

M. in Hell 441

Chapter 441 - Unreaching Voice (4)

A brown-haired woman had her eyes closed inside a white meeting room in the Hall of Protection. She then slowly opened her eyes after deep thought.

“As I’d thought,” she muttered as she sighed deeply. “It seems I’ve made a hasty decision.”

Gaia, the brown-haired woman, expressed deep regret. The law of keeping the gods in the divine realm that she had announced caused immense shock among the gods.

‘Ragnarok.’

Her decision might cause the war among gods passed down in Norse mythology.

“Haaa.”

Gaia closed her eyes again. Oh Kang-Woo had a point; if the gods were allowed to do as they wanted in the physical realm without any restrictions, the destruction during the Day of Calamity would pale compared to the chaos that would ensue.

‘If something like that were to happen when Earth’s protection is gone... the world would self-destruct before the Demon of Prophecy even gets a chance to devour it.’

It was unavoidable, so Gaia announced the law as Kang-Woo suggested. However...

Gaia closed her eyes tighter as anxiety flushed over her. No matter how she thought about it, she couldn’t help but wonder if she could have made a better choice.

‘At least the opposing faction is gathering around Odin.’

Odin was the furthest thing from being evil; his desire to protect the world was real since he had once been Earth’s guardian deity.

“Uranus,” Gaia called.

“Yes, Lady Gaia,” Uranus replied as he approached Gaia.

“How is the situation in Asgard?”

“As I have mentioned, gods who oppose the law you have announced are gathering there.”

“...”

“However, they do not seem to be preparing for an assault yet. A few gods from radical factions are pushing for a war, but Odin has been suppressing them personally.”

“Odin has?”

“Yes.”

“...”

“Ah... but I have heard that Odin’s actions have become strange after meeting Heimdall not long ago.”

“Strange?”

“Yes. I do not know why, but unlike how he usually inspects the situation outside the palace daily, he has been screaming inside the palace all day... I still have yet to acquire any details.”

“Hmm.”

“But from the circumstances we can see, it is true that Odin is trying to avoid a war.”

Gaia’s eyes sank.

‘Perhaps...’

She thought of the possibility of being able to resolve this chaotic situation without a war.

‘Although my child has said that talking is meaningless.’

There was no better way than avoiding a war through negotiations.

‘I should try to talk to him.’

They had made far too hasty of a decision due to the collapse of Earth’s protection and the fact that the Demon God’s heart fell into the hands of the Demon of Prophecy.

‘I was too impulsive.’

The fact that Kang-Woo easily overpowered her retainer Zeus also impacted her decision greatly because she was sure that even if a war took place, they would be able to win as long as Kang-Woo and Olympus joined forces.

However, Gaia did not expect Odin to be so assertive. She never thought that Odin, who had been Earth’s guardian deity before her, would completely oppose her decision and form an opposing faction.

“Odin,” she muttered faintly.

‘A war against Odin must be avoided.’

The physical realm would without a doubt be affected by a war between gods.

‘It’s not just that.’

The negative effects aside, pitting gods against each other when they should be standing together against the Demon of Prophecy was even worse.

“Uranus, call Zeus over.”

“Zeus?” Uranus looked at Gaia in dissatisfaction. “Are you perhaps... thinking of sending Zeus as an envoy?”

“We can’t afford to go to war without attempting conversation.”

“I should be the one to go.”

“No. It has to be Zeus.”

Uranus was without a doubt the second-in-command of Olympus. No one in their right mind would send their second-in-command to enemy territory as an envoy.

‘But I can’t just send anyone either.’

To make sure her desire to talk gets through to Odin, she needed to send a god of adequate power and position in Olympus as an envoy.

“How about Heracles...?” Uranus asked.

“I feel bad to say this, but this sort of mission is not suited for him.”

Uranus was left speechless.

Gaia gently caressed Uranus’s arm and continued, “There is no need to worry. Zeus is certainly immature, but he would never do anything that would dishonor Olympus.”

“I agree.” Uranus nodded.

Zeus was a severe philanderer, but he was able to separate business from private matters. No, he was more serious and dignified than anyone in the face of other factions exactly because he cared deeply about appearances.

“Understood.” Uranus bowed lightly and contacted someone.

The meeting room door opened soon after and entered Zeus.

“Hm? What’s wrong? You don’t look well.” Gaia expressed perplexity after seeing Zeus.

His face was haggard as if his life force had been squeezed out. His golden hair was completely disheveled and he smelled terrible. It was shocking, considering how well he took care of his appearance.

“A nightmare...” he mumbled.

“Nightmare?”

“Yes. I’ve been under the weather the last few days as if I’ve had a terrible nightmare.”

“Hmm. Why don’t you just not sleep?” Gaia asked as she tilted her head.

Staying awake was no problem whatsoever for beings with Deific Essence.

“No, that’s not the problem.” Zeus shook his head lifelessly. “It’s just that whenever I’m alone... especially when I’m sitting down, I’m reminded of a horrible memory.”

Zeus sighed deeply in frustration, not understanding what was wrong either.

Gaia stared at Zeus in worry.

She would not have thought much of it if Zeus was a normal human, but he was a god; one of the most powerful in Olympus, no less. She could not even imagine what sort of nightmare he was suffering from for him to be in such a terrible condition.

“More importantly, what have you summoned me for?” Zeus asked.

“Oh...” Gaia hesitated for a moment but then slowly said, “I have a favor to ask you.”

Gaia explained her plan to converse with Odin.

