

M. in Hell 421

Chapter 421 - If I Can't Go In

It looked as if the sky was falling apart. Countless tree roots poured out from the crack in the sky that looked like shattered glass. The black rotten roots stretched toward the capital of Arnan as it squirmed violently. Their dynamic movements made them look more like tentacles rather than tree roots.

"This is..." Kim Si-Hun's eyes widened in shock.

Enormous energy swirled within the giant Rift in the sky that was about several kilometers wide. The ferociously storming energy wiped out everything in its area.

"H-hyung-nim!"

Si-Hun quickly called Oh Kang-Woo, who was staring in shock at the countless tree roots stretching toward the capital as he was supporting Elune.

Kang-Woo turned to Elune and asked, "Is that the World Tree?"

It looked far too abnormal to call the World Tree; they looked more like the moving tree monsters that the party had seen when they had first come to Aernor.

Elune nodded in pallor. [Y-yes, b-but how did the World Tree come here...?]

Kang-Woo turned away from the panicking Elune.

'So that's the corrupted World Tree, huh?'

He had expected it to be an unfathomably colossal tree from its name and because it was known as the pillar of the Triad.

'But...'

He had never expected it to be able to move. The World Tree coming out of the Rift was more like a giant monster than a tree, and one that could easily engulf the entire capital, no less.

'Regardless...'

Kang-Woo's eyes lit up. This was a little out of his expectations, but it did not change what he needed to do.

"We just have to get in there and dispose of the black thorn corrupting the World Tree, right?"

[Y-yes, but—]

"That's all we need to know," Kang-Woo interjected and turned to his party members. "Let's go."

The party members nodded.

[I-I will accompany you! I won't be of much help in my current state, but... I will do my best to support you all even a little!] Elune shouted as she clenched her fists.

Kang-Woo lightly nodded and put his foot on the window frame. He looked down and scanned the surroundings.

Rumble—!

Crumble—!

The roots of the World Tree that reached the ground were rampaging throughout the city like starved beasts. Each root was hundreds of meters long, easily able to destroy buildings with a single swing.

"Kyaaaaaahhh!"

"Wh-what the hell?!"

"H-help me!"

The people swept by the giant roots screamed. They were massacred all too easily by the undefiable disaster. Flames and smoke instantly filled the entire capital.

"Holy fuck..." Kang-Woo frowned aggressively.

He bit his lip as he looked down at the people being slaughtered by the roots of the corrupted World Tree. Fury ran down his back and throughout his body. Of course, he was not angry that people were dying.

'My precious farm!'

The population of the capital of Arnan was as large as the population of several cities combined, and the majority of the people in it were devotees of the Church of Splendor. His Divinity collection plant that he had raised with his heart and soul even while doing all sorts of cringe shit was being destroyed by mere tree roots.

"Those fucking *I am Groot* bastards..."

The back of his head hurt. He would burn down the World Tree if it were up to him, but he suppressed the desire and jumped out of the window.

"Let's clean up those goddamn roots first!" Kang-Woo shouted to his party members following after him.

He glared with fury at the World Tree roots destroying the capital. He clenched his fists and pledged.

'I'll protect them.'

His precious Divinity farm— no, his precious devotees of Splendor!

Whoooooom!

Radiant splendor poured out from Kang-Woo, possibly having reacted to his heroic spirit.

Tap!

He jumped into the air and pulled his right arm back.

'Axes are the best to cut down trees.'

Grrrk.

Slushy went into the Key of the Demonic Sea, which turned into a giant ax. Kang-Woo twisted in midair and swung down his right arm.

Crack—!!

The golden ray of light split the world into two. The World Tree roots destroying the capital split in half with one attack. The energy did not lose its momentum after cutting the roots, charging forward as it destroyed buildings in its path.

"A-Aaaahh!"

"O Light!!"

"The God of Splendor has manifested!!"

The people being slaughtered by the black roots kneeled as they looked up at the light. They brought their hands together and burst into tears.

Boom!

"Gasp!"

A World Tree root fell toward the praying devotees. They tried to get away in shock, but it was far too late to dodge the root.

Clatter!

Red chains spread out like a net and deflected the root.

"For fuck's sake! Stop fucking around and run, you lunatics!" yelled Cha Yeon-Joo at the people who suddenly got on their knees to pray instead of running away.

"Wh-what? Fucking around?"

"Are you doubting the light?!"

"Prayer is the one true path to salvation!"

The devotees filling the streets got angry at Yeon-Joo instead of thanking her.

"These sons of bitches..." Yeon-Joo stared in exasperation at the devotees who went back to praying.

The problem was that there were more than just a few of them. Si-Hun and the other party members were unable to leave the area because they were protecting the praying devotees.

"Hey! Do something about these people!" Yeon-Joo shouted as she looked up.

Kang-Woo, who wiped out the roots of the World Tree with one attack, slowly raised his arms as he saw what was going on.

[Devotees of light.] The words of a god echoed directly within the heads of everyone in the capital. [Prayer with just one's thoughts will not lead to salvation. One must first act toward reaching salvation of their own accord.]

"Aaaahh..."

[Save those in danger and evacuate the city. That is the true path toward the light.]

"I believe!"

"Take the injured and evacuate the city!"

The devotees who got angry at Yeon-Joo changed completely and got moving after hearing Kang-Woo's words.

"Wha..." Yeon-Joo feigned laughter as she stared at Kang-Woo enveloped in radiant splendor commanding the devotees/

'Has he taken a liking to that shit now?'

If that was not the case, how could he say such cringe lines so naturally?

Wham—!

"Kyah!" Yeon-Joo screamed.

A giant tree root attacked her and cut off her thoughts.

"Hup!" Si-Hun stood between Yeon-Joo and the tree root and swung his sword.

Slash!

He had lost the holy sword during the war, but swords were no longer of importance to him after mastering Formless Sword. A sword made of blue condensed sword energy split the tree root in half.

"Be careful," Si-Hun remarked.

"Y-Yeah. Thanks." Yeon-Joo nodded in embarrassment.

Si-Hun went past her and ran to where Kang-Woo was.

"Hyung-nim! There will be no end to them at this rate!"

Kang-Woo nodded. As Si-Hun had said, the roots were continuously pouring out of the Rift in the sky.

'I have to find that black thorn or whatever it was.'

If he did not, they would be stuck in an endless and pointless battle of attrition.

'Authority of the Beholder.'

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and focused. If the black thorn was the cause of the World Tree's corruption, he would be able to find where it was by tracing the energy within the World Tree. He spread out his demonic energy and searched the World Tree's roots.

"Motherfucker," he cursed after examining the roots.

'The energies are entangled.'

Hundreds of energies were violently clashing against one another within the World Tree. Among them, there were energies fundamentally different from mana, sacred power, and demonic energy.

"..."

Kang-Woo frowned. He was reminded of something after searching the inside of the World Tree with the Authority of the Beholder.

'It's like I'm looking at Chaos.'

It was insanely disordered.

"This won't be easy."

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. If someone had heard that, they would have stared at him dumbfoundedly as if asking him what the hell he was talking about. Not easy? The issue was well beyond that.

The inside of the World Tree at the moment was as disordered as a record-breaking tsunami sweeping across an entire city. It would be like trying to find something on the ground while fighting through the extreme current. However...

'It's nothing I can't handle.'

For Kang-Woo, who possessed inexplicably extraordinary levels of energy control, it was only moderately difficult.

Whoooooom!

Kang-Woo located a path in the chaotic storm of energies within the World Tree. He sprinted along the path that would annihilate him with just a single misstep.

'Found it.'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone. He found something embedded in the World Tree, the cause of what was entangling the energies within it.

"This way!" he shouted as he ran to where the black thorn was.

His party members frantically ran after him.

"Hyung-nim! Where is the black thorn?!" Si-Hun asked as he looked around after catching up to Kang-Woo.

He could not see anything besides the root of the World Tree.

"It's not here," Kang-Woo answered calmly.

The party members expressed confusion.

"Th-then where is it?" Yeon-Joo asked.

"There." Kang-Woo pointed at the sky; more specifically, the several-kilometer Rift covering the night sky.

"Don't tell me..."

"Are you saying that... It's in there?" Si-Hun looked up at the Rift in shock.

Hundreds of thousands of World Tree roots were squirming within the Rift.

[A-Aaaahh.]

Elune collapsed to her knees on the spot. If the black thorn was within that area filled with horrendous chaos, it was practically impossible to approach it. They would be ripped into shreds the moment they entered the Rift.

[Y-you... cannot.] Elune shook her head in pallor.

Even if one of the gods of the Triad were here, it would be impossible for them to enter that Rift.

"It's alright," Kang-Woo remarked.

[... Pardon?] Elune looked at Kang-Woo as if she couldn't understand. She shouted hurriedly, [It's alright? Y-you're not planning on going in there, are you?!]

That would be nothing but suicide.

Kang-Woo smiled. "No."

It would be impossible even for him to jump into that Rift and come back alive.

[Then...]

"If we can't go in..."

Crack!

Kang-Woo grabbed one of the roots swung at him and smiled. If they weren't able to go into the Rift, there was only one other option.

"Hup!"

Kang-Woo took a deep breath in, widened his stance, and pulled the root with all his might.

Rumble—!

Thunderous sounds rang throughout the sky of the capital.

'If I can't go in... I'll just pull it out.'

[W-Wait—]

Crackle—!!!

Before Elune could stop Kang-Woo, the colossal tree that acted as the pillar supporting the Triad began to be pulled out by Kang-Woo.

Chapter 422 - God of the Satellite World

The unfathomably colossal tree was being pulled out of the Rift. Although the giant mass of countless roots of the World Tree being squeezed out of the Rift looked like a baby being born, it was more akin to a mother dragging their child out of their room by the hair.

Rumble—!!

A thunderous sound echoed as if the sky itself was being upturned. No, the sound was so massive that it would be no exaggeration to say that it could be heard throughout Aernor.

"Aaaaaaaahhh!" the evacuating citizens screamed as they covered their bleeding ears.

"Celestial Protection!" Han Seol-Ah chanted.

Layla also quickly chanted, "O Gaia, bring down your blessing unto the powerless."

The white light that poured out from them protected the people from the ear splitting sound shaking the entire capital.

"H-hyung-nim?!" Kim Si-Hun looked at Oh Kang-Woo in surprise.

He did not think it was possible to uproot and pull out a tree dozens of kilometers tall. The colossal scale of events sent shivers down his spine.

"Focus," Balrog said to the flustered Si-Hun. He looked up at the roots of the World Tree being pulled out of the Rift and muttered, "... There is something there."

"What?"

Si-Hun looked at where Balrog was looking as well. As he had mentioned, a purple light lingered around the giant mass of roots of the World Tree.

"That's..." Si-Hun slurred.

"There is no time to waste." Balrog jumped on one of the roots and ran up.

"Ngh!" Si-Hun followed after him.

"Wh-where are you going?!" Cha Yeon-Joo shouted as she ran after Si-Hun.

"Lady Elune, this way!" Layla grabbed the collapsed Elune's hand and flew up to the sky.

Seol-Ah, Echidna, and the other party members quickly chased after Balrog and Si-Hun.

"Kang-Woo!"

Seol-Ah looked around for Kang-Woo after climbing on a tree root after Si-Hun. Kang-Woo, who had come up with the insane idea of pulling the World Tree out of the Rift by its root, was panting severely.

"Haaa, so fucking heavy," he cursed as he frowned.

His entire body was screaming in pain after squeezing out all the demonic energy he had without opening the Doors. His vision momentarily blurred; it had been a long time since he had experienced demonic energy exhaustion.

"Fuuu, haaa," Kang-Woo took deep breaths to compose himself.

He could feel the demonic energy he had used up all at once filling back up through the Ten Thousand Demon Core. He wanted to rest some more, but he knew better than anyone that it was not the time.

'Is that the black thorn?'

He looked at the area where purple light was lingering somewhat drearily. The mix of black and purple made it look inexplicably otherworldly.

"That's..."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He remembered seeing the purple energy around the World Tree root somewhere before.

'Was it back when I fought the Constellation of Fear?'

He recalled the god of vengeful spirits with a giant scythe, but he shook his head.

'No, it's a little different.'

He was sure that he had seen it somewhere before, but it was not coming to him.

"Tsk," Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and crouched down.

He did not have the leeway to search through his memories. He jumped, flying across the sky at extraordinary speed.

'Now, then... Let's go see who corrupted the World Tree.'

Kang-Woo raised his right fist and punched using the force generated from shooting forward.

'Skybreaker.'

He activated the skill he had not used in a very long time. The black and purple light collided with Kang-Woo's fist.

Boom—!!

The barrier was destroyed along with a massive shockwave.

"Hyung-nim!"

"Kang-Woo!"

Si-Hun and the other party members arrived after running up the World Tree root. Kang-Woo nodded at them lightly and turned to look inside the destroyed barrier.

"Gurgh, what the hell? Why did the World Tree fall all of a sudden?"

A monster was looking around with its hand on his forehead. The reason why Kang-Woo referred to him as a *monster*

was simple.

"Hmm?"

His skin was covered in unknown mucus, his head resembled that of a snake, and transparent wings were sprouted on his head and back. His muscular arms reached his knees, making him resemble a combination of a Lizardman and an alien.

"Heh, well, well. If it isn't Lady Elune?"

The unknown monster flicked his purple tongue. His voice was rather flippant, unlike his appearance. Kang-Woo frowned as he stared at the monster he had never seen before.

'A demon?'

That was the first thought that came to his mind. Demons varied infinitely in appearance, so there would be no surprise if he was a demon, but...

'No.'

Kang-Woo denied the thought. He could not feel an ounce of demonic energy from the creature; he was simply enveloped in energy that Kang-Woo had never felt before.

'What is that?'

It was neither demonic energy nor sacred power; it was not energy derived from the power of nature like mana or Qi either. It was the first kind of energy Kang-Woo had seen as if the monster had come from an outer world.

"Oh," Kang-Woo expressed. "I remember."

He finally recalled where he had seen the purple energy lingering around the monster.

'It's the power I felt from the purple Rift we used to enter the satellite world.'

Kang-Woo recalled Shade, the satellite world that had fallen to ruin after being corrupted by the Nine Hells. Although the monster looked nothing like the shadow with the *Mimicry* ability, the energy around them was similar.

'But of course...'

The monster possessed far more powerful energy than the shadow.

[You are...] Elune's eyes widened as she stared at the snake-headed monster in disbelief. [H-how are you here...? The world that you lived in already...]

"Heh, yes. It fell to ruin." The snake-headed monster nodded as he flicked his tongue. His eyes were filled with chilling bloodlust. He remarked resentfully, "Because... you abandoned us."

He glared at Elune with bloodlust.

"... Who is he?" Kang-Woo asked Elune.

Elune bit her lip and replied, [He is... the guardian deity of the satellite world... Moab.]

"Was, to be more exact." The snake-headed monster aggressively clenched his fists as he snickered.

Kang-Woo stared at him with narrow eyes.

'If he's a guardian deity...'

That would put him on the same level as Seraph and Gaia, a being with the mission to protect a world and possessed a portion of the providence, the power to guard a star.

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent. He could understand why he could feel such power from the snake-headed monster. The problem was...

"What does he mean by you abandoned them?" he asked.

[That's...] Elune slurred.

The snake-headed monster remarked before she could continue, "It means exactly as it sounds. This goddamn tree abandoned us to guard the Triad."

[That is not true! It was unavoidable—]

"Yeah, yeah, sure." The snake-headed monster nodded as it snickered. "After all, our world was nothing compared to this oh-so-important world, right? Right?"

[You're wrong! The power of the World Tree did not reach the satellite worlds due to the collapse of the Gaia Sys—]

"Well, despite all that," the snake-headed monster interjected and smiled. "It wasn't all bad."

[... Pardon?]

"I would never have met him if my world was never encroached on by the Nine Hells."

The snake-headed monster trembled as if it were in ecstasy and snapped his finger.

Rumble!

The roots of the World Tree corrupted by the purple energy squirmed as if it was in pain.

[N-No...]

Elune hurriedly reached out but collapsed as she coughed up blood due to the rampaging energy within the World Tree.

The snake-headed monster shouted, "Now! Elune! It is time for you to pay for your s—"

"Just a second," Kang-Woo interjected with his hand up.

The snake-headed monster frowned as he glared at the sudden disrupter.

"Who the hell are y—"

"I can already tell what you're gonna say next, so shut up for a second. Lemme think for a bit."

"... What did you say?"

Kang-Woo turned away from the snake-headed monster and fell into thought.

'So, to summarize...'

The balance between Gaia, Aernor, and Huan was disrupted due to the damaged Gaia System, and the World Tree focused its power on the Triad to make up for that imbalance as best it could.

'And...'

The satellite worlds fell to ruin in the process via the encroachment by the Nine Hells through the cracks formed in the protection.

'So, Shade wasn't the only one that fell to ruin.'

The situation was far more severe than he had imagined. If every satellite world had collapsed via the encroachment by the Nine Hells, the next world on the list was naturally Earth.

'Motherfucker.'

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively. In the first place, the fundamental reason why the balance among the Triad was disrupted and the World Tree was forced to give up on the satellite worlds was... because he had collided with the Gaia System.

'It's me again? Why is it always me? Why is it my fault every single time? I just wanted to live a happy life with my kimchi stew. What did I do so wrong for worlds to be ending?'

Kang-Woo pulled on his hair in frustration.

"... Hah," the snake-headed monster chuckled as he watched Kang-Woo pulling on his hair while paying no mind to him.

The monster did not know where the human came from, but he was getting angry from being blatantly ignored. He was the guardian deity who used to rule over an entire world, albeit now a collapsed one. He had even been accepted as one of the masters of the *Four Heavens* and obtained power far beyond his days as a god. There was no need or reason for him to endure this disrespect.

'It's not fully ready yet, but...'

The monster turned to where the black thorn he had embedded in the World Tree was. The thorn embedded in a root was absorbing the energy within the World Tree like a starved beast.

'It should be enough to make them pay for their sins.'

The monster smiled and unsheathed the sword on his waist. It was a long urumi as thin as a piece of paper. The monster flicked his arm like a whip; the long urumi aimed for Kang-Woo as it slithered like a snake.

"Hyung-nim!"

Si-Hun stood between the monster and Kang-Woo. He used Formless Sword and deflected the urumi.

Clang!

"Kurgh!" Si-Hun's hands holding the sword ripped and he was blown back. "Y-you're..."

"Oh? You are quite exceptional for a human." The snake-headed monster lowered his stance as he smiled gloomily and said, "Hear me, humans. My name is Moab. I am a god of a fallen world and one of the loyal subordinates of the Demon of Prophecy."

"... What?" Kang-Woo said with wide eyes.

'One of the loyal subordinates of the Demon of Prophecy? What the hell is he talking about? I don't remember raising someone like you.'

"And...!"

Boom!

Moab stomped on the ground and shouted as he raised his sword high, "The Fourth Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings!"

Enormous energy stormed around Moab.

Kang-Woo's eyes widened again. "Did you just say... Four Heavenly Kings?"

"Kehehe. I doubt amoebas like you who were under the protection of the World Tree have ever heard the name bef—"

"Hyung-nim! He must be the last member of the Four Heavenly Kings!" Si-Hun shouted as if he fully understood what was going on, interrupting Moab.

"Uhh, mm. Yeah..." Kang-Woo stammered with a hardened expression.

'Four Heavenly Kings? They actually exist? Why the fuck does everything I come up with become real? Huh? Why do I keep foreshadowing the plot? What fucking hole are these fuckers crawling out of? Gimme a break, dammit! Four Heavenly Kings? Get with the times! A name like that is lame as fuck! Do these motherfuckers die if they don't group up in fours? Are you the goddamn Teletubbies? Why the Four Heavenly Kings, of all names?'

"... The last member? What are you talking about?" Moab glared at Si-Hun incomprehensibly.

Si-Hun gritted his teeth and answered, "You, Satan, Rakiel, and Lucifer! Did you think I wouldn't know?!"

"What? Satan? Rakiel? Who the hell are they?"

"How dare you try to act dumb, you foul monster!"

"No, seriously, I don't know who they are—"

"How many heroes do you think... died at your filthy hands?!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Alec Osborne! Reynald! Ludwig! You... You bastards killed them all!"

"You're not listening to me. Who the hell are—"

"Hyung-nim!" Si-Hun turned to Kang-Woo as if not interested in Moab's excuses.

Kang-Woo nodded as his eyes shone sharply. "Yeah, Si-Hun."

As long as Moab revealed that he was one of the Four Heavenly Kings, there was no longer any need for chatter.

'Countless heroes have lost their lives at their filthy hands.'

Their sacrifices could not be left in vain.

"It's time for us to avenge those great heroes."

Chapter 423 - I Will Have You Pay For Your Great Sins

"Wha..." Moab's mouth gaped open because the conversation flowed in an incomprehensible direction.

He was surprised that they knew about the Four Heavenly Kings, but what they said about him being the last remaining of them confused him even more.

'I wasn't informed about any of the Heavenly Kings taking action.'

They were all making preparations for the *time of prophecy*; Moab was likely the only one who had shown himself in the Triad, but...

'What the hell are these humans talking about?'

The humans have been saying incomprehensible things for a while now, about how Moab was the last remaining Heavenly King and that the others had died at the hands of heroes.

"Did you cast some sort of illusion magic, Elune?" Moab asked with a frown.

Nothing else would be able to explain what was going on, but his guess was completely wrong. Even Elune was staring at Oh Kang-Woo and Kim Si-Hun wide-eyed as if she couldn't follow the conversation.

[Saviors, what do you mean by that you have to avenge the great heroes...?]

"They were our precious comrades as well as our good friends," Kang-Woo said as he teared up.

"But they were... killed at the hands of... the Four Heavenly Kings."

He lowered his head as his shoulders slightly trembled. A single tear flowed down his cheek. Just thinking about the heroes' deaths felt like his heart was being squeezed. Moab had not killed them himself, but he was still one of the Four Heavenly Kings; there was no way that he was completely uninvolved with the other Kings.

[Ah,] Elune expressed.

She was informed of many things that occurred in the physical world by the other gods while she was the guardian of the World Tree, but this was her first time hearing of this.

[I see... how unfortunate,] she remarked somberly.

She was well aware of how it felt to lose loved ones.

"I..." Kang-Woo bit his lip and clenched his fists. "I will not let their deaths be in vain."

There was no way that he would ever forget their bravery that had shone brightly until the moment of their deaths.

[Savior...]

Elune stared at Kang-Woo with shaking eyes and her entire body tingled. Kang-Woo was not crying simply because those precious to him had died; he was trying to move forward with their lives on his shoulders.

'O almighty Titans...' Elune thought as she closed her eyes. 'Your prophecy was correct. This man is... the one who will save the world from the Demon of Prophecy.'

Her heart beat rapidly. She felt like she could see a light of hope shining down on the world prophesied to fall... and the future filled with despair. Elune smiled faintly as she brought her hands together.

"What the hell have you been talking about since earlier?" Moab walked forward, unable to handle it any longer. He flicked his snake tongue and continued, "Reynald? Ludwig? I don't even know who these people a—"

"Shut up!" Kang-Woo shook with rage as uncontrollable rage filled him. "How dare you shamelessly make excuses?!"

"No, I seriously don't kn—"

"Reynald and Ludwig... Those heroes should never have died that way!" he shouted straight from the heart.

Kang-Woo recalled the deaths of the two heroes. He had not witnessed the moment of Alec Osborne's death, but he clearly remembered the moments of Reynald and Ludwig's deaths.

"You're not listening to me. I—"

"Enough of your lowly excuses, Moab!"

"I'm not making excuses, I just don't know what you talking ab—"

"I... I will never forgive you."

"Son of a bitch..."

Kang-Woo closed his eyes to look away from MNoab, who was still acting dumb.

'He's not worth talking to.'

Moab had no intention of listening, so there was no way that Kang-Woo's words would reach him. The truth meant nothing before his shamelessness.

'If words won't get through to him...'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone sharply. There was no other way but this.

"I will have you... pay for your grave sins," he said what Moab had tried to say to Elune earlier.

"Who the hell are you? Huh? You're just saying what you want to say without—"

Kang-Woo dashed toward Moab, who had been complaining with a frown.

Boom!

A ray of golden light streaked behind him. He stretched his right hand downward and the Key of the Demonic Sea turned into the form of a sword; it was Del Lain, the sword of the sun. Kang-Woo gripped the divine artifact of Tirion, the late God of Heroes, and swung it down aggressively.

Claaaang—!

Moab was pushed back along with the echoing sound of metal clashing.

"Wh-what the—?!" Moab's eyes were filled with shock. He stared at Kang-Woo in disbelief. "Deific Essence?"

Not only that, it was not mere Low-rank or Lower Intermediate-rank; it was at least High-rank.

'How could a human possibly...!'

Moab stared at Kang-Woo incomprehensibly. It was already shocking enough that a human possessed Deific Essence, but one of High-rank or above? He felt as if he was having a nightmare.

"... It seems you had a trick up your sleeve."

Moab's eyes shone sharply as he flicked his tongue. He fixed his stance and grabbed his sword tighter. He had lost his composure for a moment due to the unexpected variable, but that was it. He would not lose in Deific Essence since he was a former guardian deity of a world.

"Fuuu." Moab took a deep breath and unleashed his Deific Essence.

Back when he was still a guardian deity, he would have had to pay an enormous price in his Divinity to unleash his Deific Essence in the physical world. However, he had been freed from the *Law of Titans* after receiving that person's *grace*.

"Hissssss!!!"

Moab swung down his urumi with his long arms. It coiled like a snake and then...

Swoosh!

The coiled sword straightened and shot out at incredible speed, piercing Kang-Woo's shoulder in the blink of an eye.

"Kurgh!" Kang-Woo grunted.

However, that was only for a moment. He did not jump back but rather walked forward.

"What?!"

Moab was startled by Kang-Woo's crazy behavior as if he didn't care if his arm was cut off, creating an opening for Kang-Woo to exploit. He swung Del Lain with his other arm, aiming for Moab's flank.

"What a cheap scheme!" shouted Moab and grimaced as he pulled out his urumi stabbing Kang-Woo's shoulder.

He then swung it at Del Lain being swung toward his flank.

Clang!

Del Lain was blown back. Kang-Woo used the recoil to flip backward and tried to deal a somersault kick on Moab's chin.

"Kurgh!" Moab jumped back to dodge the attack and crossed his arms.

The urumi moved elegantly as if it were dancing, pouring waves of condensed sword energy like rainfall. Kang-Woo was left completely open to the sword energy attacks after performing a large attack like a somersault kick.

'Alright!'

Moab's eyes shone, thinking that he had grasped victory. The purple condensed sword energies poured down on Kang-Woo to tear him apart, but...

Fwoosh—!

Gold and black flames resembling a black sun enveloped Kang-Woo. The purple condensed sword energies flying at him disappeared in a flash.

"... What?"

The sword energies had vanished as if they had been vaporized. No, that was not the right word to describe it. Moab looked in shock at the flames akin to a black sun. If he saw it correctly...

'They were... eaten?'

His attacks had most certainly been eaten by those raging flames.

"Urgh!" Moab quickly jumped backward as a chill ran down his back.

Kang-Woo chased after him and aimed for his flank again.

"No, you don't!" Moab swung his urumi to blow back Del Lain again.

Just then, Kang-Woo smiled unpleasantly as he let go of Del Lain without hesitation.

"...!" Moab's eyes widened.

He instinctively scrunched up after realizing that the attack had been a feint, but Kang-Woo placed his hand on Moab's solar plexus before he could.

"Chaos, Burst."

Boooooom—!!

A colossal explosion engulfed Moab.

"Kurgh!"

Moab was blown back as he coughed up blood, but Kang-Woo grabbed him by the ankle.

"You will never be able to imagine...!" Kang-Woo shouted as he infused his voice with boiling rage. "For how long I— no, we have waited to take our revenge!"

"*Cough!* What revenge... are you talking ab—"

"We will no longer take it lying down!"

Kang-Woo glared ferociously at Moab. He turned to his party members watching the battle.

'If only...'

He imagined how happy he would have been to see Alec, Reynald, and Ludwig among them. Just imagining it brought him to tears.

'No, no!'

Kang-Woo quickly shook his head. It was not the time to be crying. The tears could wait until he had taken revenge for his precious fallen comrades.

"This is...!"

Bang!

Kang-Woo stomped his feet with Moab's ankle still in hand.

"For Alec, more righteous than anyone!"

"Kurgh!"

Kang-Woo smashed Moab down on the ground by the ankle. A god possessing Deific Essence would not take any damage just from being smashed into the ground, so Kang-Woo made a bed of spikes on the ground with the Key of the Demonic Sea.

"Gaaaaaaaaaahhh!" Moab screamed as the spikes pierced him.

"And this is...!" Kang-Woo raised his leg and kicked Moab in the face like a soccer ball. "For Reynald, more courageous than anyone!"

Moab tumbled on the ground without even being able to scream after being kicked right in the face. His vision blurred and horrible pain spread throughout his body.

"A-Argghh."

Moab stood up and grabbed his face. Any other being would have died after receiving such attacks, but his powerful Divinity was healing him at incredible speed.

"And lastly, this is...!"

"W-Wait!" yelled Moab in pallor after hearing Kang-Woo's voice.

However, Kang-Woo completely ignored his desperate pleas. He jumped as he was running at Moab and raised his arms over his head with his fingers clasped. He then swung his hands down on Moab's head like a hammer.

"For Ludwig, who loved the light more than anyone!"

Bash—!!

Chapter 424 - Demonic Sword Ingrium

"Kurgh!"

Moab's skull caved in after Oh Kang-Woo smashed his fist down on his head. Moab screamed in pain as he grabbed his head. The sticky fluid covering his skin splattered all over the place.

"*Huff, huff,*" Kang-Woo panted heavily.

He was trembling all over after unleashing all the emotions he had been suppressing this entire time.

"Hyung-nim..." Kim Si-Hun walked up to the heavily panting Kang-Woo and stared at him with a complicated expression. "So you've been keeping it in all this time."

"... I'm sorry for fighting by myself, Si-Hun."

Only then did Kang-Woo realize that he had rampaged by himself, blinded by his fury. Si-Hun was probably holding back more emotions than him.

"Not at all." Si-Hun shook his head. He continued in dejection, "I know very well... that I won't be of help to you with my current strength."

He had become confident in his skills after mastering Formless Sword and grasping the principle of Mind's Sword.

'But...'

Getting blown away just from blocking the enemy's attack, which did not even have the enemy's full power behind it, made Si-Hun realize that his confidence had been conceit.

'It's... still not enough. Nowhere near enough. I have to get stronger. Only then will I...'

Si-Hun looked up and saw Kang-Woo. He was overlapping with the heroes brutally murdered by demons. Si-Hun clenched his fists.

'I won't let hyung die, at the very least. I'll protect him at any cost.'

Si-Hun embedded the pledge deep within his heart.

[Savior...] Elune approached Kang-Woo and sorrowfully wiped the tears flowing down Kang-Woo's cheeks. [I see that even a person as great as you... holds great sadness within your heart.]

Her eyes were filled with compassion, sympathy, and trust for Kang-Woo.

'Good,' Kang-Woo thought as the corners of his mouth slightly rose.

Not only had he neutralized Moab, but he had also earned Elune's trust. His earnings were massive despite this being an unexpected situation.

'What a fucking mess.'

Kang-Woo had never expected the Four Heavenly Kings to exist.

'Fucking hell. What should I do about the other three?'

Moab had referred to himself as the Fourth Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings. In other words, there was a First, Second, and Third Heaven.

'Everyone is thinking Moab is the final Heavenly King.'

Lucifer remained, but since his appearance had already been revealed to the whole world, the appearance of a new Heavenly King would cause extreme confusion.

'Goddammit.'

Kang-Woo's mind was a mess. He sighed.

'Just focus on the task at hand.'

It was not the time to bother with the other Heavenly Kings that haven't even shown themselves yet. Restoring the World Tree and having Elune find the Demon God's corpse was of higher priority.

"U-Urghh," Han Seol-Ah groaned as she stared at Elune, anxiously biting her lip.

'Huh?'

Kang-Woo's expression froze. An uneasy feeling ran down his back. He looked down at himself and saw that Elune was embracing him as if consoling him.

'Darling, no!'

Kang-Woo's face turned pale as he imagined the worst-case scenario.

"Kang-Woo..." Seol-Ah walked toward him with dead eyes.

Just then, someone grabbed her shoulder.

"... Lilith?" Seol-Ah called.

"Shh." Lilith placed her index finger on her lips and winked.

Seol-Ah expressed reluctance for a moment and then nodded lifelessly.

'Nice!'

Kang-Woo smiled thanks to Lilith's perfect intervention. Lilith was far more proficient in controlling Seol-Ah than him in some ways. Even while Seol-Ah was on the verge of losing her sense of reason due to angelic instinct, she always listened to Lilith.

'And...'

Although Seol-Ah lacked control over her instincts, she was not bad enough for Kang-Woo to consider her a troll. Her obsession was to be with Kang-Woo; the stronger that obsession was, the stronger her emotion to not be hated by Kang-Woo got as well. She would never do something that would bring Kang-Woo harm.

'Darling seems to have calmed down.'

It was time to pull out the black thorn embedded in the World Tree now. Just as Kang-Woo was about to separate from Elune...

Rumble—!!

[Kyaaah!]

"Lady Elune!"

The roots of the World Tree shook greatly. Elune scrunched up and screamed in pain. Black light was pouring out of the roots.

'What the hell is this?'

Kang-Woo frowned as he supported Elune.

"Kurgh, argh." Moab flinched on the ground with his skull bashed in. The black light pouring out of the World Tree's roots flowed into him. "*Hisssssss!*"

Moab's head began to rapidly regenerate. The black light that had poured into him shot toward the surroundings.

"My king!"

"Hyung-nim!"

Both Balrog and Si-Hun stood in front of Kang-Woo to protect him. Balrog put on his Overlord Armor to block the light, and Si-Hun used his sword to deflect the light.

Wham! Crack!

The ray of black light destroyed one of the World Tree's roots.

"Hyung-nim, this is..."

"Take care of Lady Elune for me," Kang-Woo said as he left the panting Elune to Si-Hun.

He smiled as he stared at the staggering Moab slowly standing up.

'Alright, you have a phase 2, do you?'

Kang-Woo had almost been disappointed that a battle against one of the guardian deities of a satellite world ended so anticlimactic. Kang-Woo walked up to Moab as he licked his lips.

"Kurghhh. You... bastard." Moab glared at Kang-Woo as he touched his head, which had caved in after Kang-Woo's punch. He muttered furiously, "I won't... forgive... you."

Kang-Woo looked back at Elune, who was looking at them, and clenched his fists.

"You're not done yet... is it?" Kang-Woo dragged his foot in annoyance. He said in a low tone, "I already expected this to happen. It was like this with the other Heavenly Kings. Satan and Rakiel... didn't die so easily either."

He was already used to it; neither Satan nor Rakiel allowed themselves to die without using the cowardly trump card up their sleeves.

"For the last fucking time, I don't fucking know those goddamn people!!!" Moab yelled in desperation.

Kang-Woo frowned. "Hah, I'm surprised you don't get tired of that shit. Are you still playing dumb?"

"Ah..." Moab grabbed the back of his neck as he staggered. "I see... You'll act like that to the very end, is it?" Moab glared at Kang-Woo in bloodlust as if he had given up on explaining himself. "Let us see if you can keep saying that after you die."

Moab threw his urumi down on the ground.

"...?" Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes as he looked at Moab throwing away his weapon.

Moab smiled. "Your pointless show ends here."

He took a deep breath and straightened his back. He acknowledged his blunder.

'The human is powerful.'

The fact that Moab had gotten agitated due to the humans' absurd bullshit was part of it, but that was not enough to explain his loss. The human in front of Moab was abnormally powerful to the point that he would not be able to beat him with his own strength.

'In that case...'

Moab's eyes shone as he looked at the black light pouring out of the World Tree. The tree was no longer resisting, meaning that it had been fully corrupted. Moab smiled.

'At least the plan has succeeded.'

The primary part of their ultimate plan had succeeded; with this, his master had likely gotten his hands on what he wanted.

'Now...'

Moab smiled as he recalled his conversation with his master.

"What to do with the thorn once the World Tree has been corrupted?" Moab's master waved his hand in disinterest and continued, *"You can have it."*

"A-are you sure?"

"Yeah, yeah. You should replace that flimsy sword. It looks like it'd break from the slightest touch."

Moab's master cackled. Although he was acting like it was no big deal, Moab knew better than anyone how immense the power within the thorn was.

"Hissssss." Moab flicked his tongue and snickered. "Human, do you know what material the high elves use when they create holy swords?"

"... What?"

Kang-Woo frowned due to the unexpected question. Why was Moab asking a question like that all of a sudden?

"Hiss, Elune, I'm sure you know the answer."

[D-don't tell me you...] Elune stared at Moab with wide shaking eyes.

Moab continued as he cackled, "High elves use a branch of the World Tree when creating holy swords. A very, very small amount, at that." Moab curled his fingers to make a small circle and smiled. "In that case, what do you think the material would be for a demonic sword?"

[M-Moab! What are you trying to do?!] Elune hurriedly shouted.

Moab burst into crazed laughter. "Kehehe! I corrupted the World Tree, so how wasteful would it be to not use its branch?"

He extended his arm toward the World Tree pouring black light. The black thorn embedded in its root was slowly pulled out. It was exuding suffocating energy after absorbing as much of the impure energy of the corrupted World Tree as it could.

[N-no...]

Elune trembled in pallor. The black thorn had turned into a branch of the World Tree after absorbing the energy of the corrupted World Tree. Just imagining the power of a demonic sword created with a branch of the World Tree, one exuding far more energy than what regular branches contained no less, was terrifying in and of itself.

[S-savior! We have to stop Moab!]

"Understood." Kang-Woo nodded.

He had no idea what Moab was trying to do, but he at least knew that he shouldn't let Moab do as he wished.

"Stop, Moab!" shouted Kang-Woo as radiant splendor poured out of him.

"*Hiss!*" Moab spread out his arms. "It's too late! Come! Demonic sword of the World Tree, Ingrium!"

Rumble—!!

Immense energy poured out from the black thorn. The thorn containing the energy of the corrupted World Tree began to turn into a greatsword almost two meters long and floated in the air.

"The demonic sword will guide you all toward damnation— Huh?"

Demonic Sword Ingrium slowly flew in Kang-Woo's direction.

'Wait, huh?'

Fwoom.

'Don't come here.'

Fwoom.

'Don't fucking come this way, motherfucker.'

Fwoom.

'Please fuck off.'

Riiing.

[Demonic Sword Ingrium has recognized you as its master!]

[You have been chosen by Ingrium!]

[You have obtained the title 'Ruler of Demonic Swords!']

'Fucking hell.'

Fwoom.

'What the fuck is this thing? Why is it coming to me?'

Chapter 425 - It's Calling Me

"H-Huh?"

Oh Kang-Woo was not the only surprised one; Moab looked dumbfoundedly back and forth between the demonic sword and Kang-Woo.

"Wh-What? What is happening?" Moab said to himself.

Demonic Sword Ingrium had been attracted to someone else, the God of Splendor, no less.

'I was told that Ingrium would be drawn to the greatest demonic being.'

Moab was the only demonic being here.

'Has something gone wrong?'

He wondered if he had made some sort of mistake during the creation process of Ingrium, but he could not think of anything. He had embedded into the World Tree the *Tooth of Predation*, an item his master gave, capable of entangling the energy within the World Tree.

He then turned the Tooth of Predation that had absorbed the energy of the corrupted World Tree into a branch of the corrupted World Tree, granted it a name, and added an ego of a demonic sword into it. Everything had gone exactly to plan.

'But why...'

Why was the demonic sword heading to the God of Splendor instead?

"Urgh!"

Moab ran toward the demonic sword flying to Kang-Woo and forcibly grasped it. Seeing that, Kang-Woo's eyes shone as he clenched his fists.

'Alright! Nice going, snake-head! Yeah, just take it! I don't need it, so just take it and fuck off.'

Kang-Woo cheered for Moab desperately.

"Kurgh! Your master... is... me!!" Moab shouted with a frown as he gripped Ingrium's handle tightly.

Kang-Woo created tiny neon sticks in secret and waved them.

'Do it! Do it! Do your best, Moab oppa!! Please get that crazy sword away from me! Do your best, Moab opp—'

Whooooo—!!

"K-kurgh—! N-no! I-I am your master!"

'You fucking dipshit!!'

Kang-Woo's face turned pale. Immense energy poured from the demonic sword's handle and tore Moab's hands apart. Moab stepped back as he screamed, his hands having become like bloody rags.

Fwoom.

Ingrioum began to fly toward Kang-Woo again after pushing Moab away.

[Lord... Kang-Woo? C-could that sword be flying toward you?]

"Why is a demonic sword heading to hyung-nim...?"

Elune and Kim Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo incomprehensibly. It was not just the two of them; the citizens of the empire who had not managed to evacuate yet mumbled in confusion.

"Wh-what's going on?"

"Is that sword flying at the God of Splendor?"

"Th-the God of Splendor is in danger!"

"N-no. Take a closer look. That's..."

"Doesn't the demonic sword look like it's being drawn to the God of Splendor?"

It was flying so slowly that it looked nothing like an attack. The mumbles grew larger. Cold sweats trickled down Kang-Woo's back.

'Holy fuck. What do I do? What the fuck is going on?'

He did not find it a disaster when the demonic sword was made, but something absurd occurred. He recalled his battle against Tai Wuji.

'It's similar to back then.'

The Demon God's legacy completed by Tai Wuji had flown to Kang-Woo instead.

'The problem is...'

He was alone at the time, but far too many people were watching right now. Kang-Woo could not afford to devour the lavish feast in front of him at the moment. He stared at the demonic sword pouring out immense demonic energy.

'I don't need you, so please fuck off.'

Kang-Woo was drooling from the immense power within the demonic sword, but he did not want it to the point that he would risk his true identity being discovered.

"Wh-what the hell have you done?!" Moab fiercely bared his teeth at Kang-Woo.

'I wanna know just as much as you, man.'

Kang-Woo stared at the demonic sword flying his way as he bit his lip anxiously and racked his brain about what to do.

'Claiming it to be Moab's scheme is a bit of a stretch.'

Moab was acting far too unsightly for Kang-Woo to frame it on him. How could he possibly claim such a thing when Moab was flicked away by the sword like a man kicked away by his leaving lover after grabbing onto her clothes?

'It's not that believable to say that the demonic sword is coming to attack me either.'

The demonic sword was flying so gently toward him that it did not feel menacing in the slightest; it was like a dog greeting its owner.

'In that case...'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone sharply as a thought popped up in his head.

"This is..." he expressed confusion as he stared at the demonic sword flying his way.

[Lord Kang-Woo, wh-what is going on?] Elune asked.

However, Kang-Woo ignored her and walked toward the demonic sword.

He mumbled as he stared fixedly at it, "What? I can't hear you very well. Can you speak a little louder — oh."

Kang-Woo's expression hardened.

"What's wrong, hyung-nim?" Si-Hun asked.

"What's wrong with you? What can't you hear well?" Cha Yeon-Joo asked in wonder.

"... What?" Kang-Woo flinched and turned to Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo in surprise. "You can't hear this voice?"

"Voice... you say?"

"What voice?"

Kang-Woo clenched his fists and looked back at the demonic sword. "... It's crying. It keeps talking in a sad voice."

"What? I can't hear anything..." Yeon-Joo remarked.

"No, I'm sure. It's screaming desperately to help it and to get it out of here!"

"Have your ears gone bad? None of us can hear anything..." Yeon-Joo frowned.

[A-Aaaahh!] Elune's eyes widened as if she had realized something. She trembled in disbelief and continued, [L-Lord Kang-Woo, did you perhaps... hear the voice of the World Tree? How could you directly hear the voice of the World Tree...?!]

It was impossible even for a high elf to hear the voice of the World Tree.

[Aaaahh, savior.]

Elune modestly kneeled and brought her hands together. Hearing the voice of the World Tree was a miracle impossible to experience unless one was a savior.

She said desperately with tears running down her cheeks, [Please... shine your light down on us trapped within the endless darkness.]

Kang-Woo looked down at her and then slowly walked toward the demonic sword.

"H-hyung-nim! It's dangerous!"

Si-Hun stood between him and the sword. Kang-Woo put his hand on Si-Hun's shoulder and shook his head.

"No, it's not dangerous."

"Hyung-nim...?"

"It's calling me." Kang-Woo stared at Ingrium with shaking eyes. "It's telling me... to save it."

The single strand of ego left of the World Tree, which had been corrupted, was calling Kang-Woo desperately.

"..."

'Save me. Save me. Save me. Take me out of this darkness. Take me out of this despair. Take me out of this nightmare.'

"A-arghh." Kang-Woo crouched as he covered his ears and he twisted and turned in pain.

"K-Kang-Woo!" Han Seol-Ah ran to him in pallor.

"Stay away" Kang-Woo extended his hand toward her to stop her and stood up as he bit his lip. "I have to... do this on my own."

No one but him would be able to do it.

"Fuuu."

Kang-Woo took a deep breath and staggered toward the demonic sword.

"Bastaaaaard! What are you trying to do?"

Moab charged at Kang-Woo anxiously, but a brown-haired young man got in his way.

"Do not interfere with the king."

Ker-thunk.

The sound of cogwheels engaging rang out. A black full-plate armor enveloped Balrog and he swung his fist hard at Moab.

Wham!

"Kurgh!"

Moab was blown back by a massive impact. It was nowhere near enough force to push him back if he had been in his usual state, but it was difficult to endure after his power had weakened after his battle against Kang-Woo.

Moab gritted his teeth and ran forward again, but...

"Stay away from hyung."

"We'll keep him away, Kang-Woo."

Si-Hun and Layla joined the battle.

Moab frowned aggressively. "You dare..."

Hissssss. A menacing sound left Moab's mouth.

Boom—!

The battle between Moab and Kang-Woo's party members began.

"..."

Kang-Woo turned away from his party members again and walked toward the sword. He arrived right in front of it and grabbed Ingrium by the hilt.

Whoooooom—!!

Immense power filled him as suffocating demonic energy poured out of the sword and swept everything around it.

"Kurgh, a-arghh." Kang-Woo scrunched up as he held the sword.

Blood vessels popped out from the arm grabbing the sword and he coughed up blood.

[S-savior!] Elune shouted as Kang-Woo was being corrupted by the demonic sword.

"Kurgh, hurgh!" Kang-Woo gripped the sword harder as he panted heavily. "I'll... save... you from... the darkness..."

Whoooooom—!

Radiant light poured out.

Riiing.

[A contract with Demonic Sword Ingrium has been established.]

[You have acquired full control over the demonic energy of Demonic Sword Ingrium.]

[Updating the Trait 'Ruler of Demonic Energy.']

The demonic energy pouring out of Demonic Sword Ingrium began to be dyed in white. Radiant splendor spread throughout the surroundings like a wave of light.

[A-aaaahh. O light...]

Elune burst into tears as she watched the demonic sword turn into a holy sword. Chills ran down her back.

"Haaa, haaa." Kang-Woo held the demonic— no, holy sword blazing in radiant light.

He ran toward Moab, whom his party members were keeping in check.

"U-urghh!"

Moab quickly tried to dodge the sword, but Kang-Woo pierced his heart faster.

"Kurgh!" Moab coughed up purple blood after getting stabbed by Ingrium. "*C-cough...?* Wh-what the...?"

Moab's eyes widened. He had surely witnessed a miracle of the demonic sword being converted to a holy sword, but...

"This is just a demonic sword!"

It was enveloped in golden light, but it was still exuding demonic energy like it was before. Its appearance had changed a little, but its contents not at all.

"What... in the world..."

Moab looked up in incomprehension at the God of Splendor, who was staring right at him with his sword embedded in Moab's heart. The God of Splendor was smirking nastily with his back to his party members.

"Y-you... don't tell me..." Moab's eyes widened as he imagined something that should never have happened. "You bastard..."

He coughed up purple blood again; he could tell that he did not have much time left.

"Cough! Cough! Do not rest easy... just because you defeated me." Moab fell to his knees and continued resentfully, "I am but... the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings..."

"The hell are you talking about?" Kang-Woo frowned in confusion. "I know that Satan was the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings."

"You motherf..."

Thud. Moab collapsed to the floor. He said as he lost hold of himself, "Like I said... Who the hell... is... Satan...?"

With that, Moab took his last breath.

Chapter 426 - There's No Reason To Be Scared Of Darling

"Hm, hmm~ Hm, hm, hm."

A boy was humming joyfully atop a hill covered in dry sand red as if it were dyed in blood. He was sitting on a giant rock and was innocently swinging his legs.

Step, tap, step, tap.

Someone slowly walked toward the boy with the sound of a staff hitting the ground between the steps.

The boy asked without looking back, "Is that you, Amon?"

"Yes, Lord Bael." The hunchback demon wearing an old robe bowed deeply. "The World Tree has been successfully corrupted."

"Good work." The boy smiled brightly and nodded.

Amon rubbed his staff on the ground and remarked, "However, it is not a permanent corruption. Your tooth has been removed, so the World Tree will be restored to its original state soon."

"Hehe. It doesn't matter." Bael lightly shook his head as if he didn't care. "I already got what I wanted."

Bael looked up into the sky and smiled widely.

The corners of Amon's wrinkly mouth rose. "Is that so?"

"Yeah."

"May I assume that means you will be departing right away?"

"Mmm~ about that," Bael leaned back to look at Amon. "I'm thinking of seeing someone before I go."

"Who?"

"Lucifer." Bael licked his lips and cackled. "Ahhh, I haven't seen Lucifer in so long either. I wonder if he's doing well?"

“I am sure that Lord Lucifer misses you as well.”

“Hihi! You think so too, right?”

Bael clapped his hands together with a bright smile.

Amon placed his hand on the top of his staff and asked, “But... Are you sure this is fine?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Ingrium has fallen to the Demon King’s hands.”

“Oh, ohhhh! That?” Bael smiled and continued, “It’s fine. After all, I let Moab have it so I could give the demonic sword to the Demon King.”

“...”

Amon remained silent as he looked down at the leisurely Bael. He could see an endless abyss in the innocent-looking boy.

“Hihihi,” Bael giggled as he shook his legs. He then stretched and laid down on the ground with his arms and legs spread out widely. “Nghhh~! Ah, I can’t wait.”

Bael looked up at the sky and mumbled, “I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait, I can’t wait.”

The corners of his mouth ripped open to his earlobes and revealed sharp teeth of a beast. He licked his lips with his long tongue and saliva drooled down to his chin.

“I wanna eat...” Bael jumped up and down restlessly. “I wanna eat, I wanna eat, I wanna eat, I wanna eat, I wanna eat, I wanna eat!!!”

Crackle!

Bael extended his arm and pulled out the Second Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings.

“L-Lord Bael?” Peleshet, the master of the Second Heaven, twisted anxiously as Bael grabbed him by the neck.

“I’m... hungry.”

The crazed eyes of a starved beast glared at Peleshet.

“E-EEK...!”

Bael’s mouth split open as wide as how snakes devoured their prey.

Crunch!

Peleshet’s head vanished into Bael’s mouth. It was horrendous to see a boy greedily chewing on a head far larger than himself.

“*Munch, munch.*” Bael swallowed Peleshet’s head and began to hum again. “Hmm~ hm, hm, hm~”

The bright and innocent sound of humming echoed throughout the land of the Nine Hells.

“O light...”

“Believe in the light!”

“Ohmen! Ohmen!”[1]

A week passed since the attack of the World Tree on the capital and Moab was killed by Kang-Woo. The Church of Splendor had been growing explosively even before this incident, but it had picked up even more speed.

Of course, the rapid expansion was majorly thanks to Lilith, who had spread the news throughout the continent that the God of Splendor saved the capital from the corrupted World Tree. She even used the immense wealth stored at the Church of Splendor’s base to restore the capital with the help of the devotees.

Not only did the God of Splendor save the capital from the Corrupted World Tree, but the Church of Splendor was even providing the funds and manpower to restore the continent; it was only natural that the church’s influence would rise. The nobles that had managed to survive Iris’s purge of corrupt nobles also used this chance to donate large sums of money to the Church of Splendor to improve public opinion.

“Haaa,” Oh Kang-Woo sighed as he looked down at the horde of people restoring the capital. “What the fuck is with the *Ohmen...?*”

He frowned as he heard the chant that the Church of Splendor’s devotees had recently come up with. He could not get used to it no matter how many times he heard it.

‘That aside...’

Kang-Woo frowned as he tapped on his chest. The Ten Thousand Demon Core contained the corpse of Moab that he had eaten with the Authority of Predation.

‘Eating him didn’t give me all that much.’

It might be because Moab used a form of energy different from what Kang-Woo used, or because Kang-Woo had just become too powerful. Regardless, Kang-Woo did not gain much after the digestion was complete despite having his hopes up since Moab was a god of a satellite world.

‘In any case...’

He had gained barely anything from Moab, but he had gained something. Kang-Woo slightly turned his head to the table to look at the sword with faint light pouring out through the sheath.

Whoosh!

The sword flew to his hand the moment Kang-Woo extended his arm toward it.

‘Demonic Sword Ingrim, was it?’

It was a powerful weapon made with a branch of the corrupted World Tree.

'It doesn't feel like it should be that much of a big deal.'

The power within the sword was not weak in the slightest; it was undeniable that Holy Sword Ludwig could not even be compared to Ingrium.

'But...'

It did not contain power that could destroy the entire world or to the point that Kang-Woo was unable to control it.

'It's just a little better than a sword made with the Key of the Demonic Sea.'

Considering the Key of the Demonic Sea was a Transcendent-grade weapon, the fact that it was stronger was honestly extraordinary.

"Tsk... Am I being too greedy?"

The fundamental reason was likely Kang-Woo's growth; he had become so strong that his weapon's capabilities were pointless.

'Well, at least the amount of demonic energy I can use without opening the Doors rose.'

Kang-Woo's demonic energy was not infinite unless he opened the Doors. To be more exact, it was infinite, but it just took time to replenish it through the Ten Thousand Demon Core. If he had to make a comparison, his state without opening the Doors is like a phone unplugged from a charger.

'Following that analogy, this thing is like a power bank.'

Kang-Woo was able to store demonic energy in Ingrium, so it was extremely useful when he did not have the Doors open. Not only that, it could store an immense amount of demonic energy.

"I would've liked to have given it to Si-Hun instead," Kang-Woo mumbled as he twirled Ingrium around.

No matter how he thought about it, the weapon was more suited for Si-Hun than him since Si-Hun far surpassed him in the way of the sword.

'I can't give it to him though since it's already imprinted to me.'

Kang-Woo looked down at Ingrium in disappointment. Just then, someone knocked on the door.

Kang-Woo turned to the door. "Come in."

A blonde woman in a dress carefully opened the door and entered. It was Iris.

"How are you feeling?" Kang-Woo asked.

Elune had left Iris's body to revive the World Tree after Moab's death. Iris had fallen into a panic after finding out that she had been asleep for two months.

"O-oh, I'm feeling much better now, Sir Kang-Woo." Iris carefully nodded and walked up to Kang-Woo. She looked around, searching for someone. "Umm... Is Seol-Ah here?"

"Nope. Darling left a little earlier."

“Phew.”

Iris sighed in relief and cautiously sat next to Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo asked, “Have you been contacted by Lady Elune at all?”

“That happens to be why I’ve come to see you today.” Iris clenched her dress and lowered her head. “Lady Elune said that... she would borrow my body to manifest again soon.”

She was trembling, her eyes filled with fear. It was natural to be restless since a goddess would be borrowing her body to manifest.

“Are you scared?” Kang-Woo asked and smirked.

Iris lowered her head and tapped on the floor with the ends of her heels. She mumbled as she wept, “... Yes, I’m scared.”

Kang-Woo patted Iris’s head. “Whenever you’re scared, think back to that time.”

Iris recalled a memory filled with blood. Kang-Woo put his hand over her trembling hand.

“You can beat your fears. You can kill and overcome them. You’ve proven that yourself.”

Hearing Kang-Woo’s clear voice calmed Iris down for some reason. Her hands stopped trembling.

She smiled. “Thank you very much, Sir Kang-Woo.”

“Right then, I’ll call my party members.”

It would be better for everyone to hear Elune’s words than just himself. Kang-Woo stood up.

“S-Sir Kang-Woo!” Iris quickly grabbed his clothes.

“Hm?”

“I... ummm... S-Seol-Ah is a bit...”

Iris trembled in fear once again; she looked even more terrified than when Elune said that she would manifest by borrowing Iris’s body.

‘What? What’s so wrong about my darling? She’s kinder and more gentle than anyone.’

There were indeed times when she lost control, but that was only because she did not have full control over her angelic instincts. She was usually very kind to everyone.

‘Yup, yup. My darling is the literal epitome of an angel!’

That was not an understatement since her body was now closer to that of an angel.

Kang-Woo sternly said, “Iris. I know what my darling did to you, but I think your attitude is a bit much.”

“S-Sir Kang-Woo...”

“People would think my darling is a monster or something if they didn’t know any better.”

“I apologize.” Iris lowered her head in dejection.

“Listen carefully, Iris. My darling is more beautiful, kinder, and more gentle than anyone el—”

Clack. Han Seol-Ah entered the room.

“Oh, Kang-Woo. I see you were with Iris.”

Rip! Smash!

Kang-Woo tore his clothes that Iris was gripping without hesitation and rolled backward to widen the distance from her. He rolled back so quickly that a chair and desk in his path split in two.

“Kang-Woo?”

“Hi, darling.”

Kang-Woo smiled brightly and embraced Seol-Ah. He kissed her cheek and turned his head toward Iris.

“Anyway, do you see it now? There’s no reason at all for you to be scared of or avoid darling. Understood.”

Kang-Woo’s hands around Seol-Ah’s waist were trembling. Seeing that, Iris nodded reluctantly.

“I understand,” she answered lifelessly.

Chapter 427 - World Tree’s Prophecy

The party members stared anxiously at the white light flowing out from Iris.

[Savior.]

Soon after, Iris’s consciousness faded and Elune took its place. Elune slowly turned to Kang-Woo, her expression filled with trust and expectation.

“How is the World tree?” Kang-Woo asked cautiously.

The World Tree was the only way for them to find the Demon God’s heart. Their plan would be irreparable if the Word Tree were not revived.

[It has yet to regain its full strength, but it is getting better,] Elune answered with a faint smile.

The party members expressed relief.

“In that case...”

[Yes.] Elune nodded. [I can locate the Demon God’s heart.]

“Phew,” Cha Yeon-Joo sighed in relief.

“What a relief,” Layla remarked as she looked at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo asked in a low tone, “Where is the Demon God’s heart?”

[Please give me a moment.]

Elune closed her eyes and brought her hands together. Bright green light particles floated around her; an inexplicably warm and comfortable energy filled the room.

[O great Titan Yggdrasil,] Elune prayed, her voice echoing. The green light filling the room shone even more brightly as she prayed. [Light up the path of the Savior.]

Whoooooom—!

The light particles around Elune swirled aggressively. Kang-Woo squinted due to the blinding light. Just then...

[Ah.] Elune’s eyes widened and she trembled in pallor. [A-Aaaahh.]

‘What with her all of a sudden?’ Kang-Woo frowned as he stared at the pale-faced Elune. *‘Is it because of me again?’*

Elune looked exactly like when she had foreseen Kang-Woo and Kim Si-Hun’s futures. Kang-Woo frowned, thinking that it was because of him again.

“Is something wrong?” he asked.

[P-prophecy...]

“Prophecy?”

[I have received... a new prophecy,] Elune stammered as she looked up blankly at thin air.

“What prophecy?” Kang-Woo asked.

Silence fell. The light disappeared from Elune’s eyes like a machine that lost power. She then began to speak, [The black sun will burn the sky, and the Triad will meet its end on the day that the Demonic Sea floods.]

Kang-Woo sighed as if he had expected it after hearing Elune’s prophecy.

‘It’s fucking me again.’

He had no idea what the black sun was, but he was sure that the flooding of the Demonic Sea was referring to himself. He bit his lip as if he was tired of it now.

‘What the fuck? I don’t give a flying fuck about ending worlds. Just leave me the fuck alone. Why is everyone trying so hard to kill me?’

Kang-Woo grabbed the back of his head but the rage-induced headache only lasted for a moment. He took a deep breath and calmed down.

‘I doubt it’s a baseless prophecy.’

If that was the case, Elune would not be so panicked. There were likely differences in terms of specific details, but it would most likely occur in the future.

‘What is gonna happen?’

Kang-Woo had no clue. The prophecy was so vague that he did not even know the general time frame of the foretold event. He lacked far too much information to guess what the prophecy was warning them about.

“What the hell does that even mean?” Yeon-Joo asked as she tilted her head in confusion.

[I am not sure either.] Elune shook her head with a hardened expression. [But... I am sure that the Triad will be in grave danger soon.]

Deathly silence fell.

Si-Hun lowered his head with a darkened expression and said, “Even after all that we’ve done... Nothing has changed?”

They had killed one of the Four Heavenly Kings and revived the World Tree, but the future did not change at all.

“We already expected this, didn’t we?” Kang-Woo laughed brightly to uplift the somber mood.

He could not tell exactly what the prophecy was trying to say, but he did not need to worry as long as the prophecy was directed at him.

‘Why the hell would I end the world?’

There were so many things that he had not been able to do yet. He would be crazy to end the world when he was trying to enjoy his life after suffering in Hell for ten millennia.

‘Moreover...’

This was not the time to focus on a pointless prophecy.

“Where is the Demon God’s heart located?” he asked.

[Oh, I-I apologize. I forgot the most important part,] Elune continued with a reddened face, [The Demon God’s heart is...]

She closed her eyes and light particles poured out from her again. She slowly opened her eyes and looked in a certain direction.

[May I borrow a map?]

“Yes.”

Kang-Woo took out a map as if having expected this situation. Elune pointed at a certain area on the map.

“Huh? This place...” Yeon-Joo’s eyes widened after seeing the area that Elune pointed at on the map.

Kang-Woo barely managed to hold in his curses as he stared at where Elune pointed.

“Where we first arrived in Aernor...” Yeon-Joo feigned laughter.

Elune was pointing at the Nightmare Forest, the forbidden region where Kang-Woo and his party members ended up when they crossed from Earth to Aernor.

“So we’ve been pointless going around the world this entire time?” Yeon-Joo remarked as if having a hard time suppressing her frustration.

Kang-Woo sighed deeply. Their objective had been right under their noses this entire time. It felt as if he had been hit hard on the back of his head.

“Well, we weren’t able to find it in the first place,” Kang-Woo remarked.

Kang-Woo did not slack off on searching just because that had been where they had first landed; rather, he had searched every nook and cranny of the Nightmare Forest, more thoroughly than anywhere else, with the Authority of the Beholder. If he had not been able to detect the Demon God’s heart despite that, it meant that...

‘Either it’s hidden so thoroughly that not even an Authority can detect it, or...’

The Demon God’s heart could have been moved to that location after they had left.

“In any case, now that we’ve found where it is, there’s no need to dilly-dally.”

Kang-Woo stood up. Their ultimate objective for coming to Aernor was finally in view; there was no reason or need to hesitate.

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

“We’re ready to depart at any time.”

Si-Hun and Layla also stood up. Kang-Woo nodded.

[May the light be with you, savior.] Elune brought her hands together and bowed. [*Cough!*]

She then coughed up blood all of a sudden.

“L-Lady Elune?!” Layla quickly ran up to her in surprise.

Elune smiled faintly as if saying not to worry. [I’m... alright. *Cough!*]

Unlike what she was saying, the green light was flowing out from her body and dissipating in the air.

‘*She’s...*’ Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. ‘*Being restricted.*’

Those born with Deific Essence were restricted as per the *Law of Titans* when they used their power in the physical world. Based on Elune’s condition, she seemed to have risked the annihilation of her Deific Essence to find the Demon God’s heart.

[Please... Please save... this world.]

The light flowing out of her grew fainter. Elune reached her hand toward Kang-Woo, which he grabbed and smiled.

“I swear it in my Deific Essence of Splendor. I will save this world from demise... no matter what.”

[Ah...]

Elune's eyes shook. She lowered her head as tears flowed down her cheeks. The green light completely disappeared soon after.

"Sir.. Kang-Woo."

Iris, who had regained her consciousness, staggered toward Kang-Woo.

"Get some rest," Kang-Woo remarked.

"You'll come back... right?"

Kang-Woo did not answer and lightly patted her head. Iris passed out.

"Hup." He lifted her and laid her on the bed. He then turned to his party members.

"Right then, let's go."

"It feels like a while since we've been here," Kang-Woo remarked as he looked around after arriving in the Nightmare Forest.

It had not even been half a year since they came to Aernor, but it felt like it had been far longer than that.

"A lot has happened since then, after all," Si-Hun responded as he nodded.

"Well, then." Kang-Woo floated into the air using an Authority to commence the investigation. "... Hm?"

Just then, he felt something strange. He frowned and looked around the Nightmare Forest.

"What is wrong, my king?" Balrog asked.

"Something's off."

"What do you mean?"

"You know, you and Si-Hun pretty much destroyed half the forest back then."

"Ah." Balrog coughed, having recalled his embarrassing actions. "I remember, but... what about it?"

"There are no traces of it."

Kang-Woo came back down and placed his hand on the ground. He searched the area using the Authority of the Beholder, but he could not sense any traces of the forest being destroyed.

"That is strange indeed. There is no way traces of that idiot's rampage would disappear in just a few months," Lilith remarked as she walked over.

"Could it be because of those Maokai? You know, those moving tree monsters," Yeon-Joo asked.

Kang-Woo shook his head. “No. Even if that’s the case, seeing no traces of the destruction whatsoever is abnormal.”

The moment they arrived at the Nightmare Forest, Kang-Woo felt a sense of incongruence that he had not felt when the party had arrived on Aernor for the first time. The entire area felt hot and stuffy like the summer air after rain.

‘It feels like... we’ve arrived in another world.’

“Umm... Kang-Woo,” Han Seol-Ah called.

“Yeah?”

“Come take a look at this.”

She extended her hand toward Kang-Woo, showing him what was in her hands. Kang-Woo’s face hardened.

“This is...”

“You mentioned it before, didn’t you? That there was sand like this where you came from... in Hell.”

Seol-Ah had red sand, dirt containing demonic energy that could not sustain any life whatsoever, in her hands. Such dirt could only be found in the Nine Hells.

“Where did you find this?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Over there... in that tree.” Seol-Ah pointed at a tree with its bark stripped off.

Kang-Woo walked up to the tree and touched it.

Pour.

“What the...”

The entire tree turned into red sand and collapsed.

‘Wait, could this be...’

Kang-Woo’s expression hardened as the worst-case scenario popped up in his head. Kang-Woo lightly swung his arm at the trees around him and shot light particles about the size of a fingertip. And then...

“Fuck...”

The trees burst as soon as the light particle struck them and scattered on the ground as red sand.

“The hell? Why did the trees become sand all of a sudden?” Yeon-Joo tilted her head in confusion.

Kang-Woo bit his lip and answered, “They didn’t become sand.”

“Then what?” Yeon-Joo asked.

Kang-Woo bent down, stuck his hand into the ground, and dug out about a fistful of dirt.

“This entire forest... has been corroded by the Nine Hells.”

Under the dirt was sand as red as blood.

A being was blown away past the trees in a desolate forest where no life could be felt.

Boom!

He was smashed into the ground, creating a massive dust cloud made up of red sand.

“Kurgh, *cough!*”

The being that pathetically tumbled across the ground grunted in pain as he clenched the ground.

Step, step.

A boy with blank eyes walked toward the being.

“What’s wrong, Lucifer?” The boy with blank eyes exuded chilling bloodlust as the corners of his mouth split open. “I thought you’d give me a warm welcome.”

The boy giggled as he looked down at the collapsed Lucifer.

Chapter 428 - You Cannot Handle That Monster

“Bael...” The collapsed Lucifer looked up at the boy with shaking eyes.

The boy known as Bael hummed as he smiled widely. “I’m surprised you’re still here. I thought you would’ve run away a long time ago.”

Lucifer remained silent.

He had thought about running away, but...

“I...”

“Yeah, yeah. I know. You have to get your son back, right? That’s why you’re not moving from where the *heart* is.” The boy nodded as if he understood completely.

“Hihi, you should’ve educated your son better. You sure are having a hard time because of a moronic son like that.”

“Shut... up.”

Lucifer glared at Bael as he bit his lip and gripped what remained of his arm that Bael ripped off with his *mouth*. Black blood was pouring out of the arm.

“Bael... What are you trying to do?”

“Hm?” Bael tilted his head innocently. “What do you mean?”

“I’m sure you know what this place is!”

“Hihi, of course I do. Why would I not when I went out of my way to corrupt the World Tree to find this place?”

“Then...!”

“You see...” Bael hummed and continued, “I’m just trying to take back what’s mine.”

“What?” Lucifer’s eyes widened. “Take back... what’s yours?”

“Yeah. This is...” Bael slowly pointed at the forest being consumed by the red sand. “All mine.”

Silence fell.

Lucifer stared at Bael as if he couldn’t understand.

‘What... is he talking about?’

If what Bael was talking about was what Lucifer was thinking of, then...

‘No, that’s impossible.’

Lucifer shook his head, trying to shoo away his horrifying thought.

“Man~ That aside, it sure has been a while, hasn’t it?”

Bael smiled as he stretched. Anyone else would be stupefied if they saw Bael’s pure and innocent smile, but Bael was simply smiling from a demon’s perspective.

“The war... Yeah, I’ve barely seen you since th—”

“Bael,” Lucifer interjected. “I will ask you again. Why... have you come to see me? What are you trying to do?”

“Hm? I just told you, didn’t I?”

“That absurd nonsense does not count as an answer!” Lucifer shouted fiercely.

“Hmm.” Bael clicked his tongue in disappointment and slowly raised his hand. A suffocatingly colossal amount of demonic energy flowed out from him. “Too bad. I wanted to chat a little more.”

“You...”

Lucifer’s expression hardened; he could easily tell what Bael was about to do.

“Kuh!”

Lucifer quickly got up and extended his remaining hand at Bael, shooting black lightning at him.

“Heh.” Bael smiled and swallowed his saliva.

Crackle—!!

Bael lightly waved his hand. Black sparks flew around him and easily deflected Lucifer’s attack.

“You’ve changed quite a lot from before,” Bael remarked as he smiled widely.

He lightly charged forward, disappearing as if he had assimilated with nature.

Grip!

“*Gasp.*”

”

Bael appeared in front of Lucifer and grabbed his head before Lucifer had even realized it.

“I wonder if it’s because of your Deific Essence? You look more... yes, far more...”

Bael’s mouth widened like a snake preparing to swallow its prey. He continued,

“Delicious.”

Crunch!

“Kurgh!”

Lucifer quickly jumped back, Bael’s mouth just barely grazing his shoulder. The protection made from his Top-rank Deific Essence was made obsolete, and a large lump of flesh was torn off.

“Baaaaaaaaael!” Lucifer shouted as he stomped his feet.

He spread his black wings that looked like those of a fallen angel; unlike before, he now possessed twelve wings, black lightning crackling between them.

“Hihi.” Bael giggled as he stared at the storm of lightning. He hummed and spread out his arms. “Like I had thought, you’ve become more delicious.”

Bael’s body split from head to groin and countless teeth sprouted from in between. The black lightning vanished before it could even reach Bael.

‘No.’ Lucifer shook his head in pallor. It had not vanished. ‘*It was... eaten.*’

Lucifer’s mind fell into chaos. The question of *how* echoed within his head over and over again.

‘*Where did he get such power?*’

Lucifer stared at Bael in astonishment. Bael had always been powerful. No, that was not the right word to describe him.

‘*He was special.*’

Bael was a completely different being from normal demons. Demons were born with power; some demons were destined to be princes of Hell, others were destined to be archdemons, and so on. There were some minute differences as they grew, but none of them were able to escape from the destiny given to them.

‘*But...*’

Bael was different. To be more exact, *those two* were different. Both Bael and the Demon King started from the First Hell and managed to reach the Ninth Hell, a feat that no demon had managed to pull off.

'Though it can't be called a miracle anymore.'

The thought that demons could not grow beyond the power they were born with was now outdated; even Lucifer had far surpassed his past self. It was thanks to Deific Essence, which allowed demons to overcome their innate limits.

'But even so...'

Lucifer bit his lip. Even though Bael had acquired Deific Essence like himself, this much of a gap in their strength was unreal.

"How did you... become so powerful?" Lucifer asked.

"Hm?" Bael smiled and boasted like a child giving away the answer for a riddle, "Because I managed to get my hands on one of the three, obviously."

"What?"

Lucifer remained silent. He was easily able to figure out what Bael was referring to.

"You..." Lucifer stared at Bael incomprehensibly. "... Ate a Demonic Origin."

The Demonic Origin was a portion of the Demon God's corpse, which had been split into three after he had fallen at the hands of the gods.

"Hihihi! They belonged to me from the very beginning!"

Bael burst into laughter as he grabbed his stomach. Seeing that, Lucifer finally realized why Bael had come to see him and what he was trying to do.

"Hah," Lucifer feigned laughter. "Are you perhaps... trying to devour the Demon King?"

"Huh? How did you know?" Bael stared at Lucifer wide-eyed as if he was genuinely surprised.

"Pfft!" Lucifer lowered his head and burst into laughter. "Bwahahahahaha!! You're going to devour the Demon King? That monster?" He looked at Bael as if mocking him and remarked firmly, "Have you forgotten, Bael? About who he is and what happened to us in the war against him? About how logic-defying that monster born from the Demonic Sea is? You say you'll devour the Demon King? Don't make me laugh, Bael. That monster... is not someone you can handle. No, none of us can. He is... a living apocalypse."

The expression of the giggling Bael suddenly hardened. "I... can't handle him, you say?"

The pure and innocent face of the boy crumpled. Bael grabbed Lucifer by the collar.

"Me? Me?! ME?!!" Bael yelled madly as he tightened his grip on Lucifer's collar. "I... can't... handle him, you say?!"

"Kurgh! Urgh..." Lucifer grunted as immense power weighed down on him.

“Say that again, Lucifer. Try saying that again. Huh?” Bael asked as he brought his torn mouth closer to Lucifer.

Lucifer adjusted his neck position to breathe and said firmly without hesitation, “Yeah. You... can’t handle the Demon King.”

Bael’s expression hardened even more as Lucifer was still being firm even in this situation. He then tilted his head as if could not understand.

“Why? I’ve become far stronger than before.”

“So what?”

“Man, I sure was fooled by him at the time. How could I not have when he begged me to accept him as my underling as he crawled around and even licked my feet?”

“So what?”

“He caught me off guard that time, but it’s different now. It’s my turn this time, okay? Do you understand?”

“So what?” Lucifer chuckled nonsensically and asked in genuine incomprehension, “What does any of that matter?”

“...”

“You know just as well as me, don’t you, Bael? Did you not see him with your own eyes in your final battle against him? You cannot kill that monster. There is no way that you can. As long as he possesses the Demonic Sea... He will not die, no matter what you do to him.”

“In that case—”

“In that case, what? That monster has survived even after being torn apart by the dimensional wall. He has come back alive after being driven to death thousands of times!” Lucifer trembled as if he did not even want to imagine it and bit his lip. “You... cannot handle that monster.”

Emotion vanished from Bael’s face. “Heh.”

Bael smiled once again and his eyes filled with madness returned to their blank state.

“We’ll see... if I really can’t handle him.”

Bael giggled as if something had broken inside him. Hearing that laugh sent shivers down Lucifer’s spine.

‘This is bad.’

Bael was not normal at the moment. It was not hard to tell what would happen to Lucifer if he stayed captured by Bael.

'I have to run.'

Lucifer's eyes shone as he bit his lip. He could not afford to die here.

'Lucis...'

Lucifer closed his eyes and spread his twelve wings at once.

Crackle—!!

An immense lightning storm raged.

'As long as I can get away from this crazy bastard's grasp...'

There was no other being that was of any threat to him. He was sure that he would be able to find his son, who had fallen to Lilith's temptations, one day.

"Huh?" Bael expressed confusion as he came to his senses after thinking deeply about something. "Where are you going?"

He frowned and grabbed one of Lucifer's wings.

'Now!'

Lucifer closed his eyes and twisted his body. The wing that Bael had grabbed was ripped off entirely.

"Gaaaaaaaahhh!"

Immense pain stormed within him, but he could not afford to waste the opportunity he had barely managed to acquire.

Boom!

Lucifer quickly leaped forward and flapped his wings to fly forward without even getting a chance to get a hold of himself. Then...

Slam!

"The hell?"

"K-Kang-Woo! Are you alright?!"

Lucifer bumped into someone as he was flying straight forward.

"Kurgh!" Lucifer was blown backward.

'What was that?'

Whether it be trees, rocks, or monsters, there was no way that anything would be able to stop his full-power charge.

'Who the hell...'

Lucifer looked up as he grimaced.

“A-Aaaahh.” Unending despair entered his eyes. “N-No...” He stepped back as he trembled and screamed desperately, “NOOOOOOOOO!!!”

“Lucifer?”

The Demon King was right in front of him.

Chapter 429 - You Think Your Life Is The Only Drama?

“Lucifer?”

Oh Kang-Woo looked down at the being who had flown out of the bushes and slammed into him.

‘The hell? Why did he appear out of there?’

Kang-Woo was left dumbfounded by Lucifer’s sudden appearance.

‘Fucking hell.’ A chill ran down Kang-Woo’s spine, but not because he feared Lucifer. *‘Why did he have to appear now of all times?’*

Kang-Woo bit his lip. It would have been no problem if Kang-Woo were alone or with Lilith and Balrog. However...

‘What should I do?’

He was with Kim Si-Hun, Layla, and many others who didn’t know his true identity; not even his lover knew the whole truth about him. They also did not know the fact that Kang-Woo had been the one to create the persona of Lucifer, Lord of the Flies.

‘Fuck, fuck, fuck. This happened with Moab too. Why are there so many people fucking me over these days? Things haven’t been going my way at all. What did I do to deserve all of this shit? Huh? No one lives for a more pure and innocent purpose than me, so why do I have to go through all this?’

Riiing.

[The Law of Titans judges that it is a reasonable price that Player Oh Kang-Woo must pay for the countless evil acts he has comm—]

“The fuck you say?”

‘Do you wanna be bent into a question mark?’

[Player Oh Kang-Woo has acquired the buff ‘Just My Luck’ as a reward for his atrociously bad luck.]

‘Why does it sound like a debuff?’

Kang-Woo shoed away the blue windows popping up in front of him and frowned. The System had said some nonsense about Kang-Woo paying for the evil acts he had committed, but...

‘Well, I can’t deny that I’d sown the seeds.’

He had gone down a path that he could never return from several times regardless of whether he had intended to or not.

'Shit.'

Kang-Woo turned his head to look at Si-Hun and Layla.

"Lucifer...!"

"Be careful, everyone!"

Si-Hun was fiercely emitting energy with his sword unsheathed and Layla was borrowing power from Gaia by praying to her. Every party member was filled with anxiety, but only for a moment; curiosity took its place soon after. It was only natural since Lucifer was stricken with fear as he stared at Kang-Woo as if he were prey in front of a predator.

"Wh-why are you here...?" Lucifer asked as he trembled.

"Is that really Lucifer?"

"He gives off a different vibe from before."

The party members stared at Lucifer in astonishment. Lucifer was the demon who had infiltrated the imperial castle, massacred the nobles, and turned the capital into a sea of fire. He had also slaughtered countless angels in Sant' Angelo and had even acquired the infamous title of *Lord of the Flies*, but the way he was acting at the moment shamed his reputation.

'Dammit.' Kang-Woo bit his lip. *'This isn't good.'*

There was a limit to how much Kang-Woo could ad-lib on the spot. He did not have to worry much since his party members trusted him unconditionally, but there was also a good chance that he would be put in a position that he couldn't talk his way out of like when Si-Hun had regained his memories.

'What should I do?'

As Kang-Woo's thoughts were in jumbles...

"Sh-shit!"

Lucifer quickly turned around and ran away. Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'Is the buff actually working?'

There was nothing better for Kang-Woo if Lucifer were to run away first. Kang-Woo did not go out of his way to stop Lucifer, who flew out of the party members' field of view in a flash.

"H-hyung-nim!" Si-Hun quickly shouted.

"Kang-Woo nodded and replied, "Let's split up and find him."

He then turned his head to look at Lilith.

- Lilith.

- Yes, my king.

- Subtly create a disturbance to slow down their pursuit.

Of course, Kang-Woo had no intention of letting Lucifer run away; he was just trying to face Lucifer by himself and to do that, he needed to prevent his party members from catching up to him.

- As you command.

Lilith modestly bowed.

Kang-Woo turned to Si-Hun and said, "Si-Hun, you go this way, and I'll search over there. Lilith specializes in pursuits like this, so do exactly as she says."

"Okay!" Si-Hun nodded.

Kang-Woo turned back from Si-Hun and ran in the direction where Lucifer ran off. He had run away far past Kang-Woo's field of view, but it didn't matter since Kang-Woo was better than anyone at chasing people just from the traces of demonic energy.

'Not just that...'

He had no idea why, but Lucifer was severely injured. There was no way that he would be able to go far with those injuries.

Boom!

Kang-Woo flew across the giant forest using the Authority of the Sky. It did not take long until he could see Lucifer running away as blood dripped from where his wing was torn off. Kang-Woo flew down like a hawk hunting its prey and smashed the heel of his foot down on Lucifer.

"Kurgh!" Lucifer tumbled across the ground.

Kang-Woo walked up to him and remarked leisurely, "It's been a while. How've you been?"

Since there was no one around, there was no need for him to put on an act.

"D-Demon King." Lucifer looked up in pallor at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo smirked.

'I haven't felt like this in a while.'

The last enemy who remembered Kang-Woo's past days in Hell was Satan.

"You've kept yourself hidden for quite a while now, but it looks like you've gotten your ass beat."

Kang-Woo looked down leisurely at Lucifer. His left arm was torn off as if it had been eaten by something and one of his black wings that looked like those of a fallen angel had been torn off.

'I heard he acquired Deific Essence.'

Not only that, but if a wing had not been ripped off, Lucifer would have twelve wings. Considering Lucifer only had eight back when he ruled as one of the princes of Hell, it meant that he had gained immense power after acquiring Deific Essence.

'So who could've put him in this state?'

Although it varied, demons on average possessed extraordinary vitality, and it needed not even be mentioned for Lucifer, a prince of Hell who had risen to become a god. If Lucifer's injuries were not regenerating, it meant that the being who had injured him was far more powerful than him.

"Kurgh." Lucifer lowered his head as he bit his lip.

Such blatant mockery only brought humiliation to Lucifer as the Prince of Pride, but...

"S-spare me," Lucifer stuttered.

He brought his head down on the ground. His extreme fear of the Demon King devoured any sense of humiliation he was feeling.

'I have to live... whatever it takes. I can't afford to die.'

Lucifer shut his eyes tightly and recalled a silver-haired woman smiling blankly as if something had broken within her.

'Helen.' Lucifer bit his lip and clenched his fists. *'I swear to you... I will come back with Lucis.'*

He needed to survive even if his title of *Pride* were to be thrown into the gutter.

"Wow. You've seriously changed a lot, Lucifer."

Kang-Woo looked down at Lucifer in surprise. The Lucifer that he knew was not able to endure mockery; he truly befitted the title of the Prince of Pride.

'To be fair, he wouldn't be so prideful in front of me considering everything he went through because of me.'

Lucifer had survived until the final moments of the thousand-year war and witnessed Kang-Woo's battle against Bael. His attitude was understandable if he was aware of the battle.

'Though it looks like he also has other reasons.'

Kang-Woo looked down at Lucifer, who had his head on the ground, with great interest.

"What's wrong, Lucifer? Hm? Why don't you fight me again as you say shit like how I'm just a mere human?" Kang-Woo asked as he chuckled.

Lucifer shut his eyes tightly. He was boiling with rage, but he suppressed it with all his might. "If you are talking about back then... I-I apologize."

Lucifer recalled the final battle that decided the one true ruler of the Nine Hells between Bael, the Prince of Gluttony, and the Demon King. And in that battle, the Demon King...

Chills ran throughout Lucifer's body. He just barely managed to quell his trembles.

'He's a monster.'

Lucifer looked up at Kang-Woo with shaking eyes. The sight of the black sea that flooded the red earth, devouring countless demons with its monstrous teeth was engraved in his mind.

'I mustn't fight him.'

Lucifer could not afford to die.

“Dayum, are you sure you’re Lucifer? However scared you are, you were never one to grovel like this.”

Kang-Woo had honestly not expected Lucifer to beg for his life. Lucifer had acquired Deific Essence; Kang-Woo wasn’t sure how, but the amount of Divinity he could feel from Lucifer was on par with that of Tai Wuji. He likely was not highly restricted by the System since it was not something he was born with.

‘Even despite that, he’s acting this way?’

It was logically hard to understand.

“Hmm.” Kang-Woo crossed his arms and fell into thought.

There were two possible reasons why he was acting like this. He could have either been so traumatized by Kang-Woo’s past self or...

“You have a reason that you can’t afford to die,” Kang-Woo muttered.

“...”

“Haha, your face gives it all away.” Kang-Woo snickered. It was not difficult to figure out what the reason was. “You sure love your son, huh? Why didn’t you educate him better if you love him so much?”

“Kuh...” Lucifer bit his lip anxiously. He suppressed his boiling rage and bowed his head again. “I beg of you, Demon King. Please... Please let me see Lucis.”

“Pfft, bwahahahaha!!”

Kang-Woo burst into laughter as he grabbed his stomach. He couldn’t help it; how funny was it that the Prince of Pride’s head was full of love for his son?

Kang-Woo looked down at Lucifer and said with a smile, “Enough with the shitshow.”

“...”

“What? Is your Deific Name the God of Emotion or something? You’re so fucking emotional.” Kang-Woo slowly raised his foot and slammed it down on Lucifer’s head. “You think only your son is precious?”

Lucifer was known as the Evil God before Kang-Woo arrived on Aernor.

“You think your life is the only drama?”

Lucifer had likely killed countless people during his quest to earn Deific Essence, and those people likely had a reason that they couldn’t afford to die as well.

Kang-Woo spit on the ground.

“Enough bullshit and get the hell up.”

'How dare you try to pull a pity show?'

Chapter 430 - Be The Protagonist If You Have A Problem With That

"Demon King..." Lucifer bit his lip desperately as he clenched his fists. "If you return Lucis to me... I will become your retainer. I will do anything you say without question."

Lucifer lowered his head. Although he had acquired Deific Essence, he was once the Prince of Pride; he never bent to anyone because he was more prideful than anyone. Even while the other princes of Hell avoided Bael, Lucifer trespassed on Bael's territory without reluctance. Such a person had been completely broken.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. The Lucifer that he knew was not this kind of person.

'Lucis, huh?'

Lucis was currently put to sleep with his consciousness sealed within Vernaak's laboratory that Kang-Woo had made for him in the imperial palace. It was to be able to use him as bait whenever Kang-Woo wanted if he ever faced Lucifer.

'I never thought it'd work this well.'

Kang-Woo had expected the bait only to cause hesitation in Lucifer's actions a few times, but his expectations were pleasantly exceeded. The Prince of Pride whom Kang-Woo knew no longer existed.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo sighed deeply and looked up.

'He'll become my retainer if I give him Lucis?'

It was a tempting offer. Lucis was pretty much losing his value as bait after being neglected all this time; there was no better trade if Kang-Woo could use him to gain Lucifer as his retainer. However...

"Wow, this brings back old times, doesn't it?"

Kang-Woo smiled widely as the memories of his suffering and struggling self that he wanted to forget arose.

"What do you..."

"You know, the time when you brainwashed my subordinates and commanded them to commit mass suicide bombing."

"..."

"Man, I was so desperate back then. I remember begging you to stop. Do you remember?"

"That's..."

Kang-Woo grabbed the shaking Lucifer's head and smiled. It was easy to give Lucis to Lucifer; in terms of efficiency, it would be far more useful to have Lucifer as a retainer than killing him.

'But...'

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and recalled his days in Hell. He had not gone through the thousand-year war without a single loss like some overpowered shounen protagonist. If that had been the case, he would not have been stuck in Hell for ten millennia. He had lost and despaired countless times. He had ultimately ended up coming out victorious, but he had lost far too much in the process.

"It seems like you remember now. Well, it's not like I don't understand. After all, the perpetrator tends to remember less than the victim."

Kang-Woo smiled widely. Just remembering his precious comrades, who had sworn their undying allegiance to him, charging at him with bombs in their embrace brought about unpleasant emotions.

"Well, I guess what I'm doing could be considered a pity show too, but so what? Be the protagonist if you have a problem with that."

Stuff like this was usually exclusive to the protagonist.

'Oh, but am I the protagonist? Wouldn't it be Si-Hun? Well, whatever.'

Kang-Woo brought Lucifer's head closer to his.

"You didn't stop back then." Kang-Woo smiled and continued, "And the same goes for me."

He gripped Lucifer's head like a hydraulic press with his immense strength.

"Kurgh! Urgh!" Lucifer trembled with his eyes wide open and his mouth agape.

"I won't stop either."

Lucifer felt as if his head would explode. He flapped his eleven wings to summon black lightning.

Crackle—!

Lucifer was blown backward as black lightning sparked around him.

"Shit...!"

Lucifer turned around. He could tell that conciliation with the Demon King through words was impossible.

'In that case...'

"You're thinking of running again?" Kang-Woo asked as he smiled and snapped his fingers.

Fwoosh!

Gold and black flames surrounded the area. They blazed fiercely and aimed for Lucifer.

Sizzle—!

"Gaaaaaahhh!" Lucifer twisted and turned as he screamed.

The Flames of Voracity tore his Deific Essence apart and burned him.

'He's this powerful even without opening the Doors...?!'

Lucifer looked at Kang-Woo in pallor. The Demon King had become an icon of fear because of the Demonic Sea that he possessed, and his true form was revealed once he opened the Doors of that Demonic Sea. However...

"Tsk, you can't even be compared to Tai Wuji."

Fwoosh—!

"Kurghhh!"

Lucifer could not put up any sort of resistance against the blazing flames surrounding him. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue in disappointment. Lucifer's Deific Essence was on par with that of Tai Wuji, but Lucifer's combat prowess was highly unremarkable in comparison.

'I mean, I guess it's obvious since the reason why I had a hard time against Tai Wuji wasn't because of his Deific Essence.'

Tai Wuji had been so powerful because he had reached a realm that Kang-Woo had no idea about.

'Besides, I couldn't use the Flames of Voracity back then.'

Considering that, Kang-Woo realized how much he had gained from his battle against Tai Wuji. He had acquired Top-rank Deific Essence, the Flames of Voracity, and even his Chaos skill control had improved.

'I can now fight Top-rank gods without relying on the Doors.'

It was fortunate since Kang-Woo had been reluctant to open the Doors after the side effects disappeared all of a sudden.

"Huff, huff..."

"Is it over already?" Kang-Woo asked as he sighed in disappointment.

He had expected this result somewhat; he had become far too strong and he could barely sense a will to fight from Lucifer.

'And most importantly...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and stared at Lucifer's torn arm and wing. Black blood was pouring out of the wounds without end.

'He was severely injured from the start.'

Lucifer would have had a hard time against Kang-Woo even if he was in perfect condition, but there was no way he would be any match when he was that injured.

"Lucifer." Kang-Woo walked up to Lucifer, who was panting heavily after being singed by the Flames of Voracity. He crouched down and stared at Lucifer trembling in despair and asked, "Who made you like this?"

=Kang-Woo wanted to ask Lucifer this from the very beginning. Who could have possibly driven the Lord of the Flies so far into the corner?

“...”

Inexplicable anxiety ran down Lucifer’s back. He was getting nauseous and dizzy for some reason.

“...el.”

“Huh?” Kang-Woo asked.

“It was... Bael.”

“... What?” Kang-Woo’s eyes widened. The name *Bael* shocked him. “W-wait. Did you say Bael? Bael is here?”

He would not have been this flustered if Lucifer had mentioned any other prince of Hell or even one of the Four Heavenly Kings, but...

‘Bael.’

Bael was different; Kang-Woo had never defeated him in the truest sense. He had only managed to deal a critical wound on Bael by crawling on the ground like a dog to lower his guard. Kang-Woo then absorbed Bael’s forces with Lilith’s help and attacked him with hundreds of thousands of demons.

‘Even with that, I wasn’t able to beat him.’

It was only after risking his life and opening the Second Door that he was able to devour Bael. Kang-Woo barely remembered anything about the battle since he had been unconscious, but Balrog told him that his final battle against Bael had been desperate and horrendous beyond belief. It was to the point that Lucifer, who had witnessed the battle, developed trauma because of it.

‘And you’re telling me he’s here?’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He took a deep breath to calm himself and recalled Bael and his eyes filled with madness in contrast to his pure and innocent laughter.

“Haaa,” he exhaled.

The perplexity and slight fear that Kang-Woo had felt when he first met Bael had long since vanished and been replaced by hunger. Intense thirst grinded his throat and his stomach hurt from the extreme hunger.

“Bael.”

Kang-Woo drooled uncontrollably as powerful desire surged almost to a point that he couldn’t control.

‘Calm down, calm down.’ He quelled his desire with all his might. *‘It’ll be different from back then.’*

In the past, Bael had looked so delicious that Kang-Woo was barely able to handle himself, but that would likely not be the case anymore.

'Because I didn't have Deific Essence back then.'

Kang-Woo had attained far more power than his past self after returning to Earth. He had several great powers in his arsenal such as the demonic energy from the Abyss, Chaos, and the Flames of Voracity.

'It'll be different from back then.'

If Kang-Woo had this much power back in Hell, forget opening the Doors, he would not even have needed the Flames of Voracity to devour Bael. Even so...

'Bael, Bael, Bael.'

Kang-Woo's heart beat rapidly as if he were recalling his first love. The uncontrollable hunger was making him drool to no end. He wanted to meet Bael right away.

'No, no.'

He would rather not meet him in fear that the emotions and spark he was feeling at the moment might die in vain after seeing him. He feared that Bael might be too weak.

"Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled.

'It's not like I'm going to see my first love.'

His mind was in jumbles. Kang-Woo shook his head to get a hold of himself.

"Where is Bael?" Kang-Woo asked after coming to his senses.

Lucifer pointed at a part of the forest and said, "H-he was there when I ran away from him."

The trees were scorched black, likely due to the battle between Bael and Lucifer.

"... Huh?" Kang-Woo's expression hardened after seeing where Lucifer had pointed.

'That's...'

It was where he had told his party members to search for him to be left alone with Lucifer.

"Wait..." A chill ran down Kang-Woo's spine. He quickly tried to call Lilith, but she was not answering. "Shit!"

Kang-Woo quickly turned around. Seeing that, Lucifer's eyes lit up with hope.

'Yes, go!' Lucifer prayed desperately in his head. However...

"Lemme borrow your shoulder."

"What?"

Kang-Woo grabbed Lucifer by the chin and placed one foot on Lucifer's shoulder.

'I wanted to get some more info out of him, but...'

Unfortunately, it did not seem like he had the time.

"Wh-what are you... t-trying to do?" Lucifer asked.

“What? Isn’t it obvious?”

Kang-Woo pressed his foot into Lucifer’s shoulder even harder and raised the hand that was holding Lucifer’s chin.

Crack!

“Kurghhh! Gaaaaaaahhh!”

Lucifer’s neck elongated and then ripped out along with his spine.

“What? Did you think I’d forget about you?” Kang-Woo chuckled. “You won’t get away from me twice, man.”

Kang-Woo used Lucifer’s shoulder as a foothold and jumped up like a cannon, Lucifer’s spine dangling behind him like a tail.

Zoom!

Kang-Woo flew to the area where trees were burning.

‘... Huh? That’s...’

He saw the boy with blank eyes that he had seen during the war against the Constellations of Evil. It was the boy known as the Constellation of Nightmares. He was facing Balrog and Si-Hun at once with a bright smile. He could not see Bael anywhere.

‘I don’t know what’s going on, but it doesn’t change the fact that my party members are being attacked.’

“Hup.” Kang-Woo took a deep breath and fell toward the boy who was facing Si-Hun as if he were toying around.

He gripped Lucifer’s spine and threw it at the Constellation of Nightmares like a hammer throw.

Wham—!!

A massive explosion swept the surroundings.

“H-hyung-nim!”

“My king!”

Tap.

Kang-Woo landed on the ground and pulled back Si-Hun and Balrog, who had become like ragdolls.

“Ahhh...” The boy walked out of the dust cloud. “Heh.” He smiled widely as soon as he saw Kang-Woo. “It’s been a while. How’ve you been?”

The boy giggled innocently in contrast to his eyes filled with madness.