

## **M. in Hell 431**

Chapter 431 - Bael, Prince of Gluttony (1)

“I don’t think we’re well acquainted enough to say that it’s been a while,” said Oh Kang-Woo.

He narrowed his eyes and stared at the boy with blank eyes. He had black eyes and black hair and was a fairly handsome boy. He would not lose in terms of looks against Uriel— no, he might receive even more love than Uriel based on people’s preferences.

*‘Why does he have balls with a face like— no, this isn’t the time.’*

Kang-Woo shook his head and stared at the boy.

“Hm? Ohhh! Come to think of it, you’ve never met me in this form!” The boy giggled as he clapped. He wiped the tears that had formed from laughing too much and said, “It’s me, Bael.”

“What?” Kang-Woo’s mouth split open. “You’re Bael?”

*‘What the hell is he talking about?’*

The Bael that Kang-Woo knew was a monster covered in muscles like Balrog. There was no bigger twist than this.

*‘Well, I guess physical form doesn’t matter much to a being as powerful as Bael, but isn’t this way too big of a change?’*

“Hihi, did I surprise you?” Bael asked.

Kang-Woo remained silent.

He was certain that the boy in front of him was Bael from his childlike manner of speech and bright voice.

*‘Rather, this form suits him better.’*

In the past, Kang-Woo had to suppress his desire to vomit as he had to watch a muscle pig acting like a spoiled child.

“Hyung-nim, have you spoken with the Constellation of Nightmares before? And who in the world is B—?”

“M-my king. That is... Bael?” Balrog interjected Kim Si-Hun and approached Kang-Woo in pallor.

Balrog, wearing his Overlord Armor, couldn’t help but tremble at the mention of the name *Bael*. It was only natural since that was how much power the name itself held.

“Mmm~ Wait, huh? Are you perhaps Balrog? Wow! What’s with that black armor? Hihihi! That’s so cool!” Bael burst into laughter as he clapped after finding Balrog,

who stepped back warily. "Hehe. In that case, Lilith must be somewhere around here too, right? It's so nice to see everyone, don't you think?"

"Yeah, it's so fucking nice that I could jump off a fucking cliff," Kang-Woo replied as he frowned aggressively.

"Come on, there you go again with the bad words. I told you not to do that since it'll worsen your personality, didn't I?"

"Oh gosh, I'm so sorry. I was born this way, so it's not easy to fix."

"Hehe, but since you used to be one of my underlings, I guess I could let it slide," Bael said with a smile.

"Pardon?"

"Underling...?"

"H-hyung-nim. What is that child talking about?"

Han Seol-Ah, Cha Yeon-Joo, and Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo in surprise. They couldn't even imagine Kang-Woo being someone's underling.

Bael laughed and clapped as he watched the party members' reaction. "Hihhi! That's right! Kang-Woo was one of my precious underlings! You have no idea how much I treasured him!"

"And then I caved your head in," Kang-Woo replied.

"Sheesh. Thinking back on it even now, that hurt my feelings a lot. Hm? Don't you remember what you said to me?" Bael smiled, the corners of his mouth ripping to reach his earlobes, and revealed his grotesque teeth. He stepped forward with his right foot and continued, "You don't remember? You pledged your allegiance to me as you licked my feet."

"What?"

"What do you..."

The party members' mouths split open. Balrog exuded bloodlust as he grimaced. He was enraged by how Bael was trying to taunt Kang-Woo by bringing up the past.

"You bastard..." Balrog clenched his fists.

Although it had been a part of Kang-Woo's plan to fool Bael, the fact that his king had licked the feet of the enemy was beyond humiliating.

*'My king...'*

Balrog couldn't imagine how much more humiliated Kang-Woo felt when he was feeling this much humiliation. He looked at Kang-Woo in worry.

"Hm?"

Rather than rage, Kang-Woo was smiling widely. “Oh, right. I remember.”

“H-hyung-nim?”

Kang-Woo shrugged and continued calmly, “I remember it being salty, man. You should wash your feet.”

Bael’s mouth was agape, dumbfounded by the unexpected response. “Heh... Aren’t you embarrassed?”

“Not really,” Kang-Woo smirked.

It didn’t matter even if he was embarrassed by the fact that he had crawled on the ground pathetically or licked his enemy’s feet.

“Yeah, and...” He licked his lips and continued mockingly, “Who won in the end?”

“B-big words for someone who ambushed me unfairly—”

“Unfair? Jeez, I never thought I’d hear that from a demon. Unfair? So what, motherfucker? I told you back then, didn’t I? That you shouldn’t have been fooled in the first place if you have a problem with it. It’s your fault for trusting your enemy just because they licked your feet.”

“Ngh!”

Bael frowned aggressively. He was annoyed that Kang-Woo had used Bael’s tactic to humiliate Kang-Woo against him. Bael stomped his feet in irritation as he clenched his fists.

“Ts, tsk. You’re still as childish as always.” Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and smiled.

“Kang-Woo I-licked his feet?” Seol-Ah muttered, her voice subtly trembling in ecstasy.

“S-such an envi— I mean, humiliating act...!”

Seol-Ah emitted bloodlust as if she were about to cut Bael apart with a saw.

*‘Darling, that’s a bit...’* Kang-Woo feigned laughter and shook his head. *‘Well, anyway...’*

He narrowed his eyes. There was no way that Bael was here by coincidence.

*‘He must be aiming for the Demon God’s heart.’*

Kang-Woo crossed his arms and fell into thought. He then recalled Ian, who had exposed Kang-Woo’s identity after infiltrating the Church of Splendor.

“Hmm.” Kang-Woo thought deeply as he tapped on his chin. He asked as a test, “Did you join forces with Amon?”

“Huh? What? How did you know?” Bael asked.

“I didn’t. I just guessed.”

*‘He took the bait instantly. What a score.’*

Bael remained silent.

“Then I guess it was you who corrupted the World Tree.”

“How did you know that?”

“I told you. I just guessed.”

*‘He fell for it again. He acts like a child, is his brain that of a child as well?’*

“Hi... hihi,” Bael giggled and shrugged. He straightened his back and said with a leisurely expression, “Well... it doesn’t really matter that you found out anyway.”

“Stop acting calm after getting your plan exposed because you acted like an idiot. It only makes you look more pathetic.”

Kang-Woo shook his head, feeling sorry for Amon for joining forces with someone like this.

Bael remained silent for a moment. He then smiled and said, “Yeah, you were... always like this.”

He recalled his memories of the thousand-year war. There had been no one who managed to grind his gears as much as the Demon King during that nightmarish war for the right to rule over the Nine Hells.

*‘This is fun.’*

Bael trembled ecstatically. The only one who could make him this enraged and make his bloodlust and madness run wild...

*‘It’s always been you.’*

Everyone but the Demon King had simply been stricken with fear or ran away just from looking at Bael. There was no one but the Demon King who was able to stand tall against him. And... And... And...

“Hi... hihi.” Bael smiled. “I can’t understand...” He glared at Kang-Woo with eyes filled with bloodlust and glinting with madness. “Why was it you? Why did it have to be you and not me?”

“What?” Kang-Woo frowned, not able to understand what Bael was saying.

“Hihihi... Hihihhi!” Bael simply laughed as his shoulders shook.

“Hyung-nim. Who is... that Bael person?” Si-Hun expressed anxiety as he clenched his sword.

“A thorn from the past.”

“Your past...”

Si-Hun flinched. Kang-Woo’s body was that of a demon before he returned to being a human with the power of light.

*‘In that case...’*

It meant that the child was a demon in human skin. Si-Hun bit his lip and drew out his demonic energy.

“Hehe. A thorn? You’re hurting my feelings. Weren’t we closer than that?”

Bael walked toward the party as he giggled. Each of the party members pulled out their weapons in vigilance of Bael.

“All of you, stand back,” said Kang-Woo.

“Pardon?”

“B-but...”

The party members looked at Kang-Woo in confusion.

Kang-Woo said firmly, “I have to be the one to face him.”

To be more precise, he was the only one who could. That was how powerful Bael was.

“Hurgh~! Man, I missed this feeling.” Bael stretched and looked at Kang-Woo leisurely. He asked with a smile, “Oh right, come to think of it, have you heard of something called... the World Tree’s prophecy?”

Silence fell due to Bael’s sudden question. The party members flinched. Why was Bael mentioning the prophecy that they had only heard from Elune before they came here?

“I just don’t understand that prophecy no matter how many times I repeat it in my head, wouldn’t you agree?” Bael stared at Kang-Woo with deeply sunken eyes.

“Since... you’re not the Demon of Prophecy.”

“What?”

“It’s true, isn’t it?” Bael tilted his head. “The Demon of Prophecy... The pinnacle of all demons who will bring demise to this world...!!” He spread his arms wide and stomped his feet. “Is not you! It’s me!!!”

He continued as if he was singing, his voice filled with madness, “Huh? Don’t you think so as well? Don’t you? You think it’s me and not you, right?”

Crack, crack.

Bael’s tilted head went beyond its normal range of motion. The crown of his head reached his chest as if his neck had been broken.

“Hihi, are you angry?” Bael asked with a smile. “Are you angry that you’re not the Demon of Prophecy, that you’re not the pinnacle of all demons? Hm? Hihi, I’m sure you are, right? You can’t hold in your rage, can you?”

Bael burst into crazed laughter and shouted, “You’re...! Nothing!! You... You... You... YOUUUUUU!!! YOU’RE NOTHING!!!!”

Giant bat wings sprouted from Bael's back. Six black tails grew from his tailbone and cracked the ground like a whip.

"It's not you, but me! I'm more amazing than you! I'm greater than you! Okay? Do you understand?" Bael glared at Kang-Woo in deep, blazing resentment. He shouted as if he was desperate, "Why don't you say something? Huh? SAY SOMETHING!!"

"Yeah, okay." Kang-Woo nodded. "Yup, you're the Demon of Prophecy. You're the greatest. You're the demon who will bring this world to its end, the pinnacle of all demons, and the strongest demon of all time."

"Huh?" Bael tilted his head in confusion, not having expected this kind of response.

*'Pfft! Bwehehehehe!!'*

Kang-Woo suppressed his laughter with all his might. This was the score of all scores.

*'Fucking hell, haha! You heard that, right? Huh? The son of a bitch said that he's the Demon of Prophecy! Not me, but him! I fucking knew it. I should've known from the moment that I was being framed as the Demon of Prophecy. I would never do anything like ending the world.'*

Riiing.

[The World Tree states that the Demon of Prophecy is Player Oh Ka—]

*'Hahaha! Yeah! It wasn't me!'*

[Player Oh Kang-W—]

*'It was never me!!!'*

[I'm saying that it's y—]

"Yeah, I see." Kang-Woo glared at Bael in bloodlust. He then turned to Layla and said, "Please let Lady Gaia know. The Demon of Prophecy was... Bael."

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Chapter 432 - Bael, Prince of Gluttony (2)

"I... see." Layla nodded with a serious face.

The identity of the Demon of Prophecy hidden under veils had finally been revealed.

"I will make sure to let Lady Gaia know," Layla said.

"Thank you. I will leave it to you." Oh Kang-Woo nodded and turned to Bael, who was staring at him dumbfoundedly.

"Huh?" He tilted his head in confusion due to the completely unexpected response.

"Why are you so placid about this, Kang-Woo?"

Bael couldn't understand why Kang-Woo was so easily able to accept the fact that he was not the Demon of Prophecy, the true ruler of all demons and that he was nothing at all.

"Hm? Hmmm?" Bael looked around wide-eyed. And then... "Oh."

A single thought popped up in his head. It was a possibility that he had never even considered because it was so absurd.

"Don't tell me... You don't have any intention of devouring the worlds? Hm? You don't want to complete the Demonic Sea and become the *Primordial Being*?"

That was impossible; devouring the Triad and completing the Demonic Sea was the ultimate goal of Demon God Bauli and those who possessed the Demonic Sea.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Kang-Woo said firmly. "I'm here to save this world from demise."