“You want me to go to Asgard as an envoy?” Zeus asked to confirm.

“Yes. Even if he is part of an opposing faction, Odin is an honorable warrior. He would never bring you harm while you are there.”

“Mm. I was not worried about that in the first place.” Zeus nodded. Not even the most evil of gods would attack an envoy from an enemy faction. “It’s just that I promised to support the God of Splendor’s plan.”

Although Zeus was a playboy, he was honorable enough not to break a promise that he had made after losing in a duel.

Gaia shook her head and explained, “I am not suggesting we withdraw the plan. I just want to hear Odin’s opinion. It would be better for everyone if we could avoid a war through compromise.”

“Mmm...” Zeus fell into thought with his arms crossed. He then nodded and looked at Gaia. “I understand, Mother. I will relay your will to Odin.”

“I will be counting on you, my child.”

Gaia placed her hand on Zeus’s shoulder and smiled.

“I will also help myself to some of Asgard’s women while I’m there...”

“You! Have you still not come to your senses?!”

“Hahahaha! I was just joking.”

Zeus smiled slyly as always and turned around. He slowly turned into white powder and began to disappear; he was canceling his manifestation in the physical realm and transferring his body back to the divine realm.

“In that case, I will be off.”

Zeus bowed lightly and waved. He then disappeared from Earth completely.

“Please.” Gaia brought her hands together. “May my voice reach him...”

The goddess of parental love prayed sincerely.

“What?” An old man wearing an eyepatch over one eye was sitting inside an enormous palace. “Zeus... has come here?”

“Y-yes, my lord.” The confused Heimdall nodded.

Odin, the old man with an eyepatch, frowned aggressively. “Has he come to declare war?”

Odin then shook his head. Olympus had already declared war the moment they sent him Thor’s head. There was no point in them sending an envoy to directly declare war.

“What will you do? Just say the word and I will eliminate Zeus—”

“No.” Odin raised his hand and shook his head. “Let him in.”

“L-let Zeus in?!” Heimdall yelled. “He is the son of our mortal enemy who killed Thor!”

Odin stared at Heimdall furiously in silence. “I told you to let him in.”

“Yes, my lord.” Heimdall nodded as he bit his lip.

Creak.

A sly-looking blond man walked through the palace doors. Zeus bowed lightly to Odin.

“Why have you come?” Odin asked as he stared down at Zeus with sunken eyes.

He could not imagine for what reason his mortal enemy who killed his son had sent her child as an envoy.

“I have come to relay Mother’s— I mean, Lady Gaia’s words.”

“Gaia’s words?” Odin frowned aggressively.

Zeus nodded and continued, “Lady Gaia would like to converse with you, Lord Odin.”

“What?”

The atmosphere within the palace froze. Odin clenched the armrest of his throne to the point that it could break. He glared at Zeus in front of him with deep resentment.

“She wants... to talk?” Odin stammered.

His white beard trembled as if he was experiencing the greatest humiliation of his life.

“Yes, that’s correct.” Zeus lowered his head.

“Hah.” Odin smiled and lowered his head. “Hah... Hahahahahahaha!!!!”

Rumble—!!

Enormous energy stormed within the palace.

“Lord... Odin?” Zeus looked up at Odin in confusion.

Crack.

Odin stood up from his crumbled throne.

“Gaia, Gaia, Gaia... How much will you insult me until you are satisfied?”

“What do you...”

“Hehehehe, very well.”

Odin looked down at Zeus in animosity. He slowly walked down toward Zeus and grabbed him by the neck.

“Kurgh!”

Odin had once been at the pinnacle of all Earth’s gods. There was no way Zeus would be able to resist him.

“Gaia...” Odin mumbled as he choked Zeus. “I will make sure you feel the excruciating sorrow... of losing your child.”

Chapter 442 - Unreaching Voice (5)

“Kurgh, urgh!”

Zeus twisted and turned frantically. Blue lightning sparked from him and burned Odin’s hand, creating an instant opening he was able to take advantage of.

Jump!

Zeus desperately widened the distance between himself and Odin. He looked up at him as he panted heavily.

“Wh-why are you doing this?” he asked.

“Why, you ask?”

Odin looked down at Zeus with deeply sunken eyes. Zeus could feel the intense rage within Odin’s one blue eye.

Zeus flinched. He felt as if Odin had grown several dozen times larger. It was like facing a Titan, the creator of the gods. Chills ran down his spine.

‘Was Odin... this powerful?’

Zeus stared at Odin in pallor. He knew that Odin had fought the Demon God by himself far in the past, but he had never expected him to be this strong.

“Kurgh...”

Zeus bit his lip as Odin’s immense power weighed him down. He drew out as much of his Divinity as he could, but the pressure did not vanish.

‘So this is... the power of a god with Top-rank Deific Essence.’

Zeus couldn't believe it. He had seen Gaia in battle a few times, but the power he had felt from her was never to the extent that he was feeling from Odin. It was not incomprehensible; there were differences in power between gods of the same rank. Even Zeus himself was far more powerful than other gods of the same rank as him, so it was only natural for Odin, who was once at the pinnacle of Earth's gods, to be the same.

Zeus gulped as Odin stared down at him.

"Did you just ask me... why?" Odin asked in a low tone.

Zeus nodded slightly. "I know that my mother has made a radical decision, but I'm sure you know why such a decision is necessary, do you not, Lord Odin?"

"..."

"If beings with Deific Essence were all left to their own devices, unimaginable chaos would—"

"So what you're saying is, what you did was necessary?"

