten years back when he had still been on Earth.

'That aside...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and looked around. He could not see a single one of his comrades that he was sure had been engulfed with him.

'Authority of the Beholder.'

He looked for traces of those that had been linked to him by the soul, such as Si-Hun, Balrog, Echidna and Halcyon.

"... Shit."

However, as if he was looking at a screen filled with static, he could not pinpoint their locations. The only thing he could feel was that they were still alive.

'Seol-Ah is fine too.'

Kang-Woo had crammed the Authority of Protection plus other Authorities into the ring that he had given Seol-Ah. He was easily able to check that her life was not in danger even from far away.

"... I guess I have to find them myself."

Aside from that, he needed to destroy the Rift Core, the key objective of this operation. Realizing that he did not have a lot of time, he soared into the air using the Authority of the Sky.

"Kang-Woo...?"

Just then, Kang-Woo saw Seol-Ah among the rocks scattered about. She quickly approached him with a smile as soon as she saw him.

"So this is where you were!" she exclaimed.

"Darling?"

"Phew. I was so scared after being separated from you."

Seol-Ah approached Kang-Woo and embraced his arm. A soft sensation enveloped his arm.

Kang-Woo's expression hardened for an instant, but he quickly regained his composure.

"Have you found anyone else?" asked Seol-Ah.

"No, not yet."

“Ah...” Seol-Ah sighed in disappointment.

“What about you?”

“I haven’t seen anyone else either.”

“How long has it been since you woke up?”

“I just woke up as well. Behind that rock over there. I happened to see you as I was looking around in confusion,” she remarked as she pointed at a rock behind her.

“Hm.”

Kang-Woo nodded. He raised his head and looked around the area in detail one more time. He checked the distance between the rock that Seol-Ah had pointed at and where they were right now.

“... I see,” he mumbled while nodding as if he was thinking about something very deeply.

“Um, Kang-Woo.”

Seol-Ah embraced his arm even tighter and called him with a trembling voice. She twisted around as if she needed to pee and leaned on him while panting heatedly.

“I was... so scared because I was separated from you,” Seol-Ah said seductively. She reached into his clothes. “How about we do it for a bit... before we go find the others?”

“N-Now? Right here?” Kang-Woo asked, his face dyed with bewilderment.

Seol-Ah nodded. She then answered restlessly, “Yes. I... can’t hold it any longer.”

Kang-Woo gulped. He looked around, and then grabbed her shoulders.

“In that case...”

Their lips grew closer.

“Kang-Woo...”

Seol-Ah closed her eyes. She pushed her breasts on Kang-Woo and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Slip.

Seol-Ah’s shadow moved like a living organism along the ground. It traveled up Kang-Woo’s body and slowly reached for his head. A sharp blade came out of the shadow and aimed for the back of his head.

“But, you know...” Kang-Woo suddenly opened his mouth while tilting his head for a kiss.

“Yes? What is it, Kang-Woo?” asked Seol-Ah, flustered.

The corners of his mouth curled up as he stared at her.

“You should’ve done a better job.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“They’re not that small.”

“What do you m—”

Crack.

“Kurgh!”

Kang-Woo’s hands that had been on Seol-Ah’s shoulders suddenly grabbed her neck.

He pulled her away from him and continued, “My darling’s aren’t that small, dammit.”

Chapter 313 - Satellite World (2)

“Kurgh! Cough!”

Han Seol-Ah struggled in pain from being strangled. No, to be more precise, something that had the form of Han Seol-Ah was struggling. Her skin melted down, leaving behind a quivering darkness. It was a unique and grotesque lifeform, as if it was made of shadows.

Oh Kang-Woo smirked. “Are you a Detective Conan criminal?”

The lifeform looked exactly like that.

“?????????!” the lifeform exclaimed in an unknown language.

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Language to interpret the alien language.

“L-Let me go! Kuh...!”

“Well, I guess you have some form of intelligence.”

That made things much easier. Kang-Woo pulled the black shadow toward him and his eyes narrowed into slits.

“Who are you, and where are we?”

“Kuh...!”

The black shadow averted Kang-Woo’s gaze. Kang-Woo ferociously bared his teeth. A savage bloodlust that a mortal being could not dare hope to endure flowed out from him.

“E-Eek!” the black shadow exclaimed in fear.

It trembled. Black shadows spurted out from its mouth as if it was frothing.

‘I should tone it down a bit.’

Aside from having almost perfectly turned into Seol-Ah, the black shadow seemed to be lacking in pure combat prowess. It seemed to be as strong as a demon from the Fifth or Sixth Hell at most. There was no way that it would be able to endure the energy exuding from Kang-Woo, who had

reached a point that those without Divinity could not dare face, and even made the princes of Hell feel like ants.

Kang-Woo lowered the energy he was exuding a little.

“Hurgh! Haaa! Haaa!”

“Now, tell me. Who are you?”

“...”

The black shadow quivered. It said in a voice filled with rage, “That’s what I want to know. Are you the same as *them*?”

“I don’t know what you’re referring to, but I believe I’m the one asking the questions.”

Kang-Woo added more strength into his hands. The shadow groaned in pain.

“Urrhh...”

“I don’t have time to waste, so tell me now.”

The black demonic energy flowing from Kang-Woo’s body wrapped around the shadow. He forcibly made the shadow submit by using the Authority of Fear.

The shadow spoke soon after, “W-We are... the residents... of this world.”

“Residents?”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. This satellite world was known as shade, and the shadows were its residents.

‘*They live here?*’

Kang-Woo looked around. The sky was ash, and the ground was arid. It was as horrid as the Nine Hells. He could not believe that there were beings that actually lived here.

“You must have quite the vitality if you can live in a world like this,” Kang-Woo remarked.

The black shadow flinched, and thick bloodlust rose from it. “You... You bastards were the ones who made our world like this! How dare you say such a thing after trampling on our land? Y-You... scumbags...!”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Kang-Woo had not even been aware of a world like this, so he could not understand what the shadow was trying to say.

“Shit... Shit! I will not let you bastards have your way!” the black shadow lashed out.

“Death to all outer worlds!”

The shadow’s eyes widened, and its body shook madly as if it were having a seizure.

“What the f...!”

The shadow hung down before Kang-Woo could do anything. Kang-Woo quickly bit his thumb to make blood and used the Authority of Regeneration, but the drooping shadow did not regenerate.

'It committed suicide somehow.'

It had been his first time meeting such a being, so he had not been able to prepare in any way. Kang-Woo grimaced and laid the drooping shadow on the ground.

"Shit."

He lacked information. All he knew was that this world was known as Shade, and these black shadows were its residents.

'Based on what it said, this world seems to have been attacked by one of the otherworldly beings.'

However, Kang-Woo had no idea who it was nor why. He looked up to look at the ash-colored, desolate world. He did not know what Shade used to look like, but it was highly likely that it had at least been capable of sustaining life.

'Who was it?'

Kang-Woo had no idea who could have destroyed a world so horribly.

"Tsk," he clicked his tongue.

It would only be a waste of time for him to keep thinking about it.

'For now...'

Kang-Woo extended his hand toward the shadow on the ground.

'Authority of Predation.'

Black smoke came out of his hand and engulfed the shadow. *Crunch, crunch.* The Authority of Predation devoured the shadow without a trace.

Riiing.

[You have acquired the unique ability of the Shade species, 'Mimicry'.]

[You are able to change your appearance into that of a different being for a limited time.]

'This is...'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened. He had gotten an unexpected profit.

'This should be extremely useful.'

As long as he had this ability, there was no longer any need for costumes. None of his demonic energy, sacred power nor mana had risen, but this was a valuable ability in a different way. He tried changing into Kim Si-Hun by using Mimicry.

"Wow."

The transformation was so perfect that even he was impressed. It was so perfect that even Si-Hun himself would be confused. Kang-Woo canceled Mimicry.

'This isn't the time.'

Finding his scattered comrades took priority.

"I don't think they'd be in any real danger..."

The Mimicry of the Shades, which was what Kang-Woo had decided to call the shadows, would likely not be seen through by anyone, but even in the worst-case scenario, the Shades' combat prowess was terribly low. It was the same as trying to assassinate someone with a blade made of cotton. Considering the combat prowess of every member currently in the Rift, they would have absolutely no trouble against the Shades.

'Even so, I should find them as soon as I can.'

Kang-Woo flew up using the Authority of the Sky. He saw someone not that far away. It was Han Seol-Ah.

'I'm not completely sure yet, though.'

Considering the Shades' unique ability, it was too soon to make assumptions. Kang-Woo quickly flew toward Seol-Ah.

"... Kang-Woo?"

In her hand was Kang-Woo's severed head. Black shadow flowed down from the severed area like blood.

'Holy fuck.'

Kang-Woo flinched from seeing the head of a being that looked exactly like him. He felt like he could see behind her an ocean with a twilight coming down on it for some reason. He instinctively checked to see whether or not his head was intact.

"Are you really Kang-Woo?" Seol-Ah asked in doubt.

She seemed to have been attacked by a Shade that had turned into Kang-Woo. She cautiously approached him and pulled up his shirt.

"Ah..."

Seol-Ah smiled brightly as soon as she saw the red marks on his chest.

"Kang-Woo!"

She hugged him.

'It's the real darling.'

The two of them, who had both affirmed each other's identities in their own way, silently embraced each other for a moment.

Kang-Woo then asked, "Have you seen anyone else?"

“No. I saw a weird monster that took the form of you as soon as I came to my senses, so...” Seol-Ah continued in embarrassment. “I cut off its head in disgust.”

“... Oh, I see.”

Kang-Woo stared at her with mixed feelings. He had managed to stop her fall from grace, but it seemed like its influence still remained somewhat.

‘I can only hope she gets used to the body of an angel.’

Now that Seol-Ah’s body had become closer to that of an angel due to Seraph’s influence, Kang-Woo could only hope for her to learn how to control her obsession. Not even he knew how to artificially control a racial characteristic.

“Let’s search for the others for the time being,” Kang-Woo suggested.

“Okay.”

He took Seol-Ah with him to find the others. They were fortunately able to find the others as soon as they began their search; it seemed like Seol-Ah hadn’t been the only one who had not been far away.

“Fucking hell, what are these things? They’re giving me goosebumps,” Cha Yeon-Joo said while frowning in disgust.

“You weren’t able to tell?” asked Kang-Woo.

“How can I when they look the exact same? I got chills the moment I felt bloodlust from it.”

Yeon-Joo had also been attacked by a Shade mimicking Kang-Woo, but she had easily blocked its attack and tore the Shade apart.

“Hehe, but I feel super refreshed for some reason,” Yeon-Joo said while stretching, as if refreshed from tearing apart the Shade that had taken Kang-Woo’s form.