Blinding, radiant, and beautiful light poured out from Kang-Woo, but Bael could vividly feel the black sea hidden within the splendor. The reaches of the black sea were still as endless as the abyss; it truly deserved to be known as the Demonic Sea.

*'He has the Demonic Sea for sure, so why? Why doesn't he want to devour the Triad?'*

"Wait, wait." Bael shook his head in confusion. "Then you... sided with Gaia because you had no intention of ending the worlds from the beginning?"

Bael could not help but chuckle. He thought that the Demon King had become Gaia's retainer to backstab her, the same thing that he did to Bael, but that was not the case. The Demon King... truly did not have any intention of devouring the worlds.

"Why? Why? Why?" Bael asked repeatedly. He could not understand. There was no way that he could. "You have the Demonic Sea, don't you? Despite that, you're choosing not to complete it? You're choosing to suppress your desire?"

Kang-Woo frowned at Bael's questions. "I'm not sure what you mean. The only power that I have is the power of Splendor."

"Hah," Bael chuckled and crouched as he grabbed his stomach. "Ha... Hahahahahahaha!" He burst into crazed laughter. "You're insane— no, your mind has completely fried!"

Bael glared at Kang-Woo with blazing eyes. "As I thought, you're not worthy. You don't have the right to be the Demon of Prophecy!!" He gritted his sharp teeth and yelled, "It's not you, but me! Hihhi! IT'S ME!!"

Bael jumped up and down joyfully. Kang-Woo judged that there was no point listening any further and raised the shining Ingrium.

"Fuuu." Kang-Woo took a deep breath.

He lowered his stance and shot forward.

Whoosh!

He shot a slash of light at Bael.

“Hihihihii!!” The corners of Bael’s mouth rose to his cheekbones as he spread out his arms. His body split from chin to groin; teeth sprouted from the split area and ate the slash of light that Kang-Woo shot in the blink of an eye.

“What?” Kang-Woo’s eyes widened.

*‘What the hell? Why... do you have that?’*

He could not understand. His thought process could not keep up with the situation before his eyes. His vision slowed down as if time had stopped.

“Kuh!” Kang-Woo quickly jumped backward as he stared at Bael in shock.

Something that should not have been possible had happened right before his eyes.

“Heh.” Bael smiled. “What?”

He giggled as his shoulder shook ecstatically.

“How...” Kang-Woo slurred.

“Are you shocked that I have this?” Bael asked as he stroked his split body. His smile grew even larger. “I knew it.”

Bael slowly raised his right arm and his hand split in half.

“You know nothing.”

Squelch, squelch.

Black mucus oozed out from the split areas and countless mouths appeared from it.

Bael chanted in a voice filled with madness, “Authority of Predation.”

Rumble—!!!

The black mucus that poured out from Bael’s hand spread widely and formed a giant black wave of countless mouths that devoured everything in its path.

“M-my king!” Balrog shouted.

“Stay away,” Kang-Woo replied with a deep voice as he stared at the black wave.

*‘How?’* Kang-Woo asked in his head again. *‘Why does Bael have the Authority of Predation?’*

The Authority of Predation was Kang-Woo’s Authority; it was a power that only he could use, one that had been with him from the First Hell to the Ninth.

*‘So how...’*

How could Bael use the Authority of Predation?



*'Shit.'*

Kang-Woo's mind was in jumbles. The incomprehensible situation was putting him in a daze.

*'Since when?'*

Kang-Woo did not remember his entire battle against Bael. His consciousness had been trapped deep within the Demonic Sea the moment that he opened the Second Door of the Ten Thousand Demon Core against Bael. Kang-Woo had already defeated Bael by the time he had barely managed to escape from the Demonic Sea's clutches.

*'But I'm sure that he didn't use the Authority of Predation.'*

Kang-Woo recalled his battle against Bael before he opened the Doors. Bael had not used the Authority of Predation even when Kang-Woo attacked him with his army of hundreds of thousands of demons.

No, every demon in the Nine Hells knew one thing about Bael. He did not have an Authority; the Authority of Gluttony that Beelzebub possessed as the Prince of Gluttony had not been passed down to Bael. The only reason Bael became the Prince of Gluttony was because he had taken Beelzebub's place after killing him.

*'I also heard that the Authority of Gluttony only sounds similar to the Authority of Predation and that they're completely different Authorities.'*

Even if Bael inherited Beelzebub's Authority, it would still not make sense. The Authority of Gluttony allowed one to accumulate demonic energy beyond one's limits; it was not something that could take demonic energy from other beings and absorb them like the Authority of Predation.

Crack! Crunch!

The black wave of countless mouths had reached right in front of Kang-Woo as he had been in thought. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and extended his arms.

*'First, I'll focus on the battle against Bael.'*

Boom!

Kang-Woo stomped his feet and gripped Ingrium with one hand and Inferno created with the Key of the Demonic Sea in the other hand.

He crossed the two swords and chanted, "Twilight."

Fwoosh!

Golden flames spread out in a fan shape. The sky was set ablaze like a sunset and intense heat swept the entire forest.

Boom! Crackle!

The ground split and red sand that had melted from the intense heat erupted from the cracks like a volcano.

"K-Kang-Woo!" Seol-Ah quickly reached out to Kang-Woo amidst the chaos, but Balrog grabbed her arm.

“We have to run away,” he stated.

“B-but...”

Balrog bit his lip and muttered, “We will only be a nuisance to the king if we stay close to him.”

His powerlessness was weighing him down. His expression was the same that Seol-Ah saw when he did nothing as Kang-Woo struggled with the side effects of opening the Doors.

“Kang-Woo...” Seol-Ah’s eyes glistened with tears.

She hesitated for a while and then turned around as tears flowed down her cheeks. Balrog lifted her and ran to where the heat wouldn’t harm them.

Fwoosh—!!

“Hihihi! What? Is that all you’ve got?!” Bael burst into laughter within the blazing flames. “More, more, more!! Bring out more of your power!! Huh? I know you’re stronger than this!!”

Bael spread his arms out and split the enormous flames in half.

Kang-Woo frowned as he watched Bael nullify Kang-Woo’s attacks with ease.

*‘This isn’t gonna work.’*

Although they had not fought for long, Kang-Woo could feel an overwhelming gap between him and Bael. At this rate, he would be no match for Bael.

*‘In that case...’*

Kang-Woo placed his hand over his heart. He could see three doors keeping the black sea at bay. The moment that he grabbed the handle of the First Door...

“Lord Bael, the preparations are complete,” an unpleasant voice like nails on a chalkboard rang out.

Kang-Woo turned to see a hunchback demon wearing an old robe.

*‘Amon.’*

Kang-Woo’s eyes gleamed with wariness.

“Huh? Already?” Bael expressed disappointment. He whined like a little boy asking his parents to buy him a toy, “Why~? It was just getting good! Can’t I fight for just a little longer?”

“Keke. You know that we came here for a different reason.” Amon tapped the ground with his staff and continued as if scolding Bael, “The enjoyment will only amplify if you postpone it.”

“Tch.” Bael pouted and stomped his feet as if having a temper tantrum. He said as he smiled widely and waved, “Sorry, Kang-Woo. Let’s play again next time!”

“I don’t know about that. I wanna play some more now,” Kang-Woo replied as he glared fiercely at Bael.

He had no idea what Bael had planned, but he could not let him run away.

“Hihihi.” Bael smiled innocently and looked up. “I wonder if you can?”

Bael’s mouth expanded massively, defying the laws of physics. His mouth which had grown to hundreds of meters now looked as if it were a colossal net.

Crunch!

And then, something was devoured by his mouth.

“What was that?” Kang-Woo muttered as a chill ran down his spine.

He felt as if something horrible and irreversible had occurred.

“Heh.” Bael chuckled. And then...

Riiing.

[The Demon God’s Heart has been absorbed by Bael.]

[A portion of the privileges will be granted to Bael as per the ‘Law of Titans.’]

“Right then, see ya.”

Crackle—!!

A giant Rift easily several kilometers wide formed in midair. Bael jumped into the Rift as he waved innocently.

“Stop right th—”

Before Kang-Woo even had a chance to chase after Bael...

[The privileges of the ‘Gaia System’ will be transferred from Gaia to Bael.]

[Bael has commanded the collapse of the ‘Gaia System.’]

A blue window containing a horrifying message covered Kang-Woo’s field of vision.

[Commencing the collapse of the ‘Gaia System.’]

“Motherfucker... Just my luck...” Kang-Woo cursed as he read the contents of the blue message windows.

## Chapter 433 - Linked Worlds (1)

Rumble—!!

The sky looked as if it were collapsing. The earth was upturned and shot up like a giant tsunami. The entire forest was being destroyed as if a giant had grabbed and flipped the ground.

“Kyaaaaah! Wh-what the fuck?!”

“H-hyung-nim!!”

Cha Yeon-Joo and Kim Si-Hun’s screams rang out.

Oh Kang-Woo floated into the air and shouted, “Get away from the ground!”

There was fortunately someone among his party members who could easily keep them safe in the air.

“Echidna!”

“Yeah!” Echidna nodded and jumped into the air.

The girl the size of a middle schooler lit up and turned into a massive dragon twenty meters tall.

[Krarararararara!!][1]

“What the hell’s up with that roar?”

*‘Did you turn invisible or something?’[2]*

[Hm! All of you, get on my back!] Echidna shouted as she spread her giant wings.

The party members quickly climbed on her back.

Whoosh!

Echidna flew into the air, the ground crumbling under her. Kang-Woo bit his lip as he looked down at the collapsing forest.

*‘Shit. What the fuck is going on? The Gaia System is collapsing?’*

Kang-Woo knew very well what the Gaia System’s role was. It was the power that protected Earth from otherworldly invaders.

*‘If that disappears...’*

Kang-Woo’s face paled. The Earth that he had worked so hard to protect would be vulnerable to otherworldly invasions. To make a comparison, it was as if the walls of a fortress had vaporized instantly. Not even Kang-Woo had any idea of what sort of beings there were in the outer worlds and how they would interfere with Earth.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Kang-Woo cursed.

Anxiety took over him. This was the worst possible scenario.

*‘Dammit.’*

He should have opened the Doors the moment he saw Bael. He should have realized what Bael was up to once he found out that Bael and Lucifer were in this forest. Belated regret swept over him.

“H-hyung-nim. Layla is...”

Kang-Woo managed to come back to his senses after hearing Si-Hun’s shaking voice.

*‘Wait.’*

He recalled what Layla looked like when he first met her. She had no eyesight and had been in a wheelchair because the Gaia System was severely damaged as a result of Kang-Woo returning to Earth. But if that very Gaia System had now completely collapsed, she would be...

“Shit!”

Kang-Woo quickly turned around to see Layla panting heavily in Si-Hun’s arms. He ran to her, bit open his finger, and poured blood into her mouth.

“U-Urgh...”

“Darling! Use all the healing magic you have on Layla right now!”

“O-okay!” Han Seol-Ah quickly approached Layla and poured healing magic on Layla.

The heavily panting Layla’s complexion began to return to normal.

“Haaa, haaa. I’m alright now, everyone,” Layla said as she caught her breath.

“... You are?” Kang-Woo asked, unable to understand.

He had seen many times through Layla and Iris that the condition of a god affected their incarnation. The Gaia System had collapsed, so it would not be a surprise even if Gaia, Earth’s guardian deity, were to be annihilated. How could she be fine?

Layla calmly explained, “Lady Gaia... managed to escape from the effects of the Gaia System’s collapse after losing her rights as the guardian deity.”

Kang-Woo sighed in relief at the unexpected news. There was no better news than this in terms of right at this moment.

“What in the world is going on?” Kang-Woo asked as he stared at the giant Rift several kilometers wide that had formed in the Nightmare Forest.

The ground around them was being sucked into the Rift like a black hole.

“I’m... not sure either. I-I’ve never seen anything like this before,” Layla replied.

It was an obvious answer since the protection of a star had never collapsed before. In that case...

“Are you able to get in contact with Lady Gaia?” Kang-Woo asked.