"Ah, yes. Hence—"

Wham—!

Air compressed to its limit smashed into Zeus, sending him flying backward like a cannonball.

"Kurgh!"

"It was... necessary?"

Boom. Boom.

The palace shook with each step that Odin took.

"It was necessary for Thor... my child, to die at the hands of that bitch?!"

Rumble—!

Compressed air burst, thunderous sounds ringing out. The walls of the palace cracked and began to crumble.

"Th-Thor?"

Zeus looked up at Odin in confusion. Gaia killed Thor? What in the world was Odin talking about?

"L-Lord Odin, please w—"

"Silence!!! How dare you run your filthy tongue at me?!"

Boom!

Odin stomped his foot. Cracks formed on the ground as if an earthquake was taking place. Intense gusts of wind poured out from Odin and weighed Zeus down.

Odin said angrily, "I... wanted peace."

However, the peace he had in mind differed from what Gaia wanted. Odin wanted a world ruled by the gods; he wanted to govern the foolish humans who had lost their faith and restore the past glory of the gods. He was about to take the first step to that restoration by joining forces with Olympus to unite the gods of the divine realm.

'Moronic bitch.'

However, peace would never be realized as long as humans existed. Several millennia's worth of history proved his point. They endlessly fought, disputed, resented, and desired because they were imperfect, unlike gods. One could even call them defective gods. Hence, gods needed to band together first to keep those humans in line. Only then would they be able to prevent the *time of prophecy*.

"I was planning on joining forces with you to prepare for the time of prophecy."

That was the only way to avoid destruction, which was why Odin had created the opposing faction as soon as Gaia announced the law so that he could give Gaia an offer that she could never refuse.

"But Gaia was the one who slapped my hand away first."

She had killed Thor. No, she did not just kill him but had even sent Zeus to mock him.

"And after that, she wants to talk?" Zeus feigned laughter and walked toward Zeus as his eyes gleamed with fury. "The one who refused to talk first... were you all."

Odin slowly raised his arm. "Come."

A massive storm raged and destroyed the floor of the palace. A long spear enveloped in intense winds shot out from the ground. Once Odin extended his arm toward it, the spear flew through the air and placed itself on Odin's hand.

Odin clenched the spear and said the spear's name, "Gungnir."

Rumble—!

The massive storm raged once again, destroying the crumbling palace. Outside the destroyed palace was an army of Asgardian gods filled with a desire for revenge. No, it was not just Asgardian gods; there were also gods of Japanese mythology like Susanoo and gods of Hindu and Egyptian mythology. Gods who stood against Gaia had all gathered in Asgard.

"Ah..." Zeus muttered as he stared in pallor with his mouth agape.

Odin raised Gungnir. "Let Ragnarok begin."

The war between gods had begun.

"So... you sent Zeus to Odin?" Oh Kang-Woo asked in a heavy tone.

Gaia floundered and answered as if she were making excuses, "It was a decision I came to after much thought. Odin is not a stuck-up god, and... it is far too reckless to go to war without even attempting conversation."

"..."

“Odin is an honorable warrior. Even if he has no desire to talk, he would never harm Zeus, so...”

“I see. Now that I think about it, I believe I was also being a bit too hasty.”

“Y-you agree with me?” Gaia stared at Kang-Woo in delight.

She was acting excessively humble despite talking to her retainer. It had to do with her personality, but also because Kang-Woo’s position was on the line. From Gaia’s perspective, Kang-Woo was no longer simply her retainer; he was powerful enough to overpower Zeus. The God of Splendor was one of the very few rays of hope that could save the world from the time of prophecy. She needed to do whatever it took to avoid him keeping his distance from her due to conflicting opinions.

Kang-Woo said with a smile, “It is ultimately your decision to make, Lady Gaia. I am but your retainer, so I will respect your decision.”

Gaia’s expression shone brightly.

“But... I can’t help but be worried. I wonder if Odin has any intention to talk...” Kang-Woo answered in a depressed tone.

“There is no need to worry. Odin had fought the Demon God once before to protect the world. I am sure he understands why my decision was unavoidable.”

Kang-Woo nodded in silence. He then prayed, “I wish your will... gets through to Odin.”

“My child...”

Gaia teared up as if she had been moved. She had not expected Kang-Woo to trust her this much despite not consulting him.

‘This plan needs to succeed for the sake of living up to my child’s expectations. I doubt he would refuse conversation entirely.’

The priority was to come to a compromise with Odin so that they could avoid the worst possible outcome, war.

“You shouldn’t worry either, Lady Gaia.” Kang-Woo approached Gaia as she was in thought and lightly held her hands. He said gently, “I’m sure Odin will understand you.”

“...”

“There is no one more devoted to protecting this world than you.”

“Do not say that.” Gaia shook her head and held Kang-Woo’s hands tighter. “I am not the most dedicated. You are. No, not just you. Layla, Si-Hun... Everyone is going above and beyond to protect this world.”

If it weren’t for them, Earth would have fallen years ago; the time of prophecy might have come long ago. Gaia’s eyes glistened with tears.

“Thank you. Thank you... so much, my child.”

“...”

Kang-Woo smiled gently. He could feel Gaia’s sincerity through her trembling hands.

“Good deeds... are bound to be rewarded one day. I am sure your words will reach Odin, Lady Gaia.”

“...”

Gaia wiped her tears as she was moved by Kang-Woo’s words.

Bang!

Just then, Uranus swung open the door and barged into the room. His face was pale and he was panting heavily.