Kang-Woo frowned while staring at the multiple corpses in his form on the ground.

‘But why are they all mimicking me?’

The Shades that had attacked Balrog, Echidna, Halcyon and even Si-Hun had all taken his form.

“*Sniff.* Kang-Woo, Kang-Woo...”

Echidna shed tears while grabbing Kang-Woo’s clothes. She seemed to have been considerably shocked when the Shade mimicking him had attacked her.

Kang-Woo patted her head. “Were you surprised?”

“Yeah. I thought you had abandoned me. I thought... I was going to be alone again.”

“Tsk,” Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and flicked Echidna’s forehead.

“Ouch.”

“There’s no way that would happen,” he declared.

Echidna smiled.

“But hyung-nim, aren’t these... Shades acting strangely?” Si-Hun mentioned.

“I thought so too. They were as desperate as prey being chased by a predator,” Balrog agreed.

The Shades’ actions certainly left questions.

Si-Hun said while nodding, “Despite having such a perfect transformation ability... They attacked as soon as they approached us. Rather urgently, on top of that.”

“They would have had a much better chance if they actually took their time.”

Kang-Woo nodded at Si-Hun and Balrog's opinions. “It definitely seems like something is happening in this world.”

“Mm...”

“Whatever the case, we can’t just stand around here.”

They needed to find and destroy the Rift Core as soon as possible. Finding the core itself was not difficult.

“Did Gaia give you that?”

“Yes. She said that it would lead us to the core,” Si-Hun said while using the pure-white crystal orb that he had received from Gaia.

A white light poured out from the crystal orb and pointed in a certain direction. Once they followed the light, they could see a ball of purple energy.

‘That’s the Rift Core.’

It was about thirty meters in diameter. The massive sphere was distorting the space around it.

“So we just have to destroy that, huh?” Kang-Woo expressed.

It was a piece of cake. He used the Key of the Demonic Sea to create Inferno. He slowly raised the sword wrapped in flames.

“Twilight.”

A terrifying heat that felt as if it would burn down the world itself poured out from the sword. Kang-Woo swung it down without hesitation.

Crack.

Just then, the purple sphere split. The hand of a giant demonic beast came out of it and flicked the flames away.

Chapter 314 - King of Demonic Beasts

It was a giant bull with arms like that of a human. Its black mane like that of a lion fluttered. The monster, which made the 30-meter Rift Core look tiny, lightly flicked Inferno's flames and snorted.

Fwoosh!

Black flames fumed from its nostrils.

“What the...”

Oh Kang-Woo grimaced. Thick demonic energy that intimidated even him poured out from the monster.

“Th-That's...!” Balrog slurred with his eyes widened.

Kang-Woo looked toward him and asked, “What is that thing?”

Balrog remained silent with his face pale. He finally muttered while looking up at the giant monster, “That is... Behemoth.”

“What?”

Behemoth was the father of Leviathan, one of the seven princes of Hell, as well as the king of demonic beasts. He was so powerful that trespassing into his territory was suicide, even for the princes of Hell.

“Why is... Behemoth here?” Kang-Woo said with his eyes narrowed.

The being that should be in the Nine Hells was here for some reason.

‘Come to think of it...’

He had heard before from Balrog that Behemoth had been moving beyond his territory.

‘Shit.’

He had never even imagined meeting the king of demonic beasts in a place like this.

‘Should I fight him?’ Kang-Woo thought as he looked up at the gigantic demonic beast.

If he had been the same as his past self in the Ninth Hell, he wouldn't even have dared to think about facing Behemoth; that was how synonymous the name "Behemoth" was to death. If Behemoth did not stay within his territory, all demons in Hell would have died by his hands.

‘But now...’

Kang-Woo clenched his fists. His blood boiled. His demonic instincts rampaged from the thought of battling Behemoth, who was considered a monster even within myths.

He wiped the drool off his mouth. The instinct eating at him was not a desire for battle.

‘Beef is an absolute delicacy.’

Kang-Woo's eyes burned with desire. He was getting chills down his spine from the demonic energy pouring out from Behemoth, but that only stirred his desires even more.

'Hanwoo... No, not hanwoo, but still... Expensive and delicious beef...'

Kang-Woo couldn't even imagine how delicious it would be if he ate that monster whole. Since he was considered the strongest in Hell, Kang-Woo was sure that he would be satisfied at the very least.

'Even the demonic energy pouring out from him...'

Devouring Behemoth would obviously raise his Demonic Energy stat, which was stuck at 154, explosively. 160 would be a given, and he could even aim to get 170.

"M-Master Kang-Woo."

Just then, Halcyon approached Kang-Woo and grabbed his clothes.

"Yeah?" Kang-Woo answered as he turned his head toward Halcyon.

"W-We have to run," Halcyon expressed, his face pale.

He desperately pulled on Kang-Woo's clothes as if he had seen a ghost.

"R-Right now! We have to run now!" Halcyon screamed.

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed into slits, and looked toward Behemoth. Behemoth, who had fully come out of the Rift Core, raised his head. He inhaled deeply as he looked up at the ash-colored sky. And...

"—————!!!"

It was far too colossal to call sound. A roar so powerful that it could easily rupture one's eardrums shook the entire world.

"Kyaaaaaaa!" Cha Yeon-Joo screamed while blocking her ears.

"Arrgghh!!!"

The others did as well. Echidna collapsed on the spot while trembling, and Kim Si-Hun and Balrog crouched while blocking their ears. The only people who were fine were Kang-Woo and Han Seol-Ah— no, they were not fine either.

"Fucking... hell."

Kang-Woo's expression hardened. The demonic energy within him boiled. It had only been for a moment, but the shock had been great enough for him to lose control over his demonic energy. Considering how powerful just his roar was, Kang-Woo could not even imagine how strong Behemoth would be in combat.

'What the fuck?'

Kang-Woo looked up at Behemoth in shock. He had been completely mistaken; he had been arrogant because he had gotten stronger than his past self.

'Forget eating him.'

He had taken the title of the king of demonic beasts far too lightly. He had forgotten one simple fact because he had become far more powerful than the princes of Hell; he was nowhere near a match for Behemoth.

“Fuck!”

‘A monster like this was in Hell?’

Kang-Woo had heard countless legends regarding Behemoth, but he had never expected him to be this powerful. He was doubtful that even a god possessing Divinity would be a match for him.

The monster’s gaze shifted to Kang-Woo.

“Grrrrrrr.”

Behemoth’s gaze was so powerful that Kang-Woo felt like he was being set ablaze just from being seen by him. The apex predator of Hell was staring Kang-Woo down.

‘If I open the Doors...’ Kang-Woo thought.

He would be no match for Behemoth while fighting under normal circumstances. However, if he opened the Doors of the Ten Thousand Demon Core and released the seals of the Demonic Sea...

‘No.’

Kang-Woo shook his head. He recalled why he had entered this Rift in the first place. It had not been to defeat Behemoth; it was purely to close the Rift and restore the broken Gaia System.

“Run!!”

Kang-Woo made a swift decision. He grabbed the arms of Echidna and Yeon-Joo, who were both collapsed on the ground, and turned around without hesitation.

He was not above running away; he was very used to it. After all, the majority of his life in Hell had involved running away. He had been cowardly, unsightly, and desperate, which had ultimately led to his survival.

‘And...’

In the end, he had won. He had trampled on and killed every single being that had made him run away.

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed, and exchanged gazes with the king of demonic beasts. The king of demonic beasts and the king of demons each engraved the appearance of the other in their heads.

‘Just you wait, beef. One day... I’ll put you in my kimchi stew.’

Kang-Woo turned his head. “Run back to where we were!”

He was sure that the entrance leading to Earth would be where they had first opened their eyes in Shade.

“But hyung-nim, the Rift Core is still—”

“We don’t need to care about that anymore, so just run!”

Si-Hun turned his head as if he couldn't understand what Kang-Woo was talking about.

"Ah," he shouted.

The 30-meter Rift Core had been completely destroyed after Behemoth had crawled out of it.

Boom! Rumble!

The ground was collapsing.

"Graaaaaaaaahhhhh!!"

Behemoth charged toward Kang-Woo while roaring.

"Hurry!" Kang-Woo urged.

"Okay!"

"Wings of Brilliance!" Seol-Ah shouted while spreading out her arms.

Blinding light poured out from her and flowed into her party members. Their movements became much quicker.

"Thanks, darling!"

"Look over there, Kang-Woo!"

As they were running without even looking back, Seol-Ah pointed somewhere. Kang-Woo looked to where she pointed to see a group of demonic beasts reaching the thousands. The demonic beasts were running wild as they devoured the black shadows.

"..."

- *Are you the same as them?*

'So this is what the shadow meant.'

It seemed like the Shades had been under attack by the demonic beasts before Kang-Woo and his party members had come to this world.

'This world must have entered the influence of the Nine Hells.'

He could understand why Shade looked so similar to Hell.

'Shit, so this is why demonic beasts have been appearing in Gates.'

Kang-Woo finally understood what the Triad and the satellite world was.

'If the Triad is referring to Earth, Aernor and Huan...'

Satellite worlds were small worlds within its vicinity. And one of such worlds having been invaded by the Nine Hells meant... Earth would also soon become one with the Nine Hells.

'Shit.'

Kang-Woo's expression was filled with anxiety. His worst fears had become reality. His mind was turned into mush from seeing what he had only been thinking about actually happening before his very eyes.

'Thank God we came here.'

If they had not entered the Rift because they judged that the risk of temporarily halting the Gaia System was too big, a catastrophe would have been upon them soon after.

"Grrrrrrr!"

"H-Hyung-nim!"

"Kuh! Please go on ahead without me! I will stop him here!" Balrog shouted as he turned around.

Kang-Woo, who had been running while holding Yeon-Joo and Echidna, jumped into the air and kicked Balrog in the face.

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

"Don't give me that shit and run, dammit! This isn't a goddamn TV show!" Kang-Woo yelled.

Balrog stared at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly while rubbing his cheek, and then nodded with a smirk.

"As you wish, my king."

He then also started to run from Behemoth.

"Hyung-nim, I see the Rift over there!" Si-Hun shouted.

As they got closer to where they first opened their eyes, they could see the purple Rift. Possibly because the Rift Core was destroyed, the purple Rift that had been ten meters large was growing smaller at a noticeable rate.

'Shit.'

Si-Hun's eyesight was just abnormally good; the Rift was still very far away. Kang-Woo looked behind him at Behemoth, who was charging toward him at tremendous speed. Every single step Behemoth shook the Earth as if the Big Bang was occurring.

'Motherfucker.'