“... Just a moment.” Layla closed her eyes and brought her hands together. White light particles formed around her.

“Fuuu,” Kang-Woo sighed deeply and grabbed his forehead.

He had not been this flustered since when he had first fallen into Hell.

*‘Calm down.’*

The water had already been spilled. Bael had eaten the Demon God’s heart and Earth’s protection had been destroyed. Nothing could be worse than this.

*‘But I’m sure there’s a way to fix this goddamn despairing situation.’*

“...” Kang-Woo thought in silence.

However, the situation did not allow him the leisure to think.

Boom! Rumble—!!

“K-Kang-Woo...”

“Wh-what should we do about that?”

The Rift which was already several kilometers wide was getting even larger.

“...”

At this rate, it could even devour the entire continent of Aernor.

“Haaa... Fuck.” Kang-Woo raised his head and sighed.

Although he had acquired Top-rank Deific Essence, it was nearly impossible to close a Rift getting larger to the point that it could engulf an entire world. It was as insane as stopping a natural disaster with one’s bare hands.

Kang-Woo smirked.

*‘Well, since when have I only done things that were possible?’*

He lightly jumped down from Echidna’s back.

“K-Kang-Woo?!” Seol-Ah yelled from behind.

Kang-Woo ignored her and landed on the collapsing ground.

“Fucking brat.”

Kang-Woo grimaced as he stared at the ground being sucked into the Rift.

He slowly walked to the Rift, spread his arms wide, and commanded with Soul Speech, “Close.”

Crackle—!!!

A sound akin to steel being torn apart echoed. Kang-Woo slowly brought the arms he had spread out closer together as he burned with golden light.

“No... way...”

“H-how could he close that Rift with pure strength...?”

Kang-Woo could hear the shocked voices of his party members, but he ignored them.

“Kurgh.” Kang-Woo raised his head as immense pressure weighed down on him.

“Arghhh...”

His eyes widened and his mouth agape. His muscles swelled up as if they would burst and his blood vessels popped out hideously.

“Fuck...”

*‘This hurts like hell.’*

Kang-Woo felt like he was being compressed by a giant hydraulic press. His body contorted, unable to handle the pressure.

Crack! Crunch!

His arms, legs, head, and hips twisted. Horrendous pain ate away at his sanity.

*'It's okay.'*

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He was used to this level of pain; he could endure pain like this all day if he had to.

“Kang-Woo!”

Just then, Seol-Ah's magic flowed into him, restoring his distorted body to its original condition. Kang-Woo's flickering consciousness became a little clearer thanks to Seol-Ah's help.

Crack—!!

The destruction continued; the ground around them had been destroyed to the point that it was irreparable.

“Fuuu.” Kang-Woo took a deep breath.

Fwoosh!

Kang-Woo was enveloped by gold and black flames— no, he had become fire itself.

Riiing.

[Raising Player Oh Kang-Woo's proficiency in the 'Flames of Voracity.']

[You have obtained a clue for acquiring Transcendent-rank Deific Essence!]

Blue message windows popped up, but Kang-Woo did not have the leeway to check what it said. His consciousness turned hazy as the giant flames rampaged.

“A-arghhh.”

Kang-Woo crouched. He could feel the Flames of Voracity around him getting larger and spreading to the expanding Rift.

Tsssss—!!

The Rift that was devouring a world was being devoured by the blazing flames.

“Raaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

The gold and black flames were burning the entire world. Immense power flowed into Kang-Woo— no, power might be flowing out of him; he couldn't tell. He extended his arm. He felt like he would be able to do something.

Fwoosh!

Kang-Woo closed into a fist the hand of the arm that he was extending. The Flames of Voracity wrapped around the borders of the expanding Rift. The gold and black flames eating away at the giant black Rift looked as if a *black sun* had risen.

Tsssss.

The Rift's expansion stopped.

"Haaa, haaa," Kang-Woo panted heavily and collapsed on the spot. He could not muster an ounce of strength.

*'Did I stop it?'*

He turned his head as he was lying down on the ground. He had stopped the Rift from expanding but had not managed to close it. But the good news was that the Rift was no longer sucking everything around it like a black hole.

[Kang-Woo!]

Echidna flew toward Kang-Woo as she flapped her giant wings. The party members soon arrived where Kang-Woo was. Seol-Ah quickly used healing magic on him, and Si-Hun and Balrog stood around him like bodyguards.

"... Hyung-nim."

Schwing.

Si-Hun created a sword with blue condensed sword energy and stared at the black Rift.

"I sense a presence. Not one, but many," he continued.

They could feel people walking toward them from within the Rift. The party members prepared themselves anxiously.

Whoooooom.

A wave formed on the surface of the black Rift and a foot emerged; it looked to be that of a human. An entire leg soon emerged as well as a sword strapped to the person's waist.

Boom!

Si-Hun lowered his stance and charged forward.

*'Heavenly Dragon Fl—'*

As Si-Hun raised the sword above his head and was about to swing it down...

"... Si-Hun?" said an old man who walked out of the Rift.

Si-Hun stopped himself in his tracks and stared at the old man in surprise.

"Master...?"

The old man who walked out of the Rift was Tian Wuchen, the Player with the title *Sword Emperor*.

"What in the..." Si-Hun stared dumbfoundedly at Wuchen, who was supposed to be on Earth at the moment.

"Yeon-Joo? Is that you?" A masculine woman walked out of the Rift behind Wuchen and stared at Yeon-Joo with her head tilted.



“Huh? Hwa-Yeon? Why are you here...?”

“Whoa! Why are you here, you guys? Didn’t you say that you were going to, uhhh... What was it called again? Vernar or whatever it was?”

Even Kang Tae-Soo, whom Kang-Woo couldn’t even remember the last time he was relevant, had appeared.

“... What the hell?” Kang-Woo on the ground looked around in shock.

Players who were supposed to be on Earth had crossed through the Rift; that could only mean one thing.

“Has Aernor and Earth... been linked?”

Chapter 434 - Linked Worlds (2)

“So...” Oh Kang-Woo slurred. “Your name was... uhhh... Deok-Gu, right?”

“It’s Tae-Soo! Kang Tae-Soo! I can’t believe you forgot my name even if it’s been a while, hyung-nim!”

“Hahaha. I’m just joking, man.”

*‘Sorry. I actually forgot. Can you blame me when you’ve barely appeared?’*

How was he supposed to remember a character that vanished into thin air in a long novel like this?

*‘Well, whatever the case, this isn’t the time.’*

Kang-Woo turned to Tian Wuchen and asked, “What’s going on?”

“That’s what I would like to ask. Didn’t you all... go to another dimension to fulfill a mission that Lady Gaia gave you?” Wuchen asked.

“This is that dimension.”

“Wh-what?”

Wuchen looked around in surprise. The surroundings had been destroyed beyond recognition due to Kang-Woo’s battle against Bael, to the point that the Nine Hells would look better.

“Was the continent of Aernor... this hideous a place?”

“No, this is just from a battle that took place here.”

“What sort of battle would level the surroundings like this...?”

Wuchen’s expression hardened as if he couldn’t imagine it. The area around them looked as if a battle between Titans of myth had taken place.

“More importantly, could you answer my earlier question?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Oh, my apologies. We were... It was called North Korea, correct?”

“Yes.”

It was one of the counties that had fallen during the Day of Calamity.

“A giant Gate suddenly appeared there. As you can see... It was well over several kilometers wide,” Wuchen mentioned.

“And so Guardians sent you to investigate?”

Wuchen nodded. “After all, there hasn’t been a Gate as large as this even during the Day of Calamity. Although... I never expected this place to be a continent of another world.”

“...” Kang-Woo remained silent.

As he had expected, Earth and Aernor seemed to have been linked.

‘Why?’

It had not been impossible to cross between Earth and Aernor; Lucifer, Uriel, and even Kang-Woo and his party members had crossed the dimensional wall.

‘*But this is different.*’

Kang-Woo looked up at the Rift that looked easily above ten kilometers in diameter. The Flames of Voracity had managed to stop its expansion, but it did not disappear. It was as if a bridge had been built between two islands that previously required a boat to go back and forth. Just like what Wuchen and the others did, anyone would be able to cross between Earth and Aernor through the Rift.

‘...’ There was only one explanation for why this happened. ‘*The Gaia System’s collapse.*’

The protective barrier on Earth had completely vanished.

‘*The invasion on Earth has already begun.*’

The first world that invaded Earth was Aernor, the world closest to Earth.

“... Goddammit,” Kang-Woo cursed.

The link between Earth and Aernor was not a big problem; Kang-Woo welcomed the fact that he could freely cross between Earth and Aernor.

‘*But that’s surely not the end of it.*’

Aernor was only the beginning. All sorts of outer worlds would begin to invade Earth after the Triad.

‘*And I’m sure the Nine Hells will be among them.*’

Kang-Woo frowned fiercely. The worst possible situation that he had imagined after he discovered the true nature of the Gaia System had occurred.

‘*It’s too late to restore the Gaia System now.*’

They had only just barely managed to fix the hole that Kang-Woo had made, and that had taken years of effort. Not only that, but the fix had only been temporary. Now that the entire Gaia System had collapsed, there was no practical way to restore it anymore. That fact would not change even if Kang-Woo were to find Bael and kill him immediately.

*'Motherfucker.'*

The situation could not be any worse. A sense of powerlessness spread over him.

[M-my children! Are you alright?!]

Just then, a brown-haired woman with a gentle appearance and emitting faint light came out of the Rift and ran toward Kang-Woo and his party members. Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

*'The hell? Why is Gaia here?'*

His confusion only grew. The gods of the divine realm could only manifest in the physical realm through their incarnations; coming to the physical realm in their true form was impossible unless they were to risk the System annihilating their Deific Essence.

"L-Lady Gaia?" Layla also stared at Gaia in surprise and asked in pallor, "Wh-what is happening? If you manifest directly like this, the restriction..."

[There is no need to worry. Well, that is not quite true, but...] Gaia sighed deeply and continued, [The Law's restrictions have vanished.]

"... What?"

[Those possessing Deific Essence are no longer under restriction... They can freely use their power in the physical realm.]

"..."

A heavy silence fell. Kang-Woo bit his lip. It was not hard to imagine who had eradicated the Laws of Titans that restricted the actions of gods.

*'Bael, that crazy motherfucker...'*

Not only had he destroyed Earth's protective barrier, but he had also freed the gods from their chains. He had pretty much quickened Earth's journey to its demise.

"..."

Something snapped within Kang-Woo's head. He felt dizzy as he imagined Bael bursting into laughter in front of him.

"P-please wait. By the restrictions being undone, you mean..." Layla looked at Gaia in shock.

Gaia nodded with a heavy expression. [Yes. It means that beings who possess Deific Essence can... manifest directly into the physical realm.]

"N-no way..." Layla collapsed to her knees.

It was obvious, but not all those who possessed Deific Essence desired to protect the world. Some were demonic in nature and could not care less if every world were to fall as long as it could fulfill their self-satisfaction. If the Law of Titans keeping those beings in check disappeared, they would rampage to their heart's content.

“Wh-what... What happened to Earth?” Layla asked as she stuttered.

If beings who possessed Deific Essence trespassed into Earth, there would no doubt be chaos beyond the Day of Calamity. It would be no surprise even if Earth had fallen already.

[Fortunately, Uranus took quick action to block the gods from manifesting as they wanted, but... I do not know how long that will last.] Gaia bit her lip anxiously. [We have to find that Demon of Prophecy named Bael as soon as possible to avoid the worst possible scenario. My children, did you see where he went?]

Layla shook her head with a heavy expression.

[How... How could this have...] Gaia's eyes filled with despair. She lowered her head as her shoulders trembled. [In the end... we are unable to stop the prophecy.]

Despite the Protectors doing their best to stop the end, it was coming nonetheless.

“... Let us first return to Earth and come up with a countermeasure,” Kang-Woo suggested emptily amidst the somber atmosphere.