“What’s wrong?” Gaia asked with a stiff expression.

An uneasy feeling ran down her back as she looked at Uranus’s pale face.

“L-Lady Gaia...” Uranus trembled, unable to finish his sentence.

“I asked you what’s wrong!” Gaia yelled anxiously.

She was nothing like how she usually was.

Uranus closed his eyes shut. “... Hermes found something in the Olympus temple a few moments ago.”

He then reached out his hands holding a box.

Gaia gulped. She could faintly smell blood from the box. The worst possible scenario passed through her mind.

“No.” Gaia shook her head. “Th-there’s no way. That’s impossible.”

She erased the imagination from her mind but she could already tell what was in the box.

“There’s no way...”

Gaia bit her lip as she reached for the box’s lid and opened it with trembling hands.

“A-Aaaahh.”

Inside it was Zeus’s head, his eyes wide open. There were words carved on his forehead with a knife.

- Gaia. You will pay for the choice you’ve made.

“A-Aaaaaaaaahhh!!” Gaia screamed in desperation. She collapsed with her hands clenching her hair as if she didn’t want to believe the reality in front of her. “M-my child. My child...!”

Tears flowed down her cheeks as she embraced Zeus’s head.

Bang!

“Shit, shit!”

Kang-Woo slammed his fist down on the table next to the despairing Gaia, smashing it into two. He looked down in anger at Gaia who was hugging Zeus’s head.

“How... How could this have...” Gaia wept in despair.

“Lady Gaia...” Kang-Woo placed his hand on her shoulder. “Odin was... never interested in peace from the very beginning.”

If that were not the case, Odin would never have killed so brutally an envoy sent to propose a conversation. Kang-Woo bit his lip. His heart felt heavy as he looked down at the weeping Gaia. It felt as if his heart was burning. Tears trickled down from his eyes as well.

“Your will... didn’t reach him.”

The voice of a goddess who wanted peace... The will of the goddess who sacrificed herself to protect the world... was trampled by Odin to a pulp.

“Lady Gaia.”

“Hurgh, hurgh.”

“How long are you planning on staying collapsed like this?” Kang-Woo added more strength into his hand on Gaia’s shoulder and said in rage, “We have to stand.”

‘For Zeus, who died at Odin’s hands.’

“We...”

‘For the sake of world peace.’

“Have to stand.”

They needed to put their misery aside and stand.

Chapter 443 - Ragnarok (1)

“Odin...” Oh Kang-Woo mumbled in anger.

He clenched his fists as he looked down at the weeping Gaia. He did not expect that Odin would not do such a thing; after all, sending an envoy to enemy lines came with its risks. However, he did not think the honorable warrior Odin would go this far.

‘Fucking scumbag.’

Kang-Woo bit his lip. Tracing back human history, envoys were rarely harmed. It was not just a matter of courtesy but a form of common sense.

‘Even in history, a war started just because delegations were sent back with their beards shaved.’ [1]

And in this instance, it was not a beard but a mustache.

'It can no longer be avoided.'

The war between gods, Ragnarok, had already begun.

“H-how could Odin...”

Gaia wept with blank eyes, still unable to take in the fact that Zeus was dead. Kang-Woo’s heart felt heavy as he stared at Gaia embracing Zeus’s head.

“It certainly is incomprehensible.” Kang-Woo set aside his sorrow and continued, “Even if they are in an opposing faction, they must know that justification is a crucial part of war. Despite that...”

Kang-Woo could only think of one possibility of why Odin had made such a radical decision.

“Could he be... associated with the Demon of Prophecy?”

“What are you talking about?”

The crying Gaia looked up at him with quivering eyes.

Kang-Woo calmly explained, “Who benefits the most from this war?”

Gaia remained silent. The answer was obvious even without her answering.

“The one who would benefit the most from instigating a war between Olympus and Asgard is... the Demon of Prophecy.”

“W-wait. That means...”

“Yes. I think it is safe to assume that Odin has joined forces with the Demon of Prophecy.”

If that was not the case, there was no way that Odin, who knew very well how much Gaia cherished her children, would send Zeus back to Gaia as just a head.

“That is impossible. Odin cares deeply about the world’s security to the point that he even faced the Demon God by himself in the past. There is no way he would make such a—”

Kang-Woo interjected, “Then do you think Odin beheading Zeus is for the sake of world peace?”

Gaia remained silent. She could not refute Kang-Woo’s words. Although she had made a radical decision, she knew that there was no way Odin would not know that it was all for preventing chaos from ensuing in the physical realm. There was only one explanation why, despite all that, Odin would form an opposing faction and send back Zeus’s head to her.

“A-Aaaahh.” Gaia’s expression turned pale. A thought that she did not even want to imagine popped up in her head. “Odin... joined forces with Bael...?”

Her shoulder trembled as rage and sorrow stormed within her. Kang-Woo grabbed Gaia’s trembling hands and helped her up.

“Lady Gaia.”

“Ah.” Gaia stood up as she staggered.

There was no reason to ask Kang-Woo what he wanted to say to her or why he helped her up. She also knew that this was not the time to be wallowing in despair.

“I’m sure Odin will come up with some sort of excuse to deny that fact,” Kang-Woo said.

There was no way that all the Asgardian gods joined forces with the Demon of Prophecy. Odin had likely been the mastermind for the entire situation. If that were the case, Odin would frame Gaia for a crime that she did not commit to justify his actions while covering the truth. For example, an absurd excuse that Gaia beheaded Thor and sent it to him.