Behemoth was far too fast. He was also far too big in the first place. Just like how ants could never be as fast as humans no matter how quickly they moved their legs, Behemoth, who was over a hundred meters tall, got closer to them at an alarming pace with each step.

"How the fuck did that son of a bitch even make Leviathan?!"

Kang-Woo was curious who Behemoth's partner had been. He ran for his life while cursing.

"Skreee!"

“Grrrrr!”

Just then, demonic beasts from the group stood in their way. Kang-Woo grimaced.

‘We can’t just run away.’

Not only were they being chased by Behemoth, but they would have zero chance of escaping if demonic beasts were blocking their path as well.

“Si-Hun! Balrog!”

“Yes, hyung-nim!”

“Please leave this to us!”

Si-Hun and Balrog charged toward the group of demonic beasts. The two warriors ran amok like starved beasts in a flock of sheep.

“Seol-Ah, focus your buffs on those two instead of me!”

“Okay, Kang-Woo!”

“Yeon-Joo, Halcyon, Echidna! You three secure a path to the Rift!”

“What about you?!” Yeon-Joo asked.

“I will...”

Kang-Woo turned around, facing the giant bull charging toward him while shaking the earth. His eyes sharpened.

“... Stop that bastard.”

“A-Are you insane?!”

“This is the best chance we have, so just shut up and clear a path!”

There was still a long way to the Rift leading outside. If they did not stop Behemoth here, Behemoth’s attacks would stop them from being able to reach the Rift on time.

“Grrrrrrrrr.”

“Fuuu,” Kang-Woo exhaled deeply.

He relaxed his body, tense from anxiety. Behemoth’s ferocious roars were getting closer.

‘I’ll stop him, whatever it takes.’

Kang-Woo raised his right arm high. He created an axe fuming with chilling energy.

‘Leviathan.’

He grabbed the axe handle, put strength into his legs, and pulled his arm back.

‘Authority of Extinction.’

He used Satan's Authority. Black light formed on Leviathan's edge. He rotated his body and threw Leviathan.

Rumble—!

Space itself was torn along Leviathan's trajectory.

'It's not enough.'

Kang-Woo knew very well that this would be nowhere near enough. He barraged Behemoth with skills through the Key of the Demonic Sea. However...

Clang, claaang!

"Graaaaaaahhh!"

Nothing he could dish out was powerful enough to penetrate Behemoth's skin. Kang-Woo aggressively bit his lip.

'I don't have enough firepower.'

Behemoth's physical specs were absolutely insane. His skin had even been perfectly fine after flicking aside Inferno's flames. There was no way that Kang-Woo would be able to penetrate his defenses by just continuing to barrage him with attacks.

"Fuck." Kang-Woo grimaced.

His available choices were slowly but surely being reduced to opening the Doors.

'That's the worst choice.'

Kang-Woo was not able to retain his reason once he opened the Doors, meaning there was a chance that he would continue fighting Behemoth without passing through the shrinking Rift.

'And I'd be stuck in this world forever.'

That would be the absolute worst outcome. He shut his eyelids tight. There was no way to deal any proper damage to Behemoth using normal means.

'In the end...'

He would have to open the Doors. Conflict boiled over within his head.

'Wait.'

Just then, a thought popped up in his head.

"... Fuck."

Kang-Woo unconsciously chuckled. He did not like to make such gambles, but he could instinctively feel that there was no other way but this at the moment.

'Fucking hell, I don't really like doing shit like this.'

Kang-Woo took a deep breath and spread out his arms wide.

"Fuuu."

And then, he breathed out.

Whoooooom!

White light poured out from his left hand, and black light from his right.

“Fuck it. Let’s give it a shot.”

Kang-Woo closed his eyes. There was no other time than now to test his uncertain hypothesis that relied purely on his senses.

‘Molting.’

Kang-Woo slightly opened the Door of his Ten Thousand Demon Core. At the same time...

Crash—!

He clasped his hands together.

Riiing.

[You have completed the prerequisite quest of the Demonic Sea, ‘Light-Craving Demon’.]

[You have acquired the fourth key of the Demonic Sea, ‘Greed’.]

[You have learned ‘Chaos - Burst’, a Bottom-rank skill of ‘Chaos’.]

A gray energy formed around his two clasped hands.

“Come at me, you fucking bull.”

‘Let’s see the marbling on you.’

Chapter 315 - I Am

Oh Kang-Woo clasped his hands together. He forced together the two energies that were violently rejecting one another.

‘Molting.’

And then, he slightly opened one of the Doors of the Ten Thousand Demon Core. It did not take long for him to feel a response.

Crunch—! Crunch!

“Kargh, hurgh!”

Kang-Woo’s vision flickered along with unimaginable pain. His skin was tearing open along with the chilling sound of breaking bone.

‘Fuuuuuuuuuck.’

He writhed in pain that he could never get used to, being put on the threshold of death.

‘Please let me be right.’

He had realized not long ago that the opposing force from combining demonic energy and sacred power felt similar to when he used molting.

“Kurgh, kargh!”

He twisted around. Molting could not be considered a technique; to put it simply, it was a failure that had no positive effects, destructive capabilities, or degree of perfection. The only reason why he used it was because it improved his demonic energy control in exchange for being put on the verge of death. To give a comparison, it was like ingesting a deadly poison to raise one’s poison resistance.

‘*But...*’

Molting was indeed a failure. To be more precise, it was a technique that he had not been able to perfect.

“Haaa, haaa, haaa,” Kang-Woo panted heavily.

The demonic energy of the Ten Thousand Demon Core surged. He added sacred power to the extremely rampant demonic energy. The amount of sacred power added to his near-infinite demonic energy was like pouring a bucket of water into a gigantic sea. However, its effect had been far above his imagination.

[You have learned ‘Chaos - Burst’, a bottom-rank skill of ‘Chaos’.]

A message window popped up. Kang-Woo smirked.

“Graaaaaahh!”

Boom! Boom! Boom!

A giant bull charged toward him while shaking the earth. Two horns the size of a building, wrapped in black flames, pointed at Kang-Woo.

“Huuup,” Kang-Woo inhaled.

He imbued the gray energy that he had created by clasping his hands together, on his right fist. The energy that he had never felt before raged within him; it was violent, disordered, and wild, truly befitting the name *Chaos*.

‘*I never thought there’d be energy more insane than demonic energy.*’

Kang-Woo smirked. The energy formed by combining sacred power and demonic energy was running wild, trying to separate like water being poured into boiling oil.

‘*But still...*’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes, gleaming with a strange sense of delight.

‘*This thing’s really rousing my pride.*’

The corners of his mouth went up as he stared at the gray energy on his right hand. He was extremely used to keeping in check energy that would burst as soon as he let up for even a moment. He had done so for ten whole millennia without rest.

Rumble—!

“H-Hyung-nim!”

“Kyaaaah! M-Master Kang-Woo!”

“My king!”

Kang-Woo could hear Kim Si-Hun, Halcyon and Balrog’s shouts.

‘Focus.’

He ignored them. He took a very deep breath and lowered his stance. He pulled back his right fist imbued with the gray energy. Twisting his body even slightly raised the burden on his body in folds.

‘And here...’

Boom!

Kang-Woo aggressively stomped on the ground and used a technique that could be considered a martial art technique despite him having absolutely no knack for martial arts.

‘Skybreaker.’

He stepped forward with his left foot, twisted his waist, and swung his right fist with all his might.

“Graaaaaaahhh!”

The hundred-meter king of demonic beasts and the king of demons that wasn’t even two meters tall clashed.

—————!!

Sound disappeared. The ground collapsed hundreds of meters, and the atmosphere around them burned up so hot that it was bubbling. An overwhelming recoil shot Kang-Woo away like a cannon.

“Kurgh!”

He was shot back as he destroyed the ground that he skid over.

“Hyung-nim!”

Si-Hun quickly ran to catch Kang-Woo as he was blown back.

“Kuh,” Kang-Woo grimaced while scrunched up and clenching his right arm.

His right arm that had been imbued with the gray energy had been completely mangled. He instinctively used the Authority of Regeneration.

“Fu...ck.”

The wound was not regenerating. Kang-Woo tried to get up while biting his lip, but lost his balance.

“A-Are you okay, hyung-nim?!” Si-Hun shouted while tightening his hold on Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo was not only injured on his right arm; a fragment of Behemoth’s horn was piercing his chest. Si-Hun quickly grabbed the fragment and pulled it out, Kang-Woo’s blood pouring out like a fountain.

Rip!

Si-Hun tore his clothes without hesitation to apply pressure on Kang-Woo's wound.

"Haaa, haaa."

The Authority of Regeneration was activated as soon as the horn fragment had been taken out, but the deep wound that had been formed by it could not be healed.

"Cough, cough!"

"Hyung-nim!"

Kang-Woo vomited black blood. He stood up while being supported by Si-Hun. He was not the only one who was injured.

"Graaaaaaaaahhh!!"

Behemoth thrashed about, his left horn completely broken off. Kang-Woo looked down at his right fist, which had been fully healed with the Authority of Regeneration, in surprise.

'I never thought his horn would break.'

Kang-Woo had heard countless legends about Behemoth, especially about his horns, which had been known to be able to kill even gods. One of Behemoth's horns, which had not even suffered the tiniest scratch during his entire existence, had been destroyed.

"Grrrrk! Grrk!"

Behemoth struggled in pain that he had never felt before and scratched the ground with his intact right horn like a giant excavator. Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'This is my chance.'

He felt like he would be able to kill Behemoth if he pushed himself a little more.

"My king! We have secured an escape route!"

"Kang-Woo! The Rift is getting smaller! Please hurry!"

Just then, he heard Balrog and Han Seol-Ah's voices. Kang-Woo frowned.

'Shit.'

There was not much time. No, time was not the only issue.

"Seol-Ah! H-Hyung-nim's injury is...!"

The deep wound from being pierced in the chest by Behemoth's horn fragment was not being healed by the Authority of Regeneration, causing him to bleed profusely.

'My injury is too serious.'

Behemoth had not been the only one to have received a critical injury. Kang-Woo would need to use *Chaos - Burst* again to kill Behemoth, but there was a high chance that he would be unable to control the energy if he used such a technique at his current physical state.

"Let's... Run."

Kang-Woo trampled on his boiling desire to devour Behemoth right here and now. Running away was a wise decision.

“Cough! Kuh, argh.”

Kang-Woo clenched his chest, and vomited black blood again.

- A-Arrgghh.

Just then, he heard someone’s faint groan, but he was in no position to pay it any mind.

“Si-Hun! Bring Kang-Woo here quickly!” Seol-Ah shouted, her face pale from having seen how badly Kang-Woo was injured.

Si-Hun nodded. “Hold on tight, hyung-nim.”

He supported Kang-Woo’s back with one arm and put his other arm under Kang-Woo’s knees, a position commonly known as the princess carry. Si-Hun used the Heavenly Dragon Movement Technique to its absolute limit. Just then...

Rumble—!

“Graaaaahhh!”

The split ground crumbled, and the thrashing Behemoth shot black flames toward them. An intense heat was chasing after them.

‘*We have to run.*’ Si-Hun thought.

Kang-Woo would die for sure if he was struck by those flames.

“Aaaaaaahhh!”

Si-Hun ran on the collapsing ground. In front of him was the crumbling earth, and behind him were enormous flames being shot out by Behemoth.

‘*Shit!*’

Si-Hun bit his lip anxiously. He wanted to create a bridge using Sword Control, but there were no weapons that he could create a bridge with.

Crumble—!

“Kuh!”

“Kang-Woo!” Seol-Ah shouted.

Si-Hun ran out of things to step on, and was pulled down by gravity.

“Shit, shit, shit!” he cursed.

He refused to die so pathetically in a place like this.

“Raaaaaaahhh!” Si-Hun screamed like a madman.

‘*If there are no weapons...*’

He just needed to create them. He drew out his Qi to make objects in the form of swords. They had been made in a hurry, so they were poor in both form and power, but that did not matter since what he needed right now were not weapons but footholds for him to step on.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Si-Hun soared in the air while stepping on the swords in the air made with Qi. He looked as if he was running in midair.

Riiing.

[Raising assimilation with Martial God Tian Taihuang from 51.2% to 60.8%!]

[Raising proficiency of Heavenly Dragon Movement Technique!]

[You have learned Void Steps!]

[You have learned the basics of Formless Sword!]

Message windows popped up in front of Si-Hun., but he did not have the leeway to care.

“Hurry!!”

The purple Rift was shrinking more and more; it was now only three meters large. The party members were in front of the Rift, anxiously looking at Si-Hun and Kang-Woo.

“Go on ahead of us!” Si-Hun shouted.

It was stupid to huddle around the Rift when it was getting smaller by the second.

“... I leave the king to you, human,” Balrog remarked as he jumped out of the Rift with his eyes clenched shut.

The others also looked back in anxiety as they went through the Rift.

“Haaa, haaa!” Si-Hun panted heavily.

The Rift was now only two meters large.

‘I can do it.’

1.8 meters...

‘Just a little more.’

1.5 meters...

‘Just a little faster!!’

1.11 meters...

“Kuh!”

Si-Hun threw himself into the tiny Rift. *Thump*. The Rift closed the moment both he and Kang-Woo went through it.

Rumble!

The desolate world with a gray sky and arid land was crumbling.

[The end of the satellite world Shade has begun.]

“Hmm,” a low voice echoed within the collapsing world. “To think he would destroy Behemoth’s horn... Hah, he sure is unfathomable.”

Step, step.

A hunchback wearing a robe akin to a straw mat and holding a cane exuding black light was walking through the collapsing world. As he was leisurely walking on the violently shaking earth, he stopped in his tracks; it was the place where Kang-Woo had coughed blood.

“Oh?” Eyes shone from within the old robe. “Hahaha! Wow, the demon king is impressive, but... so are you, in your own right.”

The being put his hand on the black blood that Kang-Woo had coughed out, and grabbed a black gem made of crystallized demonic energy that had melted down to the size of a fingernail.

- U-Urrgghh.

A groan came out from the back gem.

- I-I am...

“I know very well who you are.” The being snickered in an extremely displeasing way. “It is an honor to see you again, Lord Satan.”

Chapter 316 - The Goddess Opens Her Eyes

[The Rift has been successfully closed.]

[The Gaia System has been partially restored.]

“Haaa, haaa,” Kim Si-Hun panted heavily after coming out from the Rift.

He had just barely managed to get out on time.

“Kang-Woo!” Han Seol-Ah shouted as she ran toward them with her face pale.

She put her hands over Oh Kang-Woo’s chest spewing black blood.

Whoooooom!

Blinding light poured out. The injury that couldn’t be healed with the Authority of Regeneration was being quickly healed. Kang-Woo’s grimace slowly relaxed.

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo exhaled.

Seol-Ah grabbed his cheeks. “Kang-Woo!”

“I’m fine now,” he laughed softly while getting up.

He was still hurting all over, but it was nothing that he couldn’t endure. Kang-Woo held up Behemoth’s horn fragment that had been stuck in his chest.

'A horn with god-killing powers...'

He put it in his pockets, expecting to have a use for it in the future. He looked around.

"We're outside the Gate."

"Yes. I think after the purple Rift swallowed the E-rank Gate whole... The Gate itself vanished," Si-Hun expressed.

"Isn't this the first time that a Gate has vanished?"

"Yes, that's right," SI-Hun replied as he nodded.

Kang-Woo thought of the Gate that had disappeared without a trace for a moment, and then took a look at the message windows in front of him.

'I did it.'

Although Behemoth's appearance had been completely outside of his calculations, he had successfully destroyed the Rift Core. Kang-Woo's expression stiffened after reading the messages.

'It's only a partial restoration, huh?'

According to Gaia, it was only a temporary measure; it would not last forever.

'The Rift Core...'

Kang-Woo remembered hearing that term when he first came to Earth.

'The Rift Core that we destroyed is probably nothing but an offshoot.'

He had a feeling that it was just a byproduct that had fallen off from himself as he was being torn by the Gaia System. There was ultimately only one way for the Gaia System to be fully restored.

'I have to die.'

Kang-Woo chuckled. He was the true Rift Core. His death would lead to the complete restoration of the Gaia System.

'No fucking way.'

There was no need to even think about it. World peace? Saving Earth?

'Fuck all that.'

He had held on for ten whole millennia for this opportunity, so he wouldn't stand for his own death, even if it led to world peace.

'I'm gonna survive....'

... Just as he had always done.

"Kang-Woo, Kang-Woo..." Echidna hugged him while bawling her eyes out.

Kang-Woo smirked and stroked her hair.

"Were you worried?"

“Yeah...”

“It’s okay now. I told you that I would never leave you behind, didn’t I?”

Echidna pouted. “You’re a liar, Kang-Woo.”

“Huh? Why?”

“You hit and yelled at Balrog for trying to stay behind, but you always try to stay behind yourself.”

“Uhh... Mm.”

Come to think of it, Kang-Woo had indeed done so many times.

“The king has always been like that, so it is nothing new, young dragon,” Balrog said as he approached them. He then continued in slight anger while helping Kang-Woo up and supporting him, “He always tells us not to do anything unnecessary but shoulders everything by himself.”

Echidna clapped her hands together. “Oh, then are you like that, Kang-Woo?”

“Like what?” Kang-Woo asked.

“The kind of person who lies with their mouth but is honest down there.”

“What? Where did you learn something like that?”

“I saw it in your external hard d—”

Wham—!

Black light shot out; Kang-Woo used the Authority of Haste and shot toward Echidna, hugging her and tumbling on the ground. He rolled for about twenty meters.

“Huff, huff,” Kang-Woo panted heavily.

Cold sweat flowed down from the back of his neck and wet his back. Echidna, who was in his arms, looked up at him with innocent eyes.

“Y-Y-Y-Y-You...”

She must have found his secret stash folder.

“Wh-When did you...”

There were many days that she could have found it in, since he had left his room unattended many times. Kang-Woo looked down at Echidna with a face much paler than when he had been facing Behemoth.

“Hm?” Echidna looked up at Kang-Woo while tilting her head in confusion. “Is it supposed to be a secret?”

“... No.”

“So it is.”

Hm! Echidna snorted energetically. She pulled on Kang-Woo’s clothes while smiling.

“Kang-Woo, I wanna go with you to that place in Japan called Akihabara.”

“...”

“You’ll... Come with me, won’t you? Just the two of us, of course.”

Kang-Woo bit his lip.

‘When did such a pure and innocent child become so cunning?’

Kang-Woo’s heart fell from witnessing the puberty of the five-hundred-year-old little girl.

‘I have to be stern here.’

He could not let her have her way. He needed to let her know who was on top in their relationship, and what would happen if she tried to control her master.

Kang-Woo grabbed Echidna’s shoulders and said with sunken eyes, “Echidna.”

“Or should I tell Seol-Ah and Lilith about it?”

“How does a morning flight sound?”

With a passport, of course.

“Kang-Woo! Did you do it?”

Uriel ran toward him as soon as they returned to the Hall of Protection. He looked at Kang-Woo in worry, and then lowered his head.

“Sorry. I headed out as soon as I was contacted, but... The Gate had already closed by the time I got there.”

“It’s okay. We’re also at fault for entering without waiting for you.”

Things would have gotten far more troublesome if Uriel had been with them.

“Was the operation a success? What happened in there?” Uriel asked.

“I will explain everything inside.”

Kang-Woo and his party members headed to the inner area of the Hall of Protection with Uriel. They were obviously headed to the room that Gaia was in. Gaia welcomed them as soon as they opened the door.

“You’ve done it!” she exclaimed, but her face stiffened soon after. “A-Are there any casualties...?”

“Kang-Woo hyung-nim had been critically injured, but he’s no longer in any danger after Seol-Ah healed him. Everyone else is safe,” Si-Hun stated.

“Ah...” Transparent tears flowed down her cheeks. “*Sniff...* I... trusted you all. I’m so... so relieved.”

Gaia also knew how dangerous this operation was, so she couldn’t help but cry from hearing that everyone had returned safely.

“Please don’t cry, Gaia,” Si-Hun said as he wiped her tears for her.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and sat next to her. “How is the condition of Earth’s protection?”

There was no question more important than this at the moment.

“It’s only temporary, but... It has been greatly restored. Lady Gaia’s power will be returned to an extent for a while, and demonic beasts will no longer appear within Gates.”

“What a relief,” Kang-Woo expressed.

It seriously was a relief. The fundamental issue had not been resolved, but they had successfully delayed the encroachment of Earth by the Nine Hells like what had happened with Shade.

“In that case, I will report everything that has happened in the Rift,” Kang-Woo said.

He explained everything without leaving anything out. Gaia was shocked from hearing about the appearance of Behemoth, but was brought to tears from hearing that Kang-Woo had stopped him by himself.

“All of you... Thank you all so much.”

As Gaia was thanking them repeatedly, she suddenly cut off her words with a blank face. She seemed to be getting another revelation.

“Lady Gaia says that she would express her gratitude to all of you at a later time since she is currently in the middle of recovery.”

“Oh, I see,” Kang-Woo replied, expressing disinclination.

‘I don’t have any words to share with a useless troll.’