Gaia turned to Kang-Woo. [Yes, you are right. Nothing will change even if we stay still. That aside, my child. I heard that you fought against the Demon of Prophecy. Are you feeling alr—]

As she was about to reach out to Kang-Woo in worry...

[...!]

A chill ran throughout Gaia's body.

[A-arghh.]

She couldn't breathe properly. A powerless feeling as if she was being sucked into an endless abyss swept over her the moment she looked into Kang-Woo's eyes. Gaia trembled from the extreme fear.

*‘What... in the...’*

The sudden feeling then instantly disappeared before Gaia even had a chance to get a hold of herself. Gaia stared at Kang-Woo again with shaking eyes. Although his expression was slightly hardened, he was still the Protector of Light that she cherished.

*‘What was that?’*

The fear that she felt had been far too vivid for it to be an imagination. She had not felt this much fear even when she had fought against the Demon God in the past. She had seen a giant mouth with the teeth of a horrendous monster on the other side of the abyss; the image was engraved into her brain.

“Lady Gaia?” Kang-Woo called her with a gentle voice.

[Oh, I-I'm sorry.]

“Is something wrong?”

[No, it's nothing.] Gaia shook her head.

She felt dizzy as if she had an extremely realistic dream.

“I see,” Kang-Woo answered. Gaia's eyes staring at him were a little cold. “In that case, I will excuse myself to contact Iris before we go.”

[Iris?]

“She is Lady Elune's incarnation. She was of great help to our explorations in Aernor.”

[Ohhh, I see.] Gaia nodded as if she understood. [Go ahead. I will make preparations to return to Earth with the other children.]

“I will leave it to you.”

Kang-Woo turned around and walked along the Nightmare Forest that had been destroyed to the point that no one would think this place used to be a forest at a glance. As he walked... and walked... and kept walking...

“... My king.”

Kang-Woo heard Lilith's subtly trembling voice. He ignored her and continued to walk.

“My king!” Lilith shouted and grabbed Kang-Woo's arm.

Kang-Woo turned to face Lilith.

“... *Gasp.*”

His pupils were stretched horizontally, the whites of his eyes had been dyed black, and his irises were bright yellow. Lilith trembled in pallor. Kang-Woo shook off Lilith's hand and turned back around.

“Go back. I'll be right there.”

“M-my king...”

“I told you... to go back.”

“...”

Lilith bit her lip and bowed. Kang-Woo walked until Lilith could no longer see him.

Wham—!!

He slammed down his fist.

“Hah.” Kang-Woo couldn't help but laugh. “Ha... hahaha. Fucking hell.”

He looked up. It had truly been a while since he had *lost*.



Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and looked around the streets. As Yeon-Joo mentioned, it was peaceful.

*'Well, I couldn't care about less what happens to these people.'*

It was none of his business whether these people became food for demonic beasts or were torn apart by demons. He was not delicate enough to worry about what happened to people whom he had no relations with. Unlike Kim Si-Hun and Yeon-Joo, whose eyes were filled with emotions, Kang-Woo fell into thought nonchalantly.

*'Maybe I should prepare an escape route just in case.'*

If Earth were to be brought to the brink of collapse after being unable to endure otherworldly invasions, it would be nice to have a place to run away to with a few people. In other words, Operation: So Long, Earth.

*'Darling, Si-Hun... Echidna, Yeon-Joo. I'll of course take Balrog, and as long as Lilith stays in this form...'*

Kang-Woo thought about the people he would take. As long as they were with him, he couldn't care less about Earth's destruction.

*'Well, it would only be in a worst-case scenario.'*

Since the entire Triad would be destroyed according to the prophecy, he would not be able to settle in Aernor. He needed to find a world free from the Gaia System's influence. Just finding a world like that would not be easy, and he was getting a headache just thinking about how to set up a stable life there.

*'Not just that, my delicate and kind darling would no doubt be heartbroken.'*

Kang-Woo had invested too much on Earth to give up on it. He decided to set aside planning the operation for now and began to think of an alternative plan.

*'Alright, let's organize the situation first.'*

Earth had lost its ability to block otherworldly invasions due to the Gaia System's collapse. Although Gates still existed, its numbers would skyrocket to an incomparable number once the invasion picked up speed.

*'Also, the interference of the gods.'*

There was no telling what the beings possessing Deific Essence, who had been stuck in the divine realm due to the System's restrictions shackling them, would do now that they had been freed. No, to be more precise, Kang-Woo more or less knew what they would do.

*'They would fulfill their desire.'*

Actual gods were different from the almighty gods that religious organizations of Earth worshiped. Beings who possessed Deific Essence were closer to humans with special powers than gods. Since that was the case, they would do as their desire directed now that they were free to do as they liked.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and tapped his thigh with his finger.

*'Guardians won't do.'*

Players would not be able to block the disasters that would come.

*'In that case... the only way is to get the gods' cooperation.'*

He needed help from beings possessing Deific Essence; he would not be able to block all the invasions by himself. Just like how Guardians had been made through the gathering of Protectors, an organization consisting of beings who possessed Deific Essence needed to be made. Then, the organization would keep the other gods in check so that they couldn't run wild as they desired.

"Hyung-nim?" Si-Hun called the thinking Kang-Woo.

"Oh, huh?"

"What... should we do now?"

"..."

"..."

"First," Kang-Woo turned to the party members and continued, "Go back home and get some rest. It's been half a year since we've been back."

"R-rest? How can we rest in a situation like this?!" Yeon-Joo shouted.

"There's nothing we can do right now even if we don't rest."

"That's true, but..."

"We need a break. If we don't rest now, we might not have a chance to later. You should stop by the Red Rose Guild, shouldn't you?"

"Yeah."

"Right, then. All of you, go get some rest. Si-Hun, you go visit your mother too."

"Okay, hyung-nim."

"I'll call you all once I've finished preparing." Kang-Woo turned around and grabbed Han Seol-Ah's hands. He continued, "Go back home first with Exchidna and Halcyon, darling. I have some stuff to talk about with Lady Gaia, so I'll stop by the Hall of Protection."

"I'll go with you then," Seol-Ah answered desperately as she tightened her grip on Kang-Woo'd hands.

Kang-Woo could feel her strong desire of not wanting to let go of him.

"It would be bad if your identity were to be..." Kang-Woo slurred.

*'Come to think of it...'*



There was no need to hide the fact that Seraph was within Seol-Ah anymore. The Constellations of Evil who had been sealed by Seraph's power had already been freed and killed. Not only that but Seol-Ah would not be undermined by the gods since she possessed the soul of Seraph, a Top-rank goddess.

"Alright, then. Darling and Lilith, follow me."

"Okay!"

Kang-Woo opened the Gate leading to the Hall of Protection. Gaia had already gone to the Hall of Protection with Layla after guiding them to Earth.

*'I'm sure Gaia won't be the only god there.'*

Kang-Woo's eyes shone. Since the chains shackling the gods had been broken, Gaia's closest associates would likely have manifested into the physical realm as well.

"I wonder if the gods siding with Gaia will go along with it?" Lilith asked as they headed to the Hall of Protection.

Kang-Woo smirked.

*'It seems like she has an idea of what I'm trying to do.'*

As expected of Lilith. No, the idea of creating an organization, like Guardians, of beings who possessed Deific Essence might just be a simple one.

*'Although I doubt there are many who would be able to put such an idea into action.'*

How many beings would be able to keep several different gods in check?

"I'm not sure," Kang-Woo answered.

"There will surely be much opposition."

"That can't be helped."

Even if the gods resisted, Kang-Woo needed them under his control. He couldn't trust Gaia to take care of it.

"I can't afford to have one foot out the door anymore."

Kang-Woo had never once taken action directly in Aernor even during his days in Guardians; he had always coordinated the situation from the shadows as he placed Si-Hun as the figurehead. This was because he did not want to shoulder the risk involved with having his identity revealed.

However...

"From now on..."

He needed beings who listened to him, obeyed him, and died at his command.

"I'll personally take action," he stated with fiercely blazing eyes.

Lilith remained silent.

Kang-Woo reminded her of back when she saw him for the first time in the Ninth Hell.

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“You’re here, my child,” Gaia greeted him in the Hall of Protection as if she had been waiting for him.

There were many other gods as well.

“Let me introduce you. This is Uranus, the one who had taken on the role of guardian deity in my place while I was incapacitated. And this is...”

Gaia continued with the introductions. The names of the gods that she introduced were all ones that Kang-Woo was familiar with through Greek mythology.

“That blondie who looks like he likes to screw around is Zeus, and the blue-haired one next to him is Poseidon,” Gaia remarked.

“What do you mean, screw around, Mother?” Zeus asked.

“Quiet. Do you have any idea how many incidents there have been in the divine realm because of you?” Gaia said as she glared at Zeus.

Zeus laughed heartily and shouted, “Can you blame me? Just like how a butterfly can’t fly past a beautiful flower, I can’t avert my eyes from the lovely ladies thirsty for love!”

Kang-Woo chuckled as he listened to Zeus’s nonsense.

*‘I had an inkling ever since I found out that Gaia was Earth’s guardian deity, but...’*

He had not imagined gods with familiar names like Zeus and Poseidon to appear.

*‘And their personalities kinda match the legends too.’*

Of course not everything was the same as the legends; Kang-Woo was easily able to tell that from the fact that Uranus looked well.

*‘According to the myths, he was castrated and became a eunuch.’*

Uranus did not look like a eunuch.

*‘I mean, it’s a bit weird to say that someone doesn’t look like a eunuch, but whatever.’*

It felt weird seeing beings of mythology that Kang-Woo had only read about through children’s books back in the orphanage.

“And lastly, this is... Artemis, the goddess of the moon,” Gaia said as she turned to the black-haired woman standing silently in the corner of the Hall of Protection.

Her eyes were filled with sorrow and loneliness as she leaned against the wall in silence.

*‘Hm?’*

Kang-Woo tilted his head as he looked at Artemis, who was staring blankly into nothingness. She did not seem to be worrying about the end of the world like the other gods.

Noticing Kang-Woo's reaction, Gaia continued sorrowfully, "Artemis... lost some precious to her."

"Due to this incident?" Kang-Woo asked.

"No, not that." Gaia shook her head. "The Deific Essence of Apollo, her older brother, was annihilated suddenly one day. Yes, as if..." Gaia looked at Artemis pitifully. "As if he broke an oath that he made with his Deific Essence on the line."

Kang-Woo remained silent. It was no wonder why Artemis was wallowing in sadness since her older brother had been annihilated out of nowhere without knowing why.

"It must have been the Demon of Prophecy's doing." Kang-Woo's eyes teared as if he understood Artemis's pain.

He knew how agonizing it was to lose those precious to him.

"Haaa... I hate myself for being unable to help her in times like this," Gaia remarked.

"Not at all, Lady Gaia, You've done your best," Kang-Woo consoled as he patted Gaia's shoulder.

*'Bael.'*

Kang-Woo thought about the demon who had spread unfathomable sorrow and dreamed of even greater disaster.

"Now, then." Kang-Woo set aside his sorrow, quelled his rage, and said to the crowd, "Let us begin the countermeasure meeting."

Chapter 436 - Olympus (2)

"Hmm?" Zeus raised his eyebrows after hearing Oh Kang-Woo's statement and turned to Gaia.

It was not just him, but the other gods as well. They were all staring at Gaia and Uranus in confusion as if they were asking why a mere retainer was leading the countermeasure meeting. It was only natural since they did not know that Kang-Woo had acquired Top-rank Deific Essence; although he had been chosen by Gaia, he was but a retainer. Some of the gods were even giving Kang-Woo hostile glares.

"Enough with the disrespect." Gaia frowned as she stared at the gods. "My child has risked his life to protect Earth while we were restricted by the Law. Are there any of you who know Earth's situation better than my child?"

"Mm. You are right." Poseidon nodded.

Although the human was a mere retainer without Deific Essence, his achievements and experience of protecting Earth all this time needed to be acknowledged. As Gaia had mentioned, none of the gods knew about Earth's situation better than the human.

“In that case, let us continue the meeting,” Kang-Woo said firmly as the gods focused their attention on him. “I am sure all of you have some idea about what is happening on Earth right now.”

A few gods nodded.

Kang-Woo continued calmly, “Bael, the Demon of Prophecy, destroyed Earth’s protection and freed beings possessing Deific Essence from the Law of Titans. Hence, gods like yourselves have been allowed to act freely on Earth along with the commencement of otherworldly invasions. First of all, we can't block these invasions in our current situation.”

As long as the Gaia System, Earth’s protection, was not restored from its completely collapsed state, it would be fundamentally impossible to block the invasions. Not only that but there was no way to restore it at the moment.

“As for the otherworldly invasions, we can only come up with measures to take after the fact. In other words, we have to either chase out or conciliate the otherworldly beings once they arrive through a Rift.”

They needed to make preparations to be able to act at any time as soon as a Rift opened, but they couldn’t do anything else. The outer worlds would always have the initiative in this situation.

“But...”

That was not the case for gods who had been freed from the restriction.

“We can regulate the gods who are likely to cause chaos among the freed ones on our end.”

If they had been freed, they simply needed to be put on a new leash.

“Hah, so you’re suggesting we attack them first?” one of the gods asked as he snorted.

He was covered in muscles like Balrog and was wearing a lion’s head like a helmet.

*‘Heracles, was it?’*

He was one of the gods who had given Kang-Woo a hostile glare earlier.

“I’m not suggesting we attack them. We would just keep them in check so that they can’t make any reckless moves,” Kang-Woo stated.

“That’s the same thing.” Heracles glared as he argued.

Kang-Woo’s eyebrows slightly flinched. “You are free to think of it that way. We have to act first before they cause chaos.”

“Bullshit. You want to do something like that when we have no idea who will cause chaos and who won’t? Are you planning on antagonizing even the neutral gods as well?” Heracles asked curtly.

His argument was valid; restricting the gods who were trying to enjoy their newfound freedom would surely cause opposition even from gods who had no intention of causing chaos from the beginning.

Kang-Woo chuckled at the trivial objection. "Yes, it doesn't matter if we antagonize them."

"What?"

"In the current situation, the gods are like refugees."

Kang-Woo knew that not every god would have malicious intentions. The majority of the gods would probably manifest into the physical realm simply out of curiosity. Among them, there were likely gods like Gaia who would stand against the Demon of Prophecy to protect the physical realm. However...

"The risk of them causing chaos is more than enough of a reason to restrict their entry," Kang-Woo stated.

Many on Earth couldn't live anywhere else, but gods were different; they had no unavoidable reason to manifest in the physical realm. Like demons had the Nine Hells, the gods had the divine realm.

"All gods who manifest into the physical realm must be designated as enemies and cast out," Kang-Woo declared.

"Hah, then are you telling us to go back to the divine realm?"

"You would have to be sorted. Only the gods permitted by me and Lady Gaia should be allowed to remain in the physical realm."

The gazes of the gods on him grew even more hostile. The atmosphere in the Hall of Protection turned menacing.

"Hah, we have to get your permission to be in the physical realm?" Heracles glared at Kang-Woo sharply. He grabbed his double-bit ax and asked in a low tone, "Are you insane?"

"A-all of you, calm down." Gaia hurriedly stood between Heracles and Kang-Woo.

She stared at Kang-Woo in bewilderment, not expecting him to suggest such a radical countermeasure. "My child. It certainly would be an effective countermeasure, but... opposition from the other gods will be too great."

There were countless gods and just as many factions. Gaia, a Top-rank goddess as well as Earth's guardian deity until a few moments ago, naturally possessed the largest faction, but it was not large enough to keep all other factions in check. This was especially so now that her privileges as guardian deity had been stripped from her. If Gaia tried to forcibly regulate the other gods, her faction could end up going to war against the other factions.

"That's a risk we'll have to take," Kang-Woo said.

"It is way more than just a risk..." Gaia slurred.

“I am suggesting we set an example of how to avoid a war.”

“That very example is what may cause a war.”

“In that case...”

Kang-Woo stared at Gaia with deeply sunken eyes.

Gaia flinched.

She felt the same chilling terror as back when she saw Kang-Woo after his confrontation with Bael. She could barely breathe as she was overwhelmed by an endless abyss.

“We just have to trample them to the point that they wouldn’t dare to consider war.”

Deathly silence fell. The gods in the Hall of Protection stared at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly, lost for words.

“M-mmm.” Gaia stared at Kang-Woo, not sure what to do.

Seeing her reaction, Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

*‘I knew taking action myself was the right call.’*

When Kang-Woo first heard about the gods being freed from their restriction, he considered letting Gaia keep the other gods in check.

*‘It’ll be a shitshow if I let Gaia take care of it.’*

She did not possess the conviction to make extreme decisions like this.

*‘No wonder why the Demon of Prophecy is free to run rampant.’*

Kang-Woo stared at Gaia in disappointment.

*‘How can she be so incapable?’*

No, that was probably the wrong word to use. Kang-Woo could tell from the trust that Uranus and the other gods had in her that she likely possessed the qualities of an excellent benevolent ruler.

*‘But you need a tyrant in turbulent times like this.’*

The end of the world was right around the corner; nothing would get done if they were to think about the circumstances of others like Gaia wanted. If the other gods did not comply, Kang-Woo just needed to make them comply.

“I-instead of an extreme measure like that, we should try to talk it out... no, finding the Demon of Prophecy and restoring the Law of Titans comes first,” Gaia suggested.

“That would be the most ideal option, but we have no idea where Bael is or what he’s planning, do we?” Kang-Woo refuted.

“That is true, but...”

“Rather than trying to find Bael who knows where, we should resolve the chaos that we can at the moment first.”

“...”

“Of course, that doesn’t mean I’m going to stop the search on Bael. You don’t have to worry about that,” Kang-Woo stated and looked around.

As Lilith had feared, glares of hostility were all around him.

*‘It’s about time at least one of them loses their patience and steps up.’*

He had not expected the gods to take this lying down. Even if the gods of Olympus did not have a strong sense of authority, Kang-Woo’s action had surely crossed the line. After all, even though Gaia treated her retainers like her children, the other gods thought of retainers as slaves who followed their every command.

*‘Alright, one of you make a scene.’*

Kang-Woo would be the one in a predicament if no one stepped up because Gaia was here. Opposition that was not resolved was toxic for a group; taking their opposition head-on to prove that he had the right to say such things would prevent future troubles.

*‘I could reveal that I have Top-rank Deific Essence, but...’*

It would not mean much. Not only would they not believe him, they would not obey him even if they did believe him. It was not like Deific Essence was a ranking system; no god would obey another god just because they possessed a higher Deific Essence rank. In such cases, it was much easier to have them experience that Kang-Woo had the power to keep the gods in check.

*‘Now, hurry up. It’d be bad for me if none of you stepped up.’*

If the meeting ended with no objections, the gods would only consider Kang-Woo as a mere human who was nothing but talk.

*‘Hurry the fuck up! Just stand up and say some shit like, “You impertinent human!”’*

Slam!!

“You impertinent human!”

*‘Hell yeah! That’s it, Heracles. I knew you had it in you!’*

“There is only so much bullshit that I can handle!”

“Listen listen I can’t listen!”[1]

“What?”

“Oh, my apologies. I ended up saying what I was thinking.”

*‘Son of a bitch. What a fucking buzzkill.’*

“Anyway, you object to this plan?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Hah, that’s the understatement of the era! Keeping all the gods in check? Risking war? We’d be the only ones sacrificed in your insane plan!”

“That is incorrect.”

“What?”

“I will ask for assistance from the gods of Olympus, but I will be taking on the role of persecuting the gods who do not comply with the restriction.”

Heracles and the other gods were dumbfounded by how calm Kang-Woo was. “Hah.”

Boom!

Heracles stomped his feet and raised his ax.

“I will see for myself whether or not you have the power to back up your bullshit,” he said.

“Haha,” Kang-Woo softly laughed. He had been waiting desperately for such a response. “Of course.”

Kang-Woo stared at Heracles as he smiled fiercely.

“Aah, just a second.”

Just then, a handsome middle-aged man with long, wavy blond hair held Heracles back and walked forward. It was Zeus.

“Father?” Heracles looked back at Zeus perplexedly.

Zeus smiled and continued, “I’ll be the one to test that human.”

“Zeus! What do you think you’re doing?! You might hurt my child if you—” Gaia shouted.

Zeus cut her off. “Hahaha. There’s no need to worry, Mother. I’ll go easy on him. In exchange...” He turned to Kang-Woo— no, to be more exact, the two women behind him. “Could you allow me to spend some time with that beautiful lady over there if I deem that you are unworthy?”

Zeus’s eyes shone as he stared at Han Seol-Ah.

“Pardon? M-me?” Seol-Ah asked in bewilderment.

“Ahh, yes! I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you, even in the divine realm!”

“...”

Kang-Woo remained silent. Seol-Ah hid behind Kang-Woo and embraced his arm.

“I...”

*‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing, dammit?’* Kang-Woo thought.

“B-belong to Kang-Woo.”



*'You're making my darling anxious.'*

"Grit. Are you... trying to separate me and Kang-Woo?"

*'Uhhh, what are you doing darling? You're gonna break my arm at that rate.'*

Creak.

*'Wait, it's seriously gonna break.'*

"Are you... trying to get in our way?"

*'Hahaha. Calm down, darling. At this rate, you're gonna rip him into shreds. If you do that, we can kiss the gods' cooperation goodbye.'*

Chapter 437 - GAME OVER

"Mm, you're already taken?" Zeus asked as he glanced at Oh Kang-Woo. He scanned Kang-Woo from head to toe and said as he smiled slyly, "He does not deserve a beautiful blue bird like yourself."

He laughed heartily and looked back at Han Seol-Ah flirtatiously. "I can guarantee that I can make you far happier."

"Shut... up."

"Hahaha! Great! There's nothing that makes a man more passionate than a woman hard to get!"

Zeus laughed even harder as Seol-Ah glared at him in displeasure. He exhaled heatedly as he scanned Seol-Ah from head to toe.

"Not even Aphrodite would be a match for your beauty! To think there was such a precious gem hidden within the physical realm..."

Zeus then turned to the other woman behind Kang-Woo.

"By the gods, how can this be?!" His eyes lit up as he looked at Lilith. "Hahaha, there is not one but two flowers! Is this a festival?!"

"My, you flatter me." Lilith smiled and walked toward Kang-Woo, placing her hand on his shoulder and smiling seductively. "But unfortunately for you, this man has acquired both of these flowers."

"Hmm," Zeus groaned, slightly astonished. He then turned to Kang-Woo and laughed heartily. "Hahaha! What a predicament. It is still not too late for you to change your mind and do as Lady Gaia says. At this rate, you'll be embarrassed in front of your lovely ladies!"

"Zeus!" Gaia shouted, unable to endure it any longer. "I told you to behave yourself!"

“Hahaha. It’s just a joke, Mother. Not even I would covet a woman who already has a beloved.”

“Bull! You’ve caused countless incidents in the divine realm because of that!”

“Oh, had I?” Zeus turned back to Kang-Woo as he smiled slyly. “Anyway, may I spend some time alone with your women if you fail the test?”

“No,” Seol-Ah answered in Kang-Woo’s place. She hid behind Kang-Woo, embracing his arm as she trembled and gritted her teeth. “Why are you trying to get between me and Kang-Woo?”

She glared at Zeus with empty eyes.

“Hahaha. I am not trying to get between you two. I am simply heartbroken to see a flower entangled by the stifling vines known as a relationship.”

Seol-Ah frowned aggressively due to Zeus’s sly attitude. As twelve translucent wings were about to sprout from her back...

“Calm down, darling,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“Kang-Woo?”

He grabbed Seol-Ah’s shoulder and pulled his arm out of her embrace. “That’s fine. However, could you do one thing that I ask you if I pass the test?”

“Hahaha! Of course! I swear on my Deific Essence of Lightning!” Zeus nodded as he laughed heartily. He shrugged and turned to Gaia. “Alright, then. Is there a decent place to carry out the test around here?”

“Zeus,” Gaia muttered.

“Hahaha, there is no need to be so worried, Mother. I will not severely injure your precious retainer.”

Zeus looked around and lightly snapped his finger.

Crackle.

Blue sparks spread from his hand to the walls.

“Oh, I found the perfect place,” Zeus said as he walked to the large training room that Kim Si-Hun usually used.

As Kang-Woo was about to follow Zeus inside, Gaia grabbed his arm with an anxious expression.

“My child, think this through again. No god in Olympus surpasses Zeus in terms of combat. Even if you’ve received my power... it will not be enough to face Zeus.”

Kang-Woo smiled as Gaia begged him desperately. He entered the training room without answering her. Gaia stared at Kang-Woo’s back in pity.

Uranus slowly approached and grabbed Gaia's shoulder. "Do not worry. I will intervene if Zeus is about to go too far."

"But..."

"Your retainer will also get a chance to experience how powerful the gods are. He will give up on his absurd plan of keeping all the gods in check."

Gaia brought her hands together in worry. White light flowed out from her and entered Kang-Woo. A barrier made of Divinity enveloped him so that he would avoid severe injuries.

"Haha. Your love for your retainers is as strong as always." Noticing the light, Zeus chuckled. He said leisurely, "Well then, I will let you attack first."

Kang-Woo smiled widely and bowed. "I look forward to your guidance."

"Hahaha! At least you have a minimal level of courtesy! Do not worry. I will do my best to embarrass you as least as possible in front of your women—"

Kang-Woo turned into a golden light and disappeared.

Tap.

"Hm?"

Kang-Woo teleported behind Zeus and grabbed him by the back of his head. Kang-Woo swung Zeus's head down and his knee up.

Bash!

"Kurgh!" Zeus grunted after getting a knee slammed into his face.

Kang-Woo grabbed Zeus's head with both hands and slammed his knee into Zeus's face again and again. The protective barrier of Deific Essence around Zeus shattered and his nose broke.

"W-Wa..." Zeus quickly shouted.

However, Kang-Woo slammed Zeus's head into the ground and stomped his feet.

Swish!!

Hundreds of golden swords sprouted from the ground like a graveyard of swords. Kang-Woo then ran with Zeus's head on the ground.

Slash!

"Aaarrggghh!!!" Zeus screamed.

Zeus's head was split, blood pouring out of his head from being slashed by the swords of splendor on the ground. He frantically twisted himself out of Kang-Woo's hand.

"*Huff, huff, huff!*" he panted heavily as he stared at Kang-Woo in disbelief. "H-how did you break the Deific Essence protection...?"

"Because I also have Deific Essence."

“What?”

Zeus was left astonished by Kang-Woo’s calm answer. He turned to look at Gaia momentarily but shook his head. A god couldn't grant Deific Essence to anyone but their incarnation.

*‘That means...’*

The human had acquired Deific Essence with his own strength. Zeus knew how impressive of a feat that was.

“Forgive me for the disrespect.” Zeus stopped underestimating Kang-Woo and widened his stance. “Can you tell me your Deific Name?”

Crackle!!

Zeus’s eyes shone as blue lightning enveloped him. His sly expression from earlier vanished and had been replaced with one befitting the dignity of the God of Lightning.

Kang-Woo said as he stared at Zeus, “Splendor. My Deific Name is Splendor.”

He said the name of his Deific Essence which he had acquired after overcoming countless adversities.

Flash—!

Blinding light filled the Hall of Protection.

Riiing!

[Affiliating Gaia’s retainer, the God of Splendor, with Olympus.]

[Error, error.]

[The God of Splendor’s entry to Olympus has been canceled due to an unknown reason.]

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The battle between the God of Lightning Zeus and the God of Splendor Oh Kang-Woo had gone in a completely different direction than expected.

“N-no way...”

Heracles’s mouth gaped open in shock as he watched the battle, chills running down his back. The battle had been overwhelming, but the problem was...

*“Cough! Kurgh...”*

The one on the ground was Zeus, one of the strongest gods of Olympus.

“I-I’ve lost,” Zeus said as he lowered his head in front of Kang-Woo.

He did not want to admit it, but he had no choice after being beaten so one-sidedly. He had lost so miserably that the word was not enough to describe his loss.

Zeus nodded and continued, “I see that... your declaration to keep the gods in check wasn’t just talk.”

It was not just the fact that Kang-Woo possessed Top-rank Deific Essence; the God of Splendor was so powerful that the entire force of Olympus might not be a match for him.

“Can I take that as an agreement to my plan?” Kang-Woo asked.

Zeus glanced in silence at Gaia, whose mouth was still gaped open in disbelief. He nodded slightly and said, “The ultimate decision is up to Mother, but I at least will agree.”

His pride did not allow him to take back his word after losing so miserably. Kang-Woo smiled. He did not need to look at Gaia’s response since she had most definitely realized that he had the power to back up his words.

“Well, then...”

Kang-Woo grabbed Zeus’s shoulder. He had gotten what he wanted, but he could not let Zeus’s ogling of Seol-Ah and Lilith slide. “Could I ask you to do that one thing as promised right now?”

“Mm.” Zeus averted his gaze from Kang-Woo. He had put his Deific Essence on the line since he had been sure that he would win, but regret swept over him after losing. “... Tell me what you want.”

“Oh, it’s nothing special. You only need to stay still for it.”

“...?”

“Please follow me.”

Kang-Woo helped Zeus up and smiled. He told Gaia that he needed to discuss something with Zeus privately and headed down to the Hall of Protection’s basement where Guardians equipment and potions were stored.

Creak.

Kang-Woo slid open the thick steel door.

“Where is this place?” Zeus asked.

“A storage room.”

“Why are we here...?” Zeus asked as he tilted his head incomprehensibly.

Kang-Woo looked back at him and smiled. “My request is simple. Just stay in here for a few hours without using any of your powers.”

“What?” Zeus frowned after hearing the unexpected request. “Mm... I don’t know what you’re thinking, but okay.”

Zeus gladly nodded and sat on a chair in the storage room. Kang-Woo walked behind him and then extended his right hand outward. Slushy jumped out of the Key of the Demonic Sea and onto Zeus’s face.

“Urpp! Wh-what is th—”

Slushy covered Zeus's eyes and Kang-Woo tied Zeus's hands and legs together using the Authority of Sealing.

"Kurgh! L-let me go!!" Zeus shouted.

He was unable to escape from the Authority of Sealing because he was not able to use any of his powers as he had sworn with his Deific Essence on the line.

"Lord Zeus," Kang-Woo called.

"Kuh! D-dammit! What are you trying to do to me?!"

Kang-Woo brought his mouth closer to the struggling Zeus's ear.

"Have you ever heard this saying?" Kang-Woo placed his hand on Zeus's shoulder.

"Every beautiful flower..."

Squelch.

"... Has tentacles."

Squelch, squelch.

Green tentacles poured out from the seams of the storage room walls.

"Wh-what? What does that m— W-wait! Wh-what are these strange sounds?!! Kurgh! S-something is crawling up my b-body!"

"Hahaha. I will erase your memories after, so you don't have to worry. It'll just feel like a nightmare once I do."

*'A nightmare so terrible that it'll traumatize you, that is.'*

"Well, then..." Kang-Woo nodded at Lilith, who was looking his way as she waved, and headed to the storage room door.

"W-wait! P-please!! P-please, let me go!!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter.

Zeus struggled frantically behind him.

Creak.

Kang-Woo closed the thick steel door.

"GAME OVER."

Thump.

Chapter 438 - Unreaching Voice (1)

An absurd new law was placed through Gaia; entry into the physical realm was restricted to all gods who did not receive permission from Gaia and the God of Splendor, and the Deific Essence of those who broke this law would be annihilated without question.

“How are they taking it?” Oh Kang-Woo asked.

“As you can predict.” Gaia nodded, having an expression of mixed feelings.

Kang-Woo nodded back. It was not difficult to guess how the gods, who were finally free from their restrictions, would react to being restricted again right after. Although they could not complain in the past since they were restricted by the Law of Titans, a set of rules created by beings superior to them, this instance was different.

The ones restricting them this time were Gaia, a Top-rank goddess but a fellow deity nonetheless, and the God of Splendor, a retainer of Gaia who was once human. Being kept in check by a human, albeit one possessing Deific Essence, was as humiliating as having a pet, whom one raised, placing a collar on them.

*‘There’s no way they would stand for it.’*

No matter how powerful the faction of Olympus was, they would never accept this absurd level of dictatorship.

“At this rate...” Gaia slurred anxiously.

Kang-Woo nodded. “They would band together.”

An anti-Gaia faction would be formed to combat Olympus’s dictatorship. There was no better way for people to join forces than against a common enemy.

Uranus stepped forward as he was listening to Kang-Woo and Gaia’s conversation. He gave off an aura as sharp as a knife despite his barbaric appearance.

“With the way things are progressing, it seems the gods who oppose this plan are gathering around the forces of Asgard with Odin at the center,” he remarked.

“Odin...” Gaia narrowed her eyes.

Odin was one of the Top-rank gods as well as one who had once been Earth’s guardian deity. He stepped down from the position after being greatly injured in the battle against Demon God Bauli, but that was a very long time ago. He possessed power on par with— no, even greater than his prime.

“Hah, there’s Odin too?” Kang-Woo chuckled after hearing the name.

He was having a hard time taking in the fact that the gods he had only read about through cartoons and books were alive and breathing.

“Yes. He was once Earth’s guardian deity. His son Thor is as powerful as Zeus,” Gaia remarked.

“Has Thor lost some weight?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Hm?”

“I honestly didn’t think he’d be that fat in the end.”

“What do you mean?” Gaia asked as she tilted her head.

Kang-Woo shrugged and changed the subject. “Anyway, are there any gods who have joined forces with Asgard?”

“There is a god named Susanoo.”

Kang-Woo had not heard that name in a long time.

*‘What was his name again?’* Kang-Woo fell into thought as he narrowed his eyes. *‘Tsujiimoto? No, that man is a god[1], not a Player... Was it Fujimoto?’*

Fujimoto Ryoma was a Player who had managed to manifest Susanoo, albeit for a moment.

*‘Well, regardless.’*

Susanoo was a god of Japanese mythology.

*‘There are so many fucking gods.’*

If every god from every myth existed, their number would be countless.

*‘No wonder Heracles called me insane.’*

Olympus had practically declared war on an unfathomable number of gods, so their insults to Kang-Woo were valid. Rather, it was a surprise that his plan was agreed upon just from him beating the crap out of Zeus.

*‘It must be because even Gaia knows what will happen if gods are left to their own devices.’*

Kang-Woo could tell that Gaia was thinking about how absurd this plan was even now from how she looked as if she had died several times over. However, regardless of whether it was absurd or not, she had gone with Kang-Woo’s plan anyway since she had no other choice. Unlike the gloomy Gaia, Kang-Woo was pulling down the rising corners of his mouth with all his might.

*‘Gods in revolt, huh?’*

The more uncontrollable their numbers grew, the better it was for him.

Badump, badump.

His heart beat faster and his hunger pained his stomach. He licked his lips as he recalled the message he had seen as he was trying to suppress the Rift connecting Aernor and Earth.

*‘Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.’*

It was the rank above Top-rank Deific Essence. Kang-Woo was cheering at the fact that he was gaining more nutrients as he was on the cusp of attaining it.

*‘Bael... Perhaps you were a saint.’*

Kang-Woo had been enraged out of his mind when Bael had initially trolled, but he couldn’t help but think that things were heading in a favorable direction now that they were progressing.

*‘Besides, getting rid of the Demon God’s heart wouldn’t have been a permanent fix.’*



The Gaia System's collapse was inevitable; it was only a matter of time. Rather, Gaia and Layla wouldn't be fine as they were now if Bael hadn't taken ownership of the Gaia System.

*'And if that happened, Si-Hun's mind would have shattered completely.'*

Considering Kim Si-Hun's personality, leaving the collapsed Gaia System aside, he would not have been able to bear Layla falling apart in front of him. Worst-case scenario, he could have turned into a demon like last time, leaving Kang-Woo with no way of fixing it.

*'I can't let him become Doom Si-Hun.'*

Si-Hun and Layla had both become people whom Kang-Woo couldn't abandon.

*'Anyway, things haven't gone completely to shit.'*

There was nothing that could be done at the moment about the otherworldly invasion; leaving the Nine Hells aside, he could not prepare for invasions from worlds that he had never heard about or seen.

*'Without a way to block all invasions from outer worlds like the Gaia System...'*

There would be no other choice but Kang-Woo himself to take on the role of the Gaia System.

*'I have to suppress the otherworldly invasions by force if necessary.'*

For him to do that, he needed to attain Transcendent-rank Deific Essence; there was nothing more perfect than overwhelming power to deal with any variables that arose. No matter how skilled he was at deceiving the enemy and influencing their actions with his eloquence, he would just be all bark and no bite without the power to back it up.

*'And most of all.'*

Kang-Woo's eyes sank deeply and a cold flame lit up from within the endless abyss.

*'Bael.'*

He needed to emerge victorious against the demon that he had not been able to defeat even once. The battle against Bael was inevitable and there was no one but Kang-Woo who could face him—no, not even Kang-Woo himself was a match for Bael at the moment.

*'There was no way for me to beat him even before he ate the Demon God's heart.'*

Kang-Woo's head hurt just thinking about the unfathomable power Bael had gained after eating the heart.

*'Maybe...'* Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed as the worst-case scenario that he didn't even want to imagine popped up in his head. *'Even opening the Doors might not be enough.'*

He could only open up to the second Door. He had never opened the third Door ever since he created the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

*'I can't open the third one... no matter what.'*

Kang-Woo shook his head. He would lose control of the Demonic Sea completely once he opened the third Door. He was not being figurative when he said that the entire world would be eaten up by the Demonic Sea.

*'I can only open up to the second one.'*

Even with that restriction, his consciousness would be blown away if he kept the Doors open for too long. For him to control the Doors while staying as conscious as possible, he needed the Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.

In the past, just opening the first Door caused him to lose consciousness, but he was different now. Not only had he become incomparably more powerful than his past self, he was now able to keep two Doors open with full consciousness. He had never put it to the test, but he felt like he could keep the first Door open for days.

*'It would've been unimaginable in the past.'*

Even during his days in the Nine Hells, the Doors were like a self-destruct button. He had refrained from it so strongly that he could count on one hand the number of times that he opened them before his battle against Bael.

*'I hope they gather as much as possible.'*

Kang-Woo had no idea if the condition for attaining Transcendent-rank Deific Essence was to eat an immense amount of Deific Essence, but he would eat as much as he could since an opportunity had arisen.

“Haaa. My child, I still think this is far too reckless,” Gaia remarked with a serious expression as Kang-Woo was thinking about the gods of the anti-Gaia faction. She stood up and continued, “I will go to Odin myself and see if I can resolve this with words.”

Kang-Qoo quickly grabbed her arm and replied, “Lady Gaia, you already know that the situation has escalated too far for it to be resolved that easily.”

“You never know until you try. Fortunately, Odin is not a stubborn man. He will listen as long as—”

“No,” Kang-Woo said firmly.

*'Words? Over my dead body.'*

Gaia was trying to ruin a feast that had already been laid out in front of Kang-Woo.

“Only the powerless humans will be hurt if we do not set an example,” Kang-Woo stated.

“...”

Gaia lowered her head. She knew why Kang-Woo was saying such things; although he possessed Deific Essence now, he would always take the side of humans since he used to be one.

“I will think it through a little more,” Gaia answered hesitantly and averted her gaze from Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo stood up and replied, “In that case, please continue to monitor the movements of the Asgardian forces.”

It would put him in a bad light if he were to push Gaia any further.

*‘Maybe I should take some sort of measure,’* Kang-Woo thought but shook his head. *‘No, I’m sure Odin will make a move first as long as we bide the time.’*

The law had already been announced in Gaia’s name. The anti-Gaia faction was already growing in number, so it was only a matter of time until their suppressed emotions burst.

*‘I’m sure they’ll burst.’*

There was no way that the gods would stand for this level of dictatorship.

“Well then, I will excuse myself.” Kang-Woo bowed courteously and turned around.

The gods were not the only problem. The Gates on Earth had been showing abnormalities lately as well.

*‘I need to make preparations for that as well.’*

However, it was far easier to deal with thanks to Guardians.

Whoooooom.

Kang-Woo walked through a gate in the Hall of Protection and went back to Seoul; to be more precise, the mountain on the outskirts of Seoul that Kang-Woo frequently used as a training ground.

“I might as well have dinner with Seol-Ah tonight.”

He had not been able to spend much time with Seol-Ah because he had been busy resolving the problems regarding the divine realm. He was watering at the mouth thinking about the warm kimchi stew she always made for him.

Step, step.

“Are you the God of Splendor?”

Just then, a blond man with a rectangular hammer walked toward Kang-Woo.

“And you are...?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Thor, God of Thunder.”

*‘Oh, what? They’re already here? Dayum, and here I’d thought it’d take a little longer.’*

The anti-Gaia faction had only just formed, so Kang-Woo had thought it would take some time until they took action.

“To think you’d manifest into the physical realm without Lady Gaia’s consent... Have you not heard the new law?” Kang-Woo asked in a low tone with Ingrimium in hand.

*'He's apparently as strong as Zeus.'*

Kang-Woo's mouth watered from his desire to test that statement.

"No, I am not here to fight," Thor answered.

"Pardon?"

"I am here to converse with you."

*'Converse? What the fuck are you on about? You're not trying to resolve this with words too, are you?'*

Chapter 439 - Unreaching Voice (2)

*'Nah, there's no way.'*

Oh Kang-Woo shook his head. He could understand Gaia's desire to talk since her Deific Essence was that of Parental Love, but he had heard that Odin was not one to shy away from a battle.

The law that Kang-Woo had implemented through Gaia was no different from treating every single god as an evil one as well as raising the status of the gods of Olympus to the level of Titans. Odin would surely take that as a declaration of war that he would not stand for. Considering that he formed the anti-Gaia faction the moment the law was announced was proof of that.

*'But he wants to talk, going so far as to send his son as an envoy? Is the son of a bitch plotting something?'*

Kang-Woo was hoping that this was part of Odin's devious scheme to stab Gaia in the back.

*'Please.'*

If that were the case, Kang-Woo would be able to stab Odin right back after pretending to be deceived.

"... You want to talk?" Kang-Woo asked.

"That's right." Thor nodded with a heavy expression.

Kang-Woo glared at him and replied, "I believe Lady Gaia has already made herself clear."

"Hmm." Thor groaned as if he were hard-pressed. "I do not know why someone as kind as Lady Gaia would make such a radical decision, but..."

Thor and the other gods did not seem to think that Kang-Woo had come up with the law. It was only natural; no one would think that the God of Splendor, who used to be Gaia's retainer and still was after acquiring Deific Essence, would be the one leading the entire faction of Olympus. The other gods had likely deduced that it was either Gaia's or Uranus's idea.

Thor continued firmly, "I was told by my father that considering the circumstances, we should first begin by talking."

"..."

“Based on this law, Lady Gaia seems to be fearing that we would cause chaos once we manifest into the physical realm. My father has also taken that into account; Asgard is also in the process of preparing a measure that would keep in check the gods who would cause chaos in the physical realm.”

*‘Shit.’*

“He has expressed dissatisfaction with the gods of Olympus trying to treat all gods as evil gods who would cause chaos in the physical realm with no discussion whatsoever,” Thor said.

*‘The hell? They’re seriously trying to resolve things with words?’*

“We cannot afford to risk Ragnarok, especially when we need to prepare for otherworldly invasions now that Earth’s protection is gone.”

*‘Why the fuck is he so logical? I can’t even argue because not saying anything wrong. Is Zeus the dumbass or are Thor and Odin just that intelligent?’*

They had perfect knowledge of the circumstances. They formed the anti-Gaia faction to demonstrate their power while expressing their desire to come to a pacifistic conclusion. It also made sense why they would approach Kang-Woo before Gaia.

*‘Because rumors that Gaia treasures me have already spread far and wide.’*

If they thought that the radical decision was made by Gaia, they would naturally judge that it would be better to convince the people around Gaia instead of her directly.

*‘Dayum, Odin. I’m starting to like you. Should I just abandon Gaia and side with Odin instead?’*

Sweet temptation filled Kang-Woo’s mind but he shook his head.

*‘No.’*

He had invested far too much in the Gaia Coin to abandon it now. Most of all, Gaia was just the right amount of stupid for him to easily make use of her.

*‘It’d be difficult to make Odin do as I want.’*

Kang-Woo also did not have the time to go through the shitshow of tears to build up trust with another god.

“So, may I have a moment of your time to talk? I’m sure you also feel that Lady Gaia has crossed the line a little with the implementation of this law,” Thor stated.

“...” Kang-Woo remained silent. He lowered his head with a dark expression, sighed deeply, and nodded. “Yes, I am also having a hard time understanding Lady Gaia’s actions.”

There was no way that anyone would be able to easily understand Gaia's radical decision to antagonize all gods.

"... Yes, her action is no different from declaring war on all gods, is it not?" Thor replied.

"That just goes to show how much she cares for Earth's safety."

"But that very decision has put Earth in danger. If the gods go to war against each other, Earth will not last."

"..."

"The Demon of Prophecy is trying to devour the worlds. This is not the time to fight among ourselves; we have to unite as we had against the Demon God," Thor remarked, his eyes filled with passion. "My father is not against the law itself. He also understands that extreme means must be taken to protect the physical realm."

'Hm?' Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes after hearing what Thor said.

"Then..." Kang-Woo slurred.

"He just thinks that it is too heavy of a burden for Lady Gaia herself to shoulder."

"..."

'Oh? Would you look at these sons of bitches?'

It seemed like Thor's sound reasoning earlier was all for this.

*'He was just stating facts when he was talking about gods needing to band together, but in actuality, they don't like the fact that Olympus is trying to monopolize the power and just want a piece of the pie as well. Hah, they sure have thought it through.'*

The one who had formed the anti-Gaia faction was in truth after the authority to control all the gods like what Olympus was trying to do. It was no different from the commander of a revolutionary army joining forces with the government to bend the entire country to their will.

'Should I seriously switch to the Odin Coin?'

Kang-Woo was taking a liking to Odin more and more by the second.

'No, no.'

He would have considered it if he knew about Odin from the beginning, but it was far too late to change sides. He could not afford to waste time and effort when the otherworldly invasions could start at any moment.

"I see. The other gods would no doubt follow suit if Lord Odin were to join us." Kang-Woo nodded. "I will put in a good word to Lady Gaia about it."

“... Thank you.” Thor smiled faintly. “In that case, I will take my leave. I will send a messenger next time, so you can relay the progress to them.”

Thor placed his hammer on his belt and extended his hand to Kang-Woo. Kang-Woo grabbed his hand and then yanked it with all his might.

Stab!

Kang-Woo brought his arm holding Ingrium forward, the sword shining gold piercing Thor’s stomach.

“Kurgh...!” Thor’s eyes widened.

Kang-Woo brought Ingrium up toward Thor’s heart.

“Urgh!”

Thor grabbed his hammer from his belt and smashed Ingrium’s blade. Ingrium was sent flying to the side and Thor’s stomach was sliced open.

Crackle—!

An immense amount of lightning poured out from Thor’s stomach. His stomach was restored to its original form along with the sounds of burning flesh.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue in disappointment. “Tsk, I guess I was hoping for too much to kill you with one strike.”

“Wh-what is the meaning of this?!” Thor looked up at Kang-Woo in shock.

He was shocked enough that Kang-Woo had managed to pierce right through his Deific Essence barrier, but he was having an even harder time understanding the sudden attack.

“Attacking an envoy sent to propose a discussion is a taboo!” Thor shouted.

“Taboo, my ass. Do you think war is a game? Huh? Do you want to take turns attacking each other or something?” Kang-Woo smirked. “There are no rules in war, dumbass.”

Fwoosh.

The Flames of Voracity burned brightly. The flames that had been enveloping Ingrium’s blade were devouring the lightning pouring out from Thor.

“Y-you bastard...!”

Thor’s face reddened with rage as his beard shook. Kang-Woo’s words were unbearable to him as the God of Thunder as well as an honorable warrior. He glared at Kang-Woo in disgust.

“I heard that the God of Splendor is a warrior who knows honor despite originally being human... It seems I have heard wrong,” Thor remarked.

“Yeah, you sure did.” Kang-Woo felt like he was about to hurl from being called an honorable warrior. “There’s no fucking honor in killing. Also, big words from someone who tried to use this opportunity to gain power by joining forces with Olympus.”

“That’s...”

“Deny it if you can. You sure are a pro at sugarcoating. For the sake of the world? To stop the otherworldly invasions? Bullshit. Then why did you form an opposing faction after the law was announced and then secretly approach us to share the power?”

Kang-Woo feigned laughter.

“Susanoo or whatever the fuck his name was, he joined you guys too, didn’t he? Does he know about this? Hm? Does he know that Asgard is trying to join forces with Olympus to gain power over all gods?”

“...”

“Of course, he doesn’t. How could he? After all, the entire anti-Gaia faction would be disbanded as soon as it is exposed.” Kang-Woo spat on the ground. “You talk too much for a fucking snake.”

“Silence! You know nothing about my father’s great plan!”

“I don’t?” Kang-Woo cackled. “Yeah, I’ll give you that.”

It might be true that Odin did not covet power; he might have offered his help genuinely for world peace, and the war between gods would be avoided if Olympus and Asgard joined forces.

“But you see, so what? Why is that important?” Kang-Woo asked.

“... What?”

Kang-Woo needed an immense amount of Divinity to reach Transcendent-rank Deific Essence, and there was no better supply for it than the group of gods banded together against Gaia.

“The truth isn’t important.”

If Kang-Woo needed it, he would attain it; he would do whatever it took, even if he needed to trample on someone’s goodwill. That was how he had survived and emerged victorious thus far.

“What’s important is what seems like the truth.”

Kang-Woo smiled widely. He couldn’t care less what Odin really wanted. It was enough knowing that Odin was an evil god who desired power for malicious reasons and a cowardly opportunist.

*‘And if that’s not the case, I’ll just make it so with my own hands.’*

Chapter 440 - Unreaching Voice (3)

“You bastard...” Thor trembled in shock.

There was something severely broken about the human— no, the being wearing human skin.



“...”

Thor remained silent as he frowned aggressively. He clenched Mjolnir harder as blue lightning enveloped him.

“I am Thor.” He raised Mjolnir; black clouds formed over him and a blue lightning bolt struck him. “Son of Odin, and the God of Thunder!!”

Rumble—!

Waves of power spread throughout the area as the earth shook. Kang-Woo twirled Ingrium and smiled.

“I am Oh Kang-Woo.” He then raised Ingrium and continued, “Son of... wait.”

*‘Shit, I’m an orphan.’*

Bauli had revealed himself to be Kang-Woo’s mother, but it was ambiguous to say that he had been born from the Demon God. Kang-Woo grimaced.

“You son of a bitch... How dare you mock me?”

“What?” Thor asked perplexedly.

“Do you have any idea about the sorrow and isolation that comes with having no parents? Huh? Do you?! And you have the gall to brag about your dad in front of me? You scumbag...”

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He felt as if an old wound that he had stuffed deep within him had resurfaced.

“Unforgivable.” Kang-Woo clenched Ingrium tighter and glared at Thor.

“Crazy son of a...” Thor stared at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly with his mouth agape. He could not help but think that Kang-Woo had gone insane. “Hup!”

Thor took a deep breath and clenched Mjolnir harder. His bursting muscles swelled even more and ripped his clothes.

Rumble—!

Thor jumped into the air and pulled his arm back. He swung the hammer like a windmill and threw it at Kang-Woo.

Crackle—!

Kang-Woo deflected Mjolnir with Ingrium, his arm numb from the powerful impact.

“Slushy.”

“Grrrk!”

A black lump jumped out from the Key of the Demonic Sea. Slushy jumped up and down as it opened its massive mouth with hideous teeth within it, completely unlike its cute appearance.

“Buuuuuurp!”

Hundreds of swords, spears, and axes shot out of Slushy's mouth like cannonballs and at Thor.

"It's futile!" Thor extended his arm in midair, summoning Mjolnir back to him after it was deflected by Ingrium.

Rumble—!!

He aggressively swung the hammer and deflected the weapons that Slushy shot out. The weapons fell to the ground, turned into black mucus, and oozed back into Slushy.

"It's not bad as a way to keep the opponent in check." Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction as he stared at the hundreds of weapons.

He had found it a waste to leave Slushy as simply a Divinity converter and had found an effective way to use it after many trials. He patted Slushy on the head to praise it.

*"Burp! Buuuuurp!"*

"But the sound effect is a bit..."

Slushy was practically burping out various weapons that had been stored within the Key of the Demonic Sea through demonic energy, so the sounds that Slushy made were very unpleasant.

"Kuh!!" Thor grimaced as hundreds of weapons continuously shot at him. He clenched his teeth and raised Mjolnir. "Thunder!"

Rumble!

A giant black cloud formed in the sky and shot down a tremendous lightning bolt. The weapons being shot at Thor were reduced to ashes in a flash. Thor did not waste the opportunity and charged at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo smiled. "He's better than Zeus."

He had heard that Zeus and Thor were similar in power, but he had to give the edge to Thor.

"Well," Kang-Woo expressed as he ducked to dodge Mjolnir and then did a backflip to kick Thor's chin. "Not that it changes anything."

"Kurgh!"

Thor was blown back from the kick. Kang-Woo got back on his feet and extended his left arm to the side.

"Chaos, Thread."

The Chaos energy took the form of silk threads and spread like a net. Likely due to the influence of Kang-Woo's Deific Essence of Splendor, the Chaos energy that was usually gray was shining gold. The gold threads filled the entire area like spider webs. Thor made contact with one of the gold threads as he was being blown back.

Boom—!

"Kurgh!"

The electricity protecting Thor was blown away as the part that made contact with the thread exploded. Thor quickly swung his arm to get away from the threads. Kang-Woo quickly ran up to Thor in the meantime and swung down Ingrium in a reverse grip.

Stab!

“Urghhh!” Thor grunted as Ingrium pierced his shoulder.

He bit his lip and swung Mjolnir upward.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!” Thor screamed with his arms spread widely.

Crackle—!!

A blinding lightning storm thrashed about. Thor’s eyes shone blue as the mountain began to be destroyed as lightning poured out of him like a tsunami.

“Whoa.” Kang-Woo’s eyes shone as he stared at the mass destruction.

Unlike his battle against Zeus, which had been nothing but a friendly duel, Kang-Woo could feel a sense of danger now that Thor had unleashed his full power to kill Kang-Woo.

‘*Yeah.*’ Kang-Woo smiled and licked his lips. ‘*This is more like it.*’

His heart beat rapidly as hunger and thirst took control of him. He bared his teeth ferociously as he glared at Thor like a starved beast.

“Thor, God of Thunder, commands you!”

Thor stomped his foot aggressively and raised Mjolnir high. Black clouds covered the entirety of Seoul— no, possibly Korea itself. The blue lightning storm enveloped Thor.

“Storm Bringer!”

A lightning bolt struck down from the black cloud and a sound so thunderous rang out as if the sky was falling.

“Heh,” Kang-Woo chuckled as he stared into the sky and opened his mouth.

The lightning bolt struck him.

Crackle—!!!

The destruction was on par with a natural disaster. Kang-Woo felt immense pain as the lightning burned through Kang-Woo’s Deific Essence protection.

‘*More.*’

This was nowhere near enough; his thirst scratched at his throat and his hunger strangled his stomach. He recalled his battle against Tai Wuji.

‘*More, more, more.*’

Kang-Woo wanted to experience that feeling again. He stared at Thor ecstatically and with hope. Thor was beginning to pant heavily as he was summoning the lightning.

‘*Keep going just a little longer.*’

Kang-Woo stared at Thor in desperation. He felt like he would be able to experience the feeling from back then again with just a little more.

Spark—!!

Thousands of lightning bolts struck Kang-Woo one after another. His Deific Essence protection fell apart. He created a shield using the Authority of Invulnerability, but the lightning pierced straight through the golden shield. His skin was burnt black, white smoke rising from the burnt areas. He could barely see because his eyes had burned as well.

*“Huff, huff, huff!”* Thor panted heavily.

He had squeezed out all the Divinity he possessed with that last attack. His vision blurred and he swayed from loss of strength in his legs as he stared at the God of Splendor, who had become nothing but a pile of ash.

*‘Damn it.’*

Thor bit his lip regretfully. “... I guess talking is out of the question now.”

He had killed Gaia’s retainer. Since Gaia treasured her retainers as much as her children, Asgard would not be able to avoid a frontal battle against Olympus. Ragnarok, the war of gods, was near.

“Haaa,” Thor sighed deeply.

He turned around and shook his head, thinking about why things had escalated to this extent.

“Where are... you going?”

Just then, he heard a voice that he should not be hearing.

“... What?” Thor turned around in shock.

He saw the God of Splendor’s ashen corpse— no, he had only thought that it was a corpse.

“You were... so... close.” Kang-Woo sighed in disappointment. “You won’t... do.”

Crack, crack.

The God of Splendor slowly moved around.

“I wonder... how Odin will... be? Hm? I can look... forward to it... right?”

Kang-Woo smiled crazily in anticipation like a predator with defenseless prey right in front of him.

“...!”

A chill ran down Thor’s back. He was left immobile from fear.

“You...” Thor slurred with his eyes widened.

He could instinctively tell that the being in front of him was not the God of Splendor.

“Who... are you?” Thor asked.

“What’s wrong?” Kang-Woo opened his mouth to bare his teeth and stuck his tongue out. “You shouldn’t doubt the light.”

Fwoosh.

Gold and black flames enveloped Kang-Woo's burnt body.

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An old man was sitting on the throne of a giant palace with its walls covered in murals. The old man had a bushy beard, white hair, and was wearing a black eyepatch over one eye. He stared with his one remaining eye at the woman kneeling and bowing in front of him.

"Has there still been no contact from Thor?" Odin asked.

"N-not yet, Lord Odin."

Odin was a Top-rank god who led Asgard, a faction as powerful as Olympus. An intense aura was pouring out from the old god who had once battled the Demon God by himself. The kneeling and bowing woman subtly trembled.

Boom!

Just then, the palace door swung open, and entered a man with a pale expression.

Odin slowly looked up and asked, "What is it Heimdall?"

"L-Lord Odin..."

The man referred to as Heimdall walked up to Odin as he trembled. He closed his eyes and handed Odin a box.

"... What is this?" Odin asked.

"Lord Thor... Lord Thor has..." Heimdall lowered his head without being able to finish his sentence.

Odin's eyebrows rose. He felt a chill run down his back. He took the box that Heimdall handed him and opened it with trembling hands.

"A-Aaaahh." Odin's eyes widened as he groaned. "Thor.. Thor.."

Thor's severed head was inside the square box. From the way that his eyes were still open, it seemed like he had died in terror.

"My son..."

A message was written on Thor's forehead.

- I see that you tried to mess with my child.

- Hear me, Odin.

- Only death awaits those who disobey me, Gaia.

Slam!!

Odin clenched his fist and swung it down on the ground.

Rumble.

The entire palace shook.

“Gaia...” Odin muttered resentfully. Flames of animosity filled his one remaining eye.

“Gaiaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

Odin’s rageful screams echoed throughout the palace.