‘There’s nothing more impossible than that.’

Kang-Woo frowned, feeling displeasure just from imagining it. It was unthinkable that a gentle goddess like Gaia would send Odin Thor’s severed head.

‘I’m sure he joined forces with Bael.’

Kang-Woo couldn’t think of any other reason. He quelled the overflowing emotions that he felt as he looked down at Gaia and turned around as golden light enveloped him.

He then looked toward Uranus and said, “Now that it has come to this, we also have to prepare to go to the divine realm.”

Uranus fell into thought in silence for a moment and then nodded slightly. “If war is unavoidable, it is better for it to be held in the divine realm than the physical realm.”

Ragnarok in the physical realm would result in irreparable destruction.

“Lady Gaia. I will command the gods of Olympus to gather,” Uranus mentioned.

The gods of Olympus had scattered throughout Earth to make sure that no god had manifested on Earth without Gaia’s permission. Gaia nodded with a heavy expression. She could tell that war was now unavoidable and that it should not be avoided.

“Tell the gods of Olympus.” Gaia, the goddess with the Deific Essence of Parental Love, pushed her sorrow aside and stood up.

White light poured out from her and lit the Hall of Protection. Zeus’s head in her arms turned into white light particles and dissipated into the air. The God of Splendor licked his lips as if it were a waste, but no one happened to see it.

“Zeus’s lightning has lost its light... at the hands of Odin.” Gaia stood tall as she bit her lip. Intense rage filled her gaze in place of sorrow. “We will not take this lying down. We will... fight. We will make them pay for waging war against Olympus and brutally murdering my child.”

They would set aside their sorrow and fight as they burned with rage.

“It is time for Ragnarok,” Gaia declared with blazing eyes.

While the gods of Olympus gathered at the Hall of Protection one after another, Kang-Woo took the time to tell Layla, Kim Si-Hun, and other members of Guardians what was going on.

“We will go with you,” Si-Hun replied without hesitation.

His eyes were blazing with passion as he clenched his sword.

“No.” Kang-Woo shook his head.

Si-Hun could not fight against those with Deific Essence yet. Not just Si-Hun, but most members of Guardians were powerless against those who possessed Deific Essence.

‘That’s just how overpowered Deific Essence is.’

It didn’t matter how much Deific Essence one had; even a being with Lower Intermediate-rank Deific Essence could damage beings of high ranks. The problem was the difference between those who possessed Deific Essence and those who did not.

‘The broken thing about Deific Essence is how it allows one to become almost completely immune to physical and magical damage.’

For those who did not possess Deific Essence to break through this barrier, they needed to pour extremely inefficient attacks at the enemy to no end.

‘I’m fine since I have the Demonic Sea.’

However, if someone like Si-Hun were to do such a thing, their Qi would bottom out before even five minutes.

‘Gods like Zeus and Thor would be no match for Si-Hun simply in terms of martial arts level.’

To make a comparison, Deific Essence was like a piece of equipment that allowed one to earn great power just by having it, regardless of individual power. It was an absurdly unfair fight like someone with a tiny tree branch against someone with full-plate body armor.

‘I should figure something out.’

The enemies that Guardians would be facing from now on would mostly possess Deific Essence.

‘But not now.’

Kang-Woo was not leaving without them only because they would be of no use in this battle. They had something else to do.

“Layla. You said that there have been abnormalities about the Gates lately, right?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Ah, yes. That’s right.” Layla, who had been staring at Si-Hun in worry, turned to Kang-Woo and answered. “Giant monsters swarming out from C-rank Gates, the

interior of Gates that had only been the size of a mountain suddenly expanding to the size of an entire city... There have been various abnormalities.”

There was no need to wonder about what was causing it.

“It must be due to the collapse of the Gaia System,” Kang-Woo stated.

“I think so as well.” Layla nodded.

Kang-Woo was easily able to guess something like this would happen just from the fact that Gates had been the first thing to experience abnormalities when Kang-Woo returned to Earth for the first time.

“Layla, please take care of the changes in the Gates... while I’m gone.”

Layla nodded in silence and stared at Kang-Woo in worry. “... You’ll come back, won't you?”

Kang-Woo had become an irreplaceable asset in Guardians, even taking out the fact that he was extremely strong.

Kang-Woo smiled. “Of course I will.”

Layla and Si-Hun smiled faintly at how Kang-Woo answered without hesitation like always.

“In that case, I will leave things here to you,” Kang-Woo stated.

“Okay, you can count on us.” Layla nodded with a strong will.

Layla had not been able to show off her leadership skills lately, but the leader of Guardians was not Kang-Woo but her. Kang-Woo smiled after seeing her reaction.

‘I can trust Layla.’

She was several times more trustworthy than Gaia. Kang-Woo had witnessed Layla’s competency many times over.

‘And Lilith will be with her.’

Lilith would be far better at figuring out the impacts that each change in the Gates would bring than Kang-Woo. After all, his specialty only shone when he was facing enemies.

“That aside, to think Odin and Bael joined forces... I still can’t believe it,” Si-Hun mentioned.

“I’m more surprised by the fact that gods like Odin and Zeus even exist,” Cha Yeon-Joo replied as she stared at Si-Hun in deep thought.

Kang-Woo smirked and nodded. He had the same thought.

“Anyway.” Yeon-Joo crossed her arms and glared at Kang-Woo. “Don’t get hurt after doing shit by yourself again and just stay put in a corner somewhere. Gaia’s gonna be the one fighting Odin, isn’t she?”

The ones in the spotlight of this war were Olympus and Asgard, not Kang-Woo, or at least that was what Guardians thought.

“As you wish, my lady.” Kang-Woo playfully bowed and turned around.

Clack.

He left the meeting room and closed the door behind him.

‘I should let Darling know as well.’

Han Seol-Ah would make even more of a fuss than Si-Hun, but it couldn’t be helped; he couldn’t afford to take her to the divine realm. No, he couldn’t take anyone since in this war, he would...

“*Slurp.*” Kang-Woo wiped the drool flowing down from his mouth.

“My king,” someone called. Kang-Woo turned his head to see Lilith with a pile of documents in one hand. “I heard you were participating in the war between the gods.”

“Yeah. It just happened.” Kang-Woo calmly nodded.

Lilith stared at Kang-Woo with narrowed eyes and asked, “But my king, I have something to ask you.”

“Yeah, what is it?”

“Did Odin really kill Zeus... because he joined forces with Bael?” she asked as she tilted her head, not being able to fully understand.

Kang-Woo smiled and turned around. He walked past Lilith and answered, “Of course.”

Kang-Woo smiled. The corners of his mouth tore hideously to his earlobes.

“Why else would he kill Zeus?”

The demon smiled as he licked his saliva-covered lips.

Lilith turned to Kang-Woo in silence. The smile of her king that she had seen all the time felt awkward and unfamiliar to her, like a piece of a puzzle or a cog that didn’t fit.

Chapter 444 - Ragnarok (2)

“Alright, let us be off,” stated Uranus.

The gods of Olympus gathered in the Hall of Protection nodded with stiff expressions. A massive war between gods on the scale of Ragnarok had not occurred since even before Demon God Bauli's insurgence. Even immortal beings like themselves could not help but be anxious.

“Begin,” Gaia commanded as she stood at the forefront of the formation.

Uranus raised his arm and the floor of the Hall of Protection shone.

‘The divine realm, huh?’

Oh Kang-Woo's eyes shone as he stared at the light particles getting brighter. He had only heard about it; this was his first time going there.

'I wonder what it's like?'

Considering how gods used their energy to manifest into the physical realm, he guessed that it wouldn't be some sort of utopia; if that were the case, the gods would not go out of their way to manifest into the physical realm even if they were freed of their restrictions.

'But I doubt it'd be like the Nine Hells either.'

Kang-Woo had no idea, so he stopped thinking about it and waited leisurely. Once the light filling the Hall of Protection became unbearably bright, Kang-Woo and the other gods turned into light and disappeared.

Riiing.

[You have entered the First Realm. The entry of those who do not possess Deific Essence will be forcibly restricted.]

A blue message window popped up in front of him.

'Oh, so people without Deific Essence couldn't enter in the first place.'

He knew it was the right call not to take Guardians with him. If only those with Deific Essence could enter, only Han Seol-Ah and Layla would have been able to.

'Well, I never had the intention of bringing them anyway.'

Kang-Woo looked around. The first thing he thought was that it was *empty*. It was black and void like he was in outer space and islands were floating here and there. Branches of an unfathomably large tree were connected to the floating islands.

'That must be the World Tree.'

Elune had said that the World Tree was a pillar for the Triad.

'So this is what she meant.'

This was the First Realm; in other words, it was the divine realm of Earth. If they traveled down the branches, they would likely come across the divine realms of Aernor and Huan.

'Hm?'

Kang-Woo noticed something odd as he was looking at the World Tree.

"Why is that area disconnected?" he asked.

A portion of one of the branches was plunged into darkness.

"Oh, that's..." Gaia continued with a sunken voice, "The path to the Second Realm... the divine realm of Huan."

"Was it always that dark?"

“No.” Gaia shook her head. “Do you remember when the World Tree was momentarily corrupted?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Since then, the path to the Second Realm has been covered in darkness and blocked for some unknown reason.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

‘Come to think of it, Aernor and Earth were connected, but not Huan.’

He had never been there or heard anything about Huan, but he at least knew that it was one of the Triad. The fact that it was not connected to Earth meant one of two things.

‘It’s either further to Earth than Aernor is, or... it has already fallen.’

Kang-Woo made a mental note to learn about it in more detail later.

‘It’s not the time to worry about it.’

He needed to focus on the war that was about to take place. Kang-Woo and the gods of Olympus arrived at an island lined with Greek palaces that one would commonly see in cartoons.

‘It’s smaller than I expected.’

Olympus was smaller than Jeju Island. It somewhat made sense since no matter how many gods there were, there would not be as many as the population of humans on Earth.

‘I can understand why gods want to manifest into the physical realm now.’

The world of the gods was filled with nothing but a void. Kang-Woo was not referring only to the background or infrastructure; just being in this place felt like a portion of his emotions was getting cut out. It was to the point that he was honestly impressed that gods were able to live in a place like this for this long.

‘How about Asgard?’

Kang-Woo looked for the stage where the war would take place— no, he was about to.

‘I guess I won’t even have to go out of my way to find it.’

Kang-Woo chuckled as he stared at a giant branch that connected Olympus to a different island. On the branch that was easily several dozens of kilometers long were thousands of gods standing in formation. At the forefront was a one-eyed old god with a bushy white beard on a war horse, glaring at Gaia.

“Odin,” Gaia muttered as she also glared at Odin with a blazing gaze.

Rumble!

The energies of Top-rank gods clashing caused the branch to vibrate.

“Gaia...” Odin pointed his long spear at Gaia as his blue eye shone with resentment.

“You will pay for the choice you’ve made.”

It was the phrase he had carved into Zeus's forehead. Gaia bit her lip and clenched her fists.

"Were you so dissatisfied with keeping the gods in check... for the sake of preventing chaos in the physical realm?" Gaia asked.

Odin had been so dissatisfied to the point that he immediately killed Zeus whom Gaia had sent to offer a peaceful resolution.

Odin's eye shone. It was already far too late for them to come to a compromise through conversation. Their willpower was the only thing that remained.

Odin answered without hesitation, "Gods are not the ones who should be kept in check. It is the humans."

"..."

"They have lost their faith. Our existence has become but fiction to them. We must restore their forgotten faith... their respect for us, our glory."

"..."

"Who but us could possibly stop the impending doom?"

"So you... for that sort of reason... killed Zeus?!"

Rumble—!!

Gaia's scream shook space itself. Blinding light poured out from her.

"Hah." Odin chuckled at the absurdity. He smirked and said coldly, "You do not have the right to say that."

He was so speechless that he could not even get mad at Gaia's shamelessness after killing Thor with her own hands.

"As I'd thought... You were never fit for the position of guardian deity," Odin remarked.

He had passed down the seat of Earth's guardian deity to her after getting greatly injured after the battle against the Demon God, but he did not expect her to be this shameless and impertinent. He even thought that Bael managed to take Gaia's privileges as guardian deity due to her incompetence.

Deathly silence fell between the two Top-rank gods. They raised their hands simultaneously, realizing there was no point in further conversation. The tension in the air reached its limit.

"Raaaaaaaaaahhh!!!"

Odin's roar shook the battlefield. The white war horse raised its front legs. A raging storm condensed and gathered around Odin's spear edge. He then pulled back his arm as far as he could and threw Gungnir.

Crackle—!!

The compressed storm was unleashed, its unfathomable power destroying everything in its path.

“Aaarrggghh!”

The gods of Olympus screamed as they stared at the spear destroying everything around it. Their formation was destroyed by the storm that tore apart their Deific Essence barrier just from making contact with it.

“Odin.”

Just then, Gaia walked forward. The white light pouring out of her spread out like a tent.

Boom—!!!

The barrier of light and the storm collided. The several-kilometer World Tree branch was beginning to crack. The gods of Olympus and Asgard clashed against each other atop the breaking World Tree branch.

Clang! Crack! Crush!

Deific Essences collided with each other. Attacks enveloped in Divinity filled the battlefield.

“Die!”

“For Asgard!”

A battle between gods was no different from that between humans other than that they used Divinity. The battlefield was filled with curses and stormed with emotions.

“Fuuu.” Kang-Woo took a deep breath as he looked down at the fighting gods.

He was used to the clanging of metal, the barrage of screams and curses, the thick scent of blood, and the disgusting stench of excrement.

‘Nice.’

Kang-Woo couldn’t help but smile. The battle that he was watching from afar made his heart race.

“Haaa,” he sighed ecstatically as powerful hunger paralyzed his brain.

He felt like his thirst was drying him up.

‘Now, then.’

It was time for a light appetizer.

Tap.

He lightly tapped his feet. His hand ripped open and a wave of gold spread across the World Tree branch. The light was so faint, unlike his title of God of Splendor, that one would never notice unless they paid close attention.

‘And no one would be focusing on the ground during a heated battle like this.’

As long as Kang-Woo focused on concealing his energy without participating in the battle, he was confident in being able to fool even Elune.

Fwoooooom.

The corpses of the dead gods were absorbed through the Authority of Predation. Of course, he did not outright devour their entire corpses; there was no way that the gods wouldn't notice the corpses disappearing even if they were in the middle of a war. Instead of eating their corpses, Kang-Woo was sucking the energy within them.

“Haaa.”

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and enjoyed the Deific Essence flowing into him.

Riiing.

[Obtaining the Deific Essence of the Lower Intermediate-rank god ‘Baldr.’ The rank of the Deific Essence obtained will be lowered because the entire body was not predated.]

[Obtaining the Deific Essence of the Upper Intermediate-rank god ‘Susanoo.’ The rank of the Deific Essence obtained will be lowered because the entire body was not predated.]

[Obtaining the Deific Essence of the Bottom-rank god ‘Abd al-Ali.’ The rank of...]

Bell chimes continued to ring in his head. Kang-Woo would usually complain about it being too loud, but the usually annoying chimes sounded blissful due to the Deific Essence flowing into him.

‘With this...’ Kang-Woo clenched his fists and his heart raced. *‘I’ll be able to obtain it.’*

Transcendent-rank Deific Essence, the power superior to Top-rank.

‘No.’

Kang-Woo bit his lip. That was not good enough.

‘I have to obtain it, whatever it takes.’

Even if he had to get an unfathomable amount of blood on his hands. Even if he had to be weighed down by intense resentment, lament, despair, and vengeful desire. Even if he had to send a son's severed head to his father. Even if he had to deceive a mother who had her son's severed head in her arms.

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth as he recalled Bael, who felt like he was engraved in Kang-Woo's brain. His heart felt like it was getting trampled on. An overwhelming sense of anxiety swept over him and blurred his vision.

‘If I can't obtain it...’

Kang-Woo recalled a nightmarish hill of corpses filled with mangled flesh and pools of blood, and himself collapsed on his knees atop the hill wailing. He could see faces overlapping those of the corpses making up the hill; that of Han Seol-Ah, Lilith, Balrog, and Kim Si-Hun. The faces continued to overlap and explode.

He could hear Bael's laughter. It kept going and going... It did not stop.

“More.”

Kang-Woo looked up to the top of the World Tree. He could faintly see Gaia facing Odin. His burning thirst and unbearable hunger set him ablaze.

“I need... more.”

He slowly walked toward Odin.

Chapter 445 - Ragnarok (3)

Compressed wind blades shot out like a cannonball. The storm enveloping the edge of Odin’s spear tore apart space itself.

“Hurgh!” Gaia grunted and raised her hand.

A barrier of white light collided with the storm.

Rumble—!

An explosion that surpassed sound shook everything in its surroundings. Gaia could be seen biting her lip anxiously among the blinding light particles.

“Is this all there to your oh-so-great will?!” Odin shouted and aggressively swung down Gungnir.

Gaia crossed her hands and blocked the spear. She gritted her teeth.

“Odin... I... I trusted you.”

It was far in the past, but Odin used to be Earth’s guardian deity. Although their opinions differed, Gaia never thought Odin would cause Ragnarok. The price of her trust had been one too hefty to pay.

“You... You are also a father! So why...?”

Gaia recalled Zeus’s dead eyes. She bit her lip aggressively as her insides churned and she teared up.

Odin stared at the crying Gaia in silence. It was so baffling that it wasn’t even funny. “You’re the one who started it f—”

An inexplicable sense of uneasiness swept over him as he pointed Gungnir in rage at Gaia. He looked at Gaia, filled with so much anger that she was trembling.

Odin knew very well that Gaia deeply treasured her children, but her reaction was illogical.

That was impossible; she had beheaded Thor and sent it to him. How could she not have expected him to behead Zeus and send his head back to her after doing such a thing?

Odin’s expression stiffened. He lowered Gungnir and bit his lip.

An enormous sense of regret replaced his boundless rage.

No, he had many other opportunities to realize it, even during his current battle against Gaia.

The answer was simple— even the stupidest person alive could have figured it out. He could not even make an excuse that he was tricked; this was his blunder and his alone.

It was obvious with just a little thought. Considering Gaia's personality, there was no way that she would have beheaded an envoy requesting a peaceful resolution and sent the head to Odin. Not only that, but she would never have sent Zeus to him as an envoy if she had killed Thor in the first place. Odin had not managed to figure out such a poor scheme.

"..."

Odin closed his eyes. Thor's severed head floated around him like an illusion. Just imagining it filled him with rage.

Odin had lost his mind the moment he saw Thor's head. He lost the ability to think with reason and his sense of judgment had clouded. He averted his gaze from the truth that he could have reached with just a few hours— no, a few minutes of thinking.

Odin bit his lip and shook his head. It was cowardly for him to blame his blunder for Thor's death. He was the one at fault.

"It seems I am the one who needs to pay," Odin mumbled in sorrow. He lowered Gungnir and looked at Gaia. "Gaia."

"What is it?"

Gaia glared at Odin, confused by Odin's sudden change in behavior.

"How much do you know about the God of Splendor?"

Gaia narrowed her eyes due to the unexpected question. She thought for a moment and then answered, "The God of Splendor is my child as well as my hope."

"..."

"He is a hero who is giving his all to protect this world from chaos... unlike you, Odin."

Odin closed his eyes. "Gaia, there is no reason for us to fight."

"What?" Gaia's eyes widened.

There was no reason for them to fight? There was no nonsense more absurd than this.

“How dare you say that... after you brutally murdered my son Zeus?!” Gaia screamed in genuine fury.

Odin continued calmly, “Listen to me.”

He then let go of Gungnir entirely to show that he had no wish to fight. The spear enveloped in a storm slowly dropped to the ground.

Gaia stared at Odin, who was slowly walking toward her, in confusion. “What are you scheming... Odin?”

“You are being deceived by the God of Splendor.”

“What?”

“He is not the hope of this world, much less a hero who is trying to protect it from chaos. He is—”

Whooom!

As Odin was about to continue, an unfathomable amount of demonic energy surged from him. Black demonic energy condensed around his hand that had let go of Gungnir.

“What the—”

Swoosh!!

Odin’s eyes widened. Before he even had a chance to finish his sentence, a blade made of condensed demonic energy shot toward Gaia.

“Ah...”

Gaia had momentarily let her guard down because Odin had let go of Gungnir, so she was unable to react to the black blade completely outside of her expectations.

Splash!!

Red blood splattered, a long slash wound from shoulder to belly button forming on Gaia.

Swoosh!

Another black blade formed on Odin’s hand and shot toward Gaia again. Gaia shut her eyes tightly before she realized it.

Boom—!!

A deafening sound rang out. Gaia had scrunched up instinctively, but she did not feel the pain of a demonic energy blade penetrating her. She slowly opened her eyes.

“My child...”

“Lady Gaia.”

The one who had blocked the demonic energy blade to protect Gaia was Oh Kang-Woo, the hero covered in radiant light.

He looked down at Gaia and said sorrowfully, "I told you... not to listen to anything that Odin says."

"I-I'm... s-sorry."

Gaia lowered her head and clenched her wound tighter. She could not find any words to explain herself since she had already known that Odin had joined forces with Bael.

"No. I... I should have arrived sooner," Kang-Woo shook his head and embraced her.

He slowly placed his hand on Gaia's wound. As one would expect from a Top-rank goddess, her wound that looked fatal was being healed at an incredible rate.