However, she was still a goddess. Kang-Woo nodded while clicking his tongue. Just then...

Whoooooom!

“Huh?”

“G-Gaia!”

White light poured out of Gaia’s body. It was a comforting light of a different kind from Seraph, akin to a vast expanse. And...

“Ah.”

Gaia opened her eyes.

“Gaia...?” Si-Hun called.

“H-Huh?” Gaia touched her eyes in disbelief.

She slowly stood up from the wheelchair while trembling. Her two legs stepped on the ground on their own.

Silence fell. Gaia looked down at her normally-functioning legs, and then looked at Si-Hun with her brown eyes.

“Si... Hun?”

“Gaia.”

“A-Aaaahh.”

She caressed Si-Hun’s cheeks with shaking hands. Tears flowed down her cheeks.

“*Sniff. Sniff.*” Gaia fell to her knees, unable to handle the surge of emotions.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!”

She bawled her eyes out. Gaia, who had been nothing but a normal girl before becoming an incarnation, had accepted the destiny of saving the world even while even abandoning her own name. And then, she lost her eyes and legs.

It was difficult to imagine the insane burden and solitude she must have felt, as well as the despair of losing her eyes and legs.

“Si-Hun,” Kang-Woo said as he put his hand on the shoulder of Si-Hun, who had been blankly looking at the crying Gaia. “We’ll go now, so console her the best you can.”

Si-Hun did not answer. Kang-Woo took everyone else out of the room.

“*Sniff... Sniff.*”

“Gaia.”

Si-Hun got on one knee and embraced her slender body. There was no need for conversation. He grabbed her chin and slowly raised it up.

“Ah...”

Si-Hun carefully matched lips with the flustered Gaia.

Three days had passed since Gaia had opened her eyes. Si-Hun had brought many things into her room so that she could adapt to normal life again. Her room had been filled with all sorts of things that Si-Hun had bought for her, such as a desk and chair, various cosmetics and even her own computer.

“Fuuu.”

Si-Hun stood in front of Gaia’s room door in the middle of the night with a small box in his hand.

‘Would it be rude to enter this late at night?’

It was getting close to midnight, but he wanted to give her this gift that he had secretly prepared, no matter what. Si-Hun carefully opened the box; inside it was a white pair of heels that would look very good on Gaia.

“A-Ahem.”

His face reddened as he looked down at the box. He once again took a deep breath.

‘Since it’s a surprise gift, the way I give it to her should also be a surprise.’

Si-Hun had gotten her many things, but they had been nothing but supplies necessary for daily life. These heels were the first gift that he would give Gaia—the exchange of gifts between lovers. His heart beat faster.

‘I should surprise her.’

Si-Hun thought about knocking, but thought against it. He carefully opened Gaia’s room door.

“Yahoo!”

There, he saw Gaia raising her arms up while staring at her computer screen in her chair. On her screen was...

“All hail Hitomi! All hail ero manga!!”

Thump.

The box in Si-Hun’s hand fell to the floor. Gaia quickly turned to where the sound came from.

“Huh?” her face paled. “S-Si-Hun?”

Chapter 317 - It’s a Beautiful Name

Deathly silence continued. Gaia and Kim Si-Hun were seated together on the bed, and were staring into nothingness as if they would die instantly if they were to say anything. The one who broke the silence that felt like it would last forever was Gaia.

Step.

“I have no choice...” She stood up and walked to her desk, and said while grabbing the dagger that Grace McCubbin had given her as a gift for self defense, “... But to kill myself.”

“Gaia!!”

Si-Hun moved at the speed of light and grabbed Gaia’s hand holding the dagger from behind her.

“L-Let me go! I-I can’t bear to live any longer after experiencing such humiliation!”

“Kuh!” Si-Hun grunted.

He looked at her in shock while desperately stopping her from committing suicide with all his might.

‘How is she so strong?’

Gaia, who was shining with dim light, was unnaturally strong, to the point that she was easily able to overpower Si-Hun, who had an assimilation rate of over sixty percent with Martial God Tian Taihuang. He bit his lip in anxiety.

'It must be because Lady Gaia's power has been restored.'

That was the most likely, since the woman that he was holding from behind was Gaia's incarnation. She had regained her power as an incarnation after Gaia's power had been restored.

'Shit.'

There was no other way than to persuade her with words.

"I-I'm completely fine with it!"

"Please don't lie!!" Gaia shouted with her face as red as a tomato. *"Sniff... Wh-Why did this have to..."*

She glared at Si-Hun with teary eyes. "I-It's your fault for coming in without knocking."

"Yes, it's all my fault."

"Urgh!"

Gaia pounded Si-Hun's chest with her fist. Her hands were so slender that her veins were easily visible, but the power imbued within her fists was no joke.

'Kurgh!'

Si-Hun crouched while clenching his chest. Gaia was beating the crap out of him while bawling her eyes out.

'At this rate...'

He would actually die. Si-Hun grabbed her wrists and yanked her toward him.

"Please calm down, Gaia. I really am fine with it."

"..."

"Rather... I'm happy to have learned this side of you."

"Y-You are?" Gaia said with her eyes widened.

Si-Hun smirked and nodded. "Yes. To be honest... I would have never expected you to have such interests."

"U-Urgghh." Gaia lowered her head in dejection. "W-Were you disappointed?"

"Not at all," Si-Hun softly laughed. "I told you, didn't I? I'm happy to have learned this side of you."

Gaia sat back on the bed while pouting. Perhaps because the lowest side of herself had been exposed, her expression had become much lighter than usual.

“I-I also had a normal life before becoming Lady Gaia’s incarnation.”

‘That’s normal...?’

Si-Hun had many questions, but knew to keep them to himself. He brought the chair over and sat in front of Gaia.

The blushing Gaia in the dimly-lit room looked highly alluring. Si-Hun fell into deep thought while staring at her.

‘Come to think of it...’

He did not know much about her; he didn’t know about her life before she had become an incarnation, what she liked, her hobbies.... Absolutely nothing.

‘Hah.’

Si-Hun chuckled in his mind. He swept his hair back with sunken eyes.

‘After all that talk about falling in love with her at first sight...’

He had never once thought about getting to know her.

‘Hyung-nim would smack me if he found out.’

Si-Hun smirked while thinking of Oh Kang-Woo.

“I want to know more,” Si-Hun expressed.

“... Pardon?”

“I want to know more about you, Gaia.”

Gaia averted her gaze with reddened cheeks. “Y-You won’t find it very interesting.”

“I’d still like to know.”

Si-Hun stood up from the chair and sat next to her on the bed again. He slowly reached out to grab her slender hand.

“First, I’d like to know your real name.”

Gaia lowered her head in silence. Her name, which she had abandoned when she had decided to become Gaia’s incarnation...

“My name is...”

Her voice trembled. At this moment, she was not the incarnation of a goddess, but just a regular woman. She slowly spoke as if she was revealing a long-kept secret.

“... Layla.”

Si-Hun smiled brightly and put her hand on Gaia—no, Layla’s cheek.

“It’s a beautiful name.”

He leaned in while smiling, and they kissed.

“What a relief.”

“Hm? About what?”

“About Gaia,” Han Seol-Ah said while smiling and clasping her hands together. “I’m sure she must have had a hard time... Back when she had first lost her sight and legs.”

“I’m sure she would have,” Kang-Woo replied while nodding.

He was moved back when he saw Gaia bawling her eyes out, since he had gotten quite attached to her over the years; the incarnation, not the goddess.

‘I want my sister-in-law to be happy.’

Only then would Si-Hun continue to stick to her without being led astray.

“Now that Earth’s protection has been restored... We’d be able to live in peace, won’t we?” Seol-Ah mentioned.

“We do have some leeway now.”

Kang-Woo nodded. Although it was not permanent, they had managed to buy some time. Since he also knew the truth behind Gaia’s worries of Seraph having turned to the dark side, he did not need to make any rash decisions.

‘But that doesn’t mean I can just roll around doing nothing.’

The time he had bought was finite; if he kept doing absolutely nothing, the Gaia System would once again begin to collapse.

‘And...’

Kang-Woo’s eyes sank as he recalled the gigantic bull snorting black flames.

‘He’ll come back one day.’

Kang-Woo needed to make ample preparations starting now.

“First off...”

He opened the status window to check the Key of the Demonic Sea. After having acquired the fourth key *Greed*, he only had one key left to acquire.

[You must complete a prerequisite quest to acquire the fifth key of the Demonic Sea, ‘Heresy’.]

Like he had thought, there was another quest.

[Prerequisite Quest: ‘Demon of the Heavens’]

[Learn a Chaos technique of at least low-rank.]

“...Ngh.” Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes in irritation.

He had successfully managed to win in his previous gamble and learned a bottom-rank Chaos technique, but it had been nothing but a coincidence among coincidences. His right hand had exploded like fireworks from being unable to control even *Chaos - Burst*

, so it was far beyond him right now to learn a technique above that.

'But was that seriously only just a bottom-rank technique?'

It was hard to believe, since such a technique had destroyed Behemoth's horn that contained god-killing powers.

'If I can use higher-ranking techniques...'

Kang-Woo couldn't even imagine what he would be capable of.

"... I guess I have no other choice than to train diligently."

It was a huge risk to use the Chaos techniques since he also needed to slightly open the Doors of the Ten Thousand Demon Core to activate molting, but it was absurd to neglect it after having witnessed its astounding power. He needed to make the technique fully his, no matter the risk.

'Besides, I need to clear the quest too.'

There were several reasons for him to learn Chaos techniques.

'Fortunately, it doesn't require much sacred power.'

Compared to Kang-Woo's boundless demonic energy, the amount of sacred power he had was pathetically small. Forget balance, one wouldn't even be able to tell that he had sacred power unless they took an extremely close look. However, since the Chaos technique was enhanced by sucking in the flowing demonic energy within him, the imbalance between sacred power and demonic energy was alleviated.

"That aside..." Kang-Woo sighed.

Seol-Ah, who was lovingly staring at Kang-Woo next to him, asked, "What's wrong, Kang-Woo?"

"I just have something that's annoying me."

Not everything was going his way.

'The Authority of Extinction is malfunctioning.'

After having been wounded deeply in his chest, the Authority of Extinction had become unstable. The Authority stopped from time to time as if a call was cutting out.

'Is it because of the wound I got from Behemoth?'

That was most likely the case, since it had become like this after getting stabbed by his horn.

'I'll keep the Authority of Extinction sealed for now.'

It was a shame that an Authority of a prince of Hell had become unavailable to him, but he could not afford to use an unstable Authority.

'How irritating.'

Kang-Woo couldn't help but be pissed off after losing his use of not a regular Authority but that of a prince of Hell.

"Kang-Woo." Seol-Ah approached him and hugged his head.

An unbelievably soft sensation pressed on his cheeks.

'Oh sweet Jesus.'

Kang-Woo's irritation melted away in a flash.

Seol-Ah continued while giggling, "Don't make such a scary face. The operation was a success, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, you're right."

"Let's just forget about everything for today and enjoy ourselves," Seol-Ah said while caressing Kang-Woo's head that she was embracing. "Let's invite Balrog, Lilith and Yeon-Joo over and have a simple party. What do you think?"

"Let's have beef on the menu," Kang-Woo replied.

He was craving some beef after thinking about Behemoth.

"Hohoho. Okay, I'll make whatever you want. Right, could you go buy some beer with Echidna? Balrog was saying that he really wanted some."

"That guy really shouldn't be drinking," he said while nodding with a smirk.

As he went into his room to get ready to go out, he saw a black object on his desk.

"Oh, come to think of it, I had this."

Kang-Woo looked down at Behemoth's horn fragment. Despite it only being a single fragment of the shattered horn, it was over a meter long.

"How should I use this?"

It was far too much of a waste to leave a horn fragment containing god-killing powers unused.

'But using it to make a weapon for myself is a bit of a waste.'

He possessed the Transcendent-grade weapon, Key of the Demonic Sea, which was far more valuable than Behemoth's horn fragment. Kang-Woo fell into thought while tapping the horn fragment.

'Who should I give it to?'

He thought of possible candidates, but it didn't take him too long for the perfect person to come to mind.

"Yeah."

There was only one person at the moment who was in need of such an item.

Chapter 318 - Oppa~

“You want to make me a weapon?” Cha Yeon-Joo asked with her eyes open wide.

She was more confused than thankful for the unexpected offer.

“Why so out of the blue?”

“Well, I was thinking about it, and...” Oh Kang-Woo slurred.

He had thought about many candidates such as Balrog, Halcyon, Echidna and Kim Si-Hun. However, Balrog already had his Overlord Armor, while Si-Hun had the holy sword Ludwig. Halcyon’s style of fighting did not require weapons, and Echidna need not even be mentioned.

‘The only ones left are Tian Wuchen and Cha Yeon-Joo.’

Kang-Woo owed Yeon-Joo more, and was also closer to her than Wuchen. As the deciding factor, Yeon-Joo had participated in the last operation.

“... I just thought it’s best that you have it,” Kang-Woo said as he raised Behemoth’s horn fragment in his hand.

Yeon-Joo’s eyes widened, and she averted her gaze as her cheeks flushed red.

“R-Really?”

She also knew how powerful the horn of the monster known as Behemoth was since she had witnessed the gigantic bull covered in black flames charging while decimating everything in his path.

“Yeah. You should be the one to use it,” Kang-Woo stated.

“Ahem. If you say so, I’ll use it.”

Yeon-Joo touched Behemoth’s horn fragment while humming in a good mood. Just lightly touching was enough to send sparks up her hand; she could feel the immense power emanating from the horn.

“But are you sure you’ll be able to process this thing? My weapon is a bit... special,” Yeon-Joo asked in worry.

Kang-Woo nodded while smirking. “Yeah, it’s more than possible.”

Yeon-Joo’s weapon was chains with sharp thorns on them.

‘The fragment is a bit too small to make chains from scratch, but...’

He could imbue his demonic energy in the fragment and coat the chains with it.

“First, take out all of your chains,” Kang-Woo said.

“Okay.”

Yeon-Joo extended both of her hands out and slightly twisted her wrists.

Clatter.

Chains poured down from the bracelets on her wrists. Kang-Woo stared at her wrists in fascination.

“Is that also one of the bracelets’ functions?” Kang-Woo asked.

“No, this is one of my Traits. I can store chains in an equipment of my choosing and use them freely.”

“Aha,” Kang-Woo expressed, and lightly grabbed her wrists.

“Wh-What are you doing?” Yeon-Joo asked, her eyes sharp.

“Stay still.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and read the flow of Yeon-Joo’s mana.

‘She has better control of it than I’d thought.’

He had imagined her mana flow to be rampant like her beast-like personality, but it was far more tranquil than he had expected.

‘Using this mana flow as the base...’

Kang-Woo mapped out a design of her weapon in his head. This was his first time creating a weapon for someone else, but the fundamental technique itself was similar.

‘I’ll make it more comfortable and stronger.’

Weapons just needed to be easy to use and powerful; adding complex and difficult-to-use functions to them was pointless. Kang-Woo took Yeon-Joo’s hands and slowly massaged them.

“Wh-What the hell are you doing, y-you son of a bitch?!” Yeon-Joo shouted with her cheeks as red as her hair.

It was a natural response, since the one who had said that he would make her a weapon was suddenly taking her hands and massaging them.

“I told you to stay still,” Kang-Woo stated.

“Y-You...!”

Kang-Woo ignored Yeon-Joo’s resistance and observed her hands.

‘The weapon should be a bit lighter... Since she controls the chains using mana instead of strength, I should raise its mana sensitivity as high as possible.’

He more or less had completed the design in his head. Kang-Woo extended his hand toward the pile of chains, and closed his eyes with Behemoth’s horn fragment in his other hand.

Fwoooooom!!

Great amounts of energy moved. The horn fragment that contained god-killing powers melted down by yellow flames.

‘Authority of Blaze.’

Mammon’s Authority was useful in many ways. Behemoth’s horn fragment glowed red and melted, covering Yeon-Joo’s chains.

Yeon-Joo blankly stared at Kang-Woo, who was making her weapon under immense concentration. She bit her lip as her expression showed a hint of anger, but it soon grew softer, and she went back to staring blankly at him.

“All done.”

“... Huh?”

“I said it’s done.”

“O-Okay.” Yeon-Joo nodded while coughing.

Moments later, her eyes widened due to the message window that had popped up in front of her.

“What is it?” Kang-Woo asked.

“U-Uhmm...” Yeon-Joo stuttered. “The equipment grade... rose from Legendary to Mythic.”

“Mythic?”

Kang-Woo frowned.

‘I guess Transcendent was pushing it.’

It would have been a different story if the chains had been made purely out of Behemoth’s horn, but its quality fell since it had only been made from a fragment.

“That’s a shame,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“A-A shame? Are you insane? This is of the highest grade even among Mythic-grade equipment! M-My god. Just from coating it with a horn fragment...”

Yeon-Joo read through the message window that Kang-Woo couldn’t see over and over again. Kang-Woo smirked.

‘Just a fragment, huh?’

Such an expression did not suit a being like Behemoth.

‘I mean, I guess it is surprising, since all I did was coat the chains with the horn fragment.’

Even if the material was not Transcendent-grade, the god-killing powers infused within the horn would not have disappeared.

“C-Can I try using it?” Yeon-Joo asked.

“Of course. We didn’t meet all the way here for nothing.”

They had met in the mountains in the vicinity of Seoul that Kang-Woo frequently used to train so that Yeon-Joo could test out the power of her newly-made weapon.

“Alright.” Yeon-Joo nodded in excitement.

The mana flowing through the chains was on a whole other level compared to before; it was as if invisible wings had been added to them.

'What the hell?'

Yeon-Joo's eyes widened. She used the Trait that she had unlocked on her Tenth Awakening.

"Red Lotus, First Form."

Thrash—! The chains moved.

"W-Wow," Yeon-Joo expressed.

The scene before her eyes thrilled her. She had completely destroyed an entire mountain. She had reached a stage far higher than her previous self just from switching weapons.

"What the..."

"Do you like it?" Kang-Woo asked.

"I don't just like it! This is insanely amazing!"

Yeon-Joo hugged Kang-Woo before she had realized it from the uncontrollable burst of emotion within her. Kang-Woo hugged her back.

"I hadn't been able to use even the first form of Red Lotus properly, but I can perfectly use it up to the third form now! This is absolutely insane!"

Yeon-Joo burst into bright laughter. She was jumping up and down with Kang-Woo in her arms. And then...

"Kyaaaaaahh!"

She belatedly came back to her senses and pulled away from him while screaming. She wrapped her arms around herself and glared at Kang-Woo.

"Wh-Where do you think you're touching?!"

She was overreacting all by herself.

"Calm down, woman," Kang-Woo said while laughing from the absurdity. "Anyway, I'm relieved. You don't feel any side effects, do you?"

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

Yeon-Joo hugged the chains as if she was never willing to part with them. Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction as he looked at the delighted Yeon-Joo.

'I guess I made the right call to give it to Yeon-Joo.'

He couldn't help but smile from seeing how happy she was.

"Hehehe," Yeon-Joo giggled while hugging the chains.

Kang-Woo closed his mouth.

'What's happening?'

As he looked at how happy Yeon-Joo was, he felt an irresistible desire to tease her. He had never felt this way before, so even he was slightly surprised. However, his surging desire was pushing him to tease her. Kang-Woo did not resist the desire.

"I have a condition for making those chains for you," Kang-Woo mentioned.

"What? What condition?" Yeon-Joo asked in surprise.

"From now on, you have to say *Oppa~* with a cute pose whenever you address me."

"What the fuck did you say?" Yeon-Joo grimaced.

Kang-Woo continued calmly, "If you don't like it, give that back to me."

"Y-You son of a bitch...!"

Yeon-Joo's eyes set ablaze. She aggressively flung her chains at Kang-Woo.

Grab.

However, no matter how powerful her weapon had become, she was still no match for Kang-Woo. Kang-Woo easily grabbed the chains and smirked.

"What? You're not gonna do it?"

"O-Of course not, you fucker!"

"Then I guess I'll take these back."

Kang-Woo yanked on the chains.

"Kyaaaah!" Yeon-Joo was dragged along with the chains while screaming. "Y-You're just joking, right? You're actually not taking them away, are you?"

"No, I really am."

"N-No!"

Yeon-Joo frantically hugged the chains. It would have been a different story if she hadn't tasted the power of the chains, but since she had, she couldn't give them up. Kang-Woo smiled wickedly.

"Then you know what you have to do, don't you?"

"Y-You...!"

Yeon-Joo shook in rage. She glared at him in fury.

"So? What'll it be?" Kang-Woo asked while snickering.

"Y-You fucking demon!"

"Yeah, I'm a demon."

“Scumbag! Dipshit! Baldy! Pervert!”

“I’m not a baldy,” Kang-Woo retorted. That was the only one he couldn’t stand for. “It’s not hard, is it? Anyone else would’ve happily done it if it meant they could get their hands on a Mythic-grade weapon.”

Yeon-Joo kept her mouth shut. She trembled with her face pale and teary-eyed.

“Haaa, haaa...!”

She bit her lip while clenching her fists to the point that veins were popping out. She took a step back, put her palms on her cheeks, making a V sign, and winked.

“Oppa~”

Kang-Woo was shocked. Yeon-Joo’s voice sounded so cute that he couldn’t believe it had come from her.

Deathly silence fell.

“Pfft!!” Kang-Woo covered his mouth with one hand and crouched. “Kffp! Kahahaha!!”

He burst into laughter. He trembled while grabbing his stomach.

“Kahahahahahahah!!!”

Kang-Woo clenched his fists from the thrill. It had far surpassed his wildest expectations.

‘This is so fucking fun! Why hadn’t I done something so fun earlier?!’

He laughed to the point of shedding tears.

Yeon-Joo’s eyes lost their light.

Bash!

“Kurgh.”

Kang-Woo flew into the air after being smashed on the solar plexus, and rolled across the ground.

“... Let’s die.” Yeon-Joo staggered toward Kang-Woo. Her eyes that had lost all sense of life were terrifying. “Now that it’s come to this, let’s just die together.”

A lioness engulfed in madness charged at him.

Chapter 319 - Protector of Light

“K-Kang-Woo? Wh-What happened?”

Han Seol-Ah quickly went up to Oh Kang-Woo as soon as he came back home. She searched his ragged face in worry. However, he was not injured anywhere; his hair was just a mess.

Kang-Woo answered while smiling bitterly, “I was attacked by a lion on my way home.”

He recalled the lioness engulfed in madness, charging at him with her red mane fluttering. He was easily able to dodge such attacks, but...

'I felt like I shouldn't dodge them for some reason.'

He could tell that he would suffer even more down the line if he didn't keep his mouth shut and take the beating.

'Regardless...'

Kang-Woo smirked after recalling the memory of Cha Yeon-Joo calling him *Oppa* while making a cute pose.

"Pfft! Kek!" He couldn't help but laugh.

Seol-Ah tilted her head in confusion. "Did something interesting happen?"

"I-It's nothing. More importantly, did anything new happen?"

"Oh, we got a call from Layla."

"Layla?" Kang-Woo tilted his head from the name he had never heard before.

Seol-Ah grinned and answered, "It's Gaia's real name. Si-Hun told me."

"Mm. But didn't she abandon her real name after becoming an incarnation?"

"That was to accept Lady Gaia's Divinity better, but since she has already accepted most of the Divinity that she could receive as an incarnation, she can use her real name now."

"Aha." Kang-Woo nodded.

Seol-Ah giggled and said excitedly, "Listen to this, Kang-Woo. Layla was planning on continuing to use the name Gaia, but Si-Hun insisted she use her real name. Isn't it kind of romantic?"

Kang-Woo smirked and asked, "That aside, didn't you say that Layla contacted us?"

"Oh, right." Seol-Ah nodded with her cheeks red. "Umm... The real Gaia apparently wants to meet you."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It was obvious who Seol-Ah was referring to.

"Just me?" he asked.

"No, she also called the other Protectors. And... Also that brat."

Seol-Ah's eyes filled with chilling bloodlust. She still seemed to have some ill feelings toward Uriel.

'Man, I have a bad feeling about this.'

Kang-Woo grimaced. He had never had any good experiences associating with Gaia until now.

'How is she gonna troll me this time?'

He had suffered from her trolling multiple times; she was the one who had made his Satan Coin plummet, as well as ruined many other plans of his.

'I don't wanna go.'

However, there was no way he couldn't go. Kang-Woo sighed.

"Okay," he nodded while shutting his lips tight anxiously.

"Welcome, my children."

A comforting voice was heard as soon as Kang-Woo entered the Hall of Protection. Gaia's will had descended into Earth by borrowing Layla's body through Deific Manifestation.

'Fuck.'

Kang-Woo grimaced unconsciously. The enormous amounts of power flowing out from Gaia's body prickled his skin. She had descended using Layla's body before, but this could not even be compared to back then.

'This is the power of one of the highest gods.'

Cold sweat trickled down the back of Kang-Woo's neck. He was smothered by the breathtaking energy as soon as he entered the room. The Divinity of Gaia, who had recovered her power, was powerful enough to make Kang-Woo anxious.

"Greetings, Lady Gaia," Kim Si-Hun, who was standing at the front, said while kneeling on one knee.

With him in the middle, the other Protectors such as Zhuge Xian, Ito Shinji, Grace McCubbin, and others that were lined up next to Si-Hun, also kneeled on one knee. Kang-Woo lined up at the far end, hoping to stay hidden. He could feel his heart beating like crazy.

'This is scary as hell.'

It felt as if he was a murderer called to the scene of his own crime. Kang-Woo anxiously stared at Gaia.

'What should I do if she recognizes me?'

The possibility of that was low since she herself had said that she did not know who the Demon of Prophecy was; she also had not recognized him back when she had descended before. However, now that her power had returned after Earth's Protection had been restored, it could be a different story.

'If I get exposed as the Demon of Prophecy here...'

Everything would obviously be over. The sturdy tower of trust that he had built with difficulty would crumble.

'Fucking please...'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists, desperately hoping that Gaia wouldn't say anything. However, contrary to Kang-Woo's hopes, Gaia slowly opened her mouth.

“First, I would like to thank all of you,” she said while smiling gently. “If it were not for you all, this star would have been fully exposed to otherworldly interference and been destroyed.”

“It could not have happened without your guidance, Lady Gaia,” Si-Hun answered calmly.

Gaia smiled. “Protector Kim Si-Hun.”

“Yes?”

“Come closer.”

Si-Hun expressed slight bewilderment, but approached her.

“Successor of the Heavenly Dragon. You have no idea how reassured I am to have you with me.”

“N-Not at all...”

“Fufu. There is no need to be so humble. I have been reported of all your accomplishments through Layla.”

Si-Hun lowered his head while blushing. Gaia gently caressed his cheeks.

“I am nothing but sorry for this child. Although it could not have been helped, I made her shoulder far too heavy of a burden.” She sighed in sorrow. “But my heavy heart has become at least a little lighter, seeing how happy this child has become from having met you.”

“Lady Gaia...”

“Fufu. This child may have some quirks, but please give her as much love as you can.”

“Of course.” Si-Hun nodded without hesitation.

“And...” Gaia then shifted her gaze toward Uriel. “I thank you, wings of Seraph. Thanks to your assistance, we were able to chase out the darkness from this star.”

“I only did my duty.” Uriel bowed while maintaining his dignity as an archangel instead of his usual childlike self. He then added, “From what I have heard, the restoration of your power is not permanent... Is that true?”

Gaia nodded with a darkened expression. “It is. As long as the Demon of Prophecy lives... Earth’s protection will never be fully restored.”

Kang-Woo’s shoulders flinched from the sudden mention of the Demon of Prophecy.

“But do not fret. Time has been bought thanks to your help,” Gaia expressed.

“But...”

“Trust me. I will personally stop the darkness from laying its hands on this star. Of course, it will not last forever, but... I have come up with a plan in preparation for it.”

Silence fell. There was nothing else to say when the goddess in charge of managing Earth was going so far.

“What is this plan that you are referring to, Lady Gaia?” Si-Hun asked, breaking the silence.

Everyone here was likely curious about it.

Gaia nodded and replied, “I have called you all here today to give you the details of that plan. But before I get into it...” Gaia looked toward the Protectors with sunken eyes. “I have something to announce to all of you.”

She slowly turned her gaze toward Kang-Woo.

‘Wh-What?’

Why was she looking at him? Kang-Woo’s expression stiffened, and he averted his gaze.

‘I don’t think she knows I’m the Demon of Prophecy.’

So why was she looking at him so intently?

“Oh Kang-Woo, is it?”

“Yes.” Kang-Woo slowly nodded.

He was acting like he was perfectly fine on the outside, but a storm was raging within his head.

‘Don’t call me. Don’t even look at me. Please just pay me no mind. Screw off.’

Kang-Woo stared at Gaia in desperation.

“Come here,” Gaia said.

“... Yes, Lady Gaia.”

Kang-Woo slowly got up and walked toward her. Just like she had done to Si-Hun, she gently touched his cheek. Kang-Woo’s eyes widened, cold sweat flowing down his back.

‘Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.’

He was scared shitless. He was at risk of being found out as the Demon of Prophecy just from being in the same room as her, but she was now making direct contact with him. It would not be strange if she found out that he was the Demon of Prophecy here and now.

‘She’s seriously a goddamn nuisance.’

The pains that he had gone through because of Gaia flashed before his eyes like a panorama.

‘If it weren’t for you...’

Everything would have been resolved with just his Satan persona without ever having needed to create the Rakiel persona. The Demon of Prophecy would have never needed to be revealed. No, Earth would have never needed to be in danger in the first place.

'You useless, frustrating, dumb, dim-witted bitch.'

She let the Gaia System be broken, unnecessarily wasted her Divinity and asked for help from other worlds at random, and completely ruined his plans that were going well several times.

'Fucking troll.'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists while suppressing his rage.

"Despite not being a chosen Protector, you worked harder than any other Protector to protect this star."

'Yeah, I worked hard as fuck, all because of you.'

Gaia grabbed Kang-Woo's shoulders, which irritated him even more.

"Thank you... very much."

'Oh yes, I'm sure you would be thankful.'

Kang-Woo slightly rolled his eyes. He understood why Gaia had asked to see him; it was for the completely meaningless act of a chief gathering their subordinates and naming one of them employee of the month, telling the other employees that they could also be praised like this if they worked hard.

'Enough with the bullshit.'

Kang-Woo was not so easy to please. He lightly snorted and lowered his head. Just then...

"Henceforth, I have decided to select you as a Protector on the same level as Protector Kim Si-Hun."

"Pardon?"

'The fuck she say?'

Whoom!

Bright light poured out from Gaia's hands and flowed into Kang-Woo.

Riiing!

[You have received 'Gaia's Blessing'.]

[Raising all stats dramatically!]

[Demonic Energy has surpassed 160. You can now partially use demonic energy from the Abyss.]

[The title 'Protector of Light' has been generated.]

[All beings of godhood will recognize you as a retainer of Gaia!]

Kang-Woo's eyes filled with shock from the messages before his eyes.

'My Demonic Energy stat surpassed 160, and... I can use demonic energy from the Abyss?'

Not just that, all beings of godhood would recognize him as the Protector of Light.

'There's no way I'd get exposed now.'

Who in their right mind would suspect a retainer of Gaia to be the Demon of Prophecy?

'Yes, this is it! My life has completely turned around now!'

Kang-Woo unconsciously raised his two arms high up in the air.

'Lady Gaiaaaaaaaaaa!! I believed in you!!'

He could swear on his life that he had never doubted Gaia for even a millisecond.

'Shiiiet, Protector of Light, huh? Awesome! Lady Gaia sure has an eye for people!'

Kang-Woo had been right all along.

'You are... the hope of humanity.'

He had not once thought of Gaia as useless despite everyone else having thought so. He always believed that Gaia was the true hope of humanity as well as its savior.

'Yes, I knew it all along.'

He was simply being rewarded for his faith.

"I will... dedicate myself to the light."

Tears flowed down Kang-Woo's cheeks.

Chapter 320 - Goddess's Rage (1)

"Thank you for becoming my child." Gaia smiled faintly. She then continued solemnly, "From now on, I, Gaia, swear on my Divinity that I will spare no support and love for Protector Oh Kang-Woo."

The blinding light that entered Oh Kang-Woo burst out, and a golden light enveloped him.

"I will dedicate my life to you, Lady Gaia," Kang-Woo answered.

Gaia stroked Kang-Woo's hair with a smile filled with parental love.

"You do not have to speak so formally. You are now... nothing short of my child."

"Lady Gaia..."

For the first time since the primeval chaos, the Protector of Light was born in a way that would never have been imagined by any transcendental being.

'Huehuehuehue!!'

Kang-Woo suppressed his laughter with all his might. He had become a hero that was vouched for by Gaia, a goddess of the top rank! He had never expected to gain such an insane asset.

“Congratulations, hyung-nim.” Kim Si-Hun grabbed his hand with a bright smile.

Seeing that, Uriel grabbed Kang-Woo’s other hand and let out a snort.

“Rather, it’s more of a surprise that you weren’t a Protector until now. You should’ve become a Protector way earlier than this,” he grumbled.

Si-Hun’s eyebrows twitched. “It could not have been helped since Lady Gaia was unwell.”

He then pulled on Kang-Woo’s hand that he was holding. It was like having flowers (stamens) in each hand. Kang-Woo frowned.

‘Stop it, you sons of bitches.’

He aggressively shook them off.

Gaia covered a hand over her mouth and let out a hushed giggle. “Since the Protector selection is complete, I will get to the main topic at hand.”

“Yes, Lady Gaia.” Kang-Woo nodded.

He was highly interested in what Gaia had to say, and just as worried.

“Protector Kim Si-Hun and Oh Kang-Woo, my lovely children. I would like to entrust... a very special mission to you two.”

“Special...”

“Mission?”

Kang-Woo and Si-Hun expressed confusion from the sudden proposition.

Gaia nodded. “My powers have been partially restored, but... As you all know, it is not permanent. In the end... At this rate, I will go back to being unable to move an inch like before.”

“... Yes, we know.”

“There is a way to delay that process. This does not resolve the fundamental issue either, but... It will buy much more time than the previous operation.”

“Will we be destroying a Rift like last time?” Kang-Woo asked.

Gaia slowly shook her head. “It is different. No... I guess it is not completely different.” She then continued with a low tone, “I want you two to go to the continent of Aernor to find and destroy the sealed corpse of the Demon God.”

Heavy silence fell. Both Kang-Woo and Si-Hun naturally turned agape.

‘What?’

What Gaia had just said was absolutely insane.

‘It’s not like we can just go to Aernor whenever we want.’

Kang-Woo had gotten so used to the word Aernor that it no longer sounded like the name of another world. Based on what he had heard from Echidna, it was a classic fantasy world with dragons, fairies, knights and mages.

'The only different thing is...'

The civilization of Aernor was highly advanced. They still had a monarchy, but general civilization was fairly advanced due to the advancements in magic tools.

'No, that's not what's important right now.'

Kang-Woo quickly raised his head back up. The important point was that Aernor was not on Earth, but was another world entirely.

"What... Do you mean?"

"I knew you would be confused. It is only natural, since I told you to go to another world out of nowhere." Gaia nodded with a bitter smile. She then pointed at Uriel and continued, "However, I am not sending you to a land that you can never return from. You could say that it is similar to how the Wings of Seraph over there is on Earth right now."

Kang-Woo and Si-Hun's faces relaxed slightly.

'I guess it's something along the lines of going to a foreign country that you can't just come and go however you wish.'

Although Aernor was another world, many beings from that world had come to Earth, such as Reynald, Lucis and Lucifer, and Uriel; they were all residents of Aernor.

'But even so, another world?'

It was definitely not someplace that one could go with light feelings.

"... Is there a reason why we absolutely have to go?"

"If there wasn't, I would not be sending my lovely children to another world." Gaia nodded with a heavy expression. "You all may not know this, but... Earth's protection is not confined just to the star known as Earth. It is deeply intertwined with the protection of the respective stars Aernor and Huan."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. His hypothesis when he had first heard that Seraph's seal was weakening had been confirmed.

"The protection of Aernor and Huan have also become unstable due to the impaired protection of Earth," Gaia mentioned.

"Is that connected to destroying the corpse of the Demon God?"

Gaia nodded. "Aernor's protection is not as specialized as Earth's protection in blocking otherworldly interference; it is more specialized toward stopping the Demon God's revival. If the

Demon God's corpse is completely destroyed... Aernor's protection can be used to block otherworldly interference."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes again. He more or less understood what Gaia was trying to say.

'But...'

He had two questions.

"First, are the protections of each star not being managed by the respective ruling god of each world? Do you have the authority to modify Aernor's protection, Lady Gaia?"

"... Good question." Gaia stared at Kang-Woo in slight surprise. She nodded soon after and answered, "Long story short, I do. When Seraph sealed the darkness by sacrificing her Divinity, she passed her authority over to me."

"In that case, I have one more question." This one was what Kang-Woo actually did not understand. "If there was a way to destroy the Demon God's corpse, why have you not done it until now?"

Even if they were Protectors, they were still only human. Although that was no longer the case now that Kang-Woo had also become a Protector, Gaia did not know that. Asking Kang-Woo and Si-Hun to destroy the Demon God's corpse that even the gods had no choice but to seal was absurd.

Gaia also answered this question without hesitation, "After the Demon God's corpse on Earth disappeared, Bauli's Divinity has become unstable. Now... We should be able to annihilate his corpse."

Kang-Woo's eyes sharpened.

'So that's why he tried to take over my body.'

Bauli had tried to get his hands on Kang-Woo's body as soon as Kang-Woo absorbed the Demon God's corpse. If that had been to get his hands on the other portions of his corpse, it made sense for him to have acted so hastily.

'In that case...'

Kang-Woo smirked.

'This could be a good opportunity.'

Eliminating the Demon God's corpse was necessary in the sense that he would be eliminating future risk factors in advance.

'There's also the option for me to eat it instead of destroying it, but...'

Kang-Woo shook his head.

'It's far too dangerous.'

It was not that he didn't want the enormous demonic energy contained within the Demon God's corpse, but it was way too risky.

'As long as Bauli is within me, I can't eat his corpse.'

If he did, Bauli's influence would grow bigger and could give him the chance to take over Kang-Woo's body. He could obtain immense power by eating the corpse, but at the risk of his body being taken over; it was not even worth considering whether to take that chance or not.

'No matter how strong I become...'

It was meaningless if he would lose control over his body.

"I understand. I will go to Aernor with Si-Hun."

"H-Hyung-nim." Si-Hun looked at Kang-Woo in bewilderment.

Kang-Woo calmly continued, "However, it is far too dangerous for just us two to go by ourselves. We need more help."

"I will leave it entirely to you two to choose who to take with you. My incarnation will also join you. It will be difficult for me to manifest through her like I am now, but... I will be able to assist you through revelations."

Kang-Woo nodded. "When will we be departing...?"

"For you to cross through Aernor's protection without receiving any form of restrictions, it will take about half a year. I would like you to train to grow stronger until then."

"Understood."

Half a year... It was a long yet short amount of time.

'It's a bit later than I'd expected.'

Kang-Woo wanted to eliminate the risk factor that was Bauli as soon as possible, but it could not be helped.

"Hyung-nim..." Si-Hun called out to him anxiously.

"Sorry for deciding without consulting you, Si-Hun."

"Not at all. I was planning on following whatever you decided on. But..." Si-Hun asked in worry, "What will happen to Earth while we're gone?"

"I will take care of that," Gaia declared strongly. "Now that Earth's protection has been restored, I will not let otherworldly beings do as they wish on Earth."

Fwoooooom.

Great power flowed out from Gaia.

“Although my incarnation will be with you all... I am not as powerless as I have been before.”

There was nothing more reassuring than the declaration of a goddess with top-rank Divinity.

“Oh Kang-Woo... No, my lovely child. Thank you for accepting my unreasonable request.” Gaia approached Kang-Woo while smiling gently. “May your path be filled with the blessing of li—”

As she was expressing her best wishes to Kang-Woo while caressing his cheek, her expression slightly crumpled.

She mumbled with a hint of hesitancy in her words, “What...? Why?”

Her voice was filled with confusion. Kang-Woo stared at her in wonder of what was going on, but flinched after hearing her mumbles.

“Why... are there traces of demonic energy...”

“...!”

Kang-Woo’s eyes widened.

‘Fuck.’

He was fucked. He clenched his chest without hesitation and collapsed on the spot.

“Kurgh! Cough, cough!”

“H-Hyung-nim?!”

Si-Hun quickly ran up to him.

“Kang-Woo, could you be...”

Uriel’s eyes shook. His expression stiffened after approaching to see Kang-Woo collapsed on the ground. He was used to seeing such a scene.

“Shit, shit!! It still... hasn’t disappeared yet?!” Uriel shed tears while shouting.

He put his hands on Kang-Woo’s chest and poured sacred power into him. Kang-Woo, who had been seizing up, gradually relaxed.

“Wh-What is going on, Wings of Seraph?” Gaia asked with a trembling voice.

Uriel answered sorrowfully with his head lowered, “This is... Rakiel’s doing.”

“What?” Gaia’s eyes widened.

Kang-Woo hurriedly extended his arm as if to shut Uriel up.

“L-Lord Uriel... Don’t...”

“... I’m sorry, Kang-Woo. I can’t hide it any longer.”

Uriel revealed the secret that only he and Kang-Woo knew, about what Rakiel had done to Kang-Woo's body in the two weeks that Kang-Woo had been captured by him.

"A-Aaaahh," Gaia shook.

Crack. The ground she was standing on split.

"How... How dare he..."

Rumble—!!

The entire Hall of Protection shook.

Crackle!

The power of the enraged goddess distorted space itself.

"How dare the mere Constellation of Corruption lay a hand on my child?!"

The rage of Gaia, the goddess in charge of one of the worlds of the Triad, pointed toward the Constellation of Corruption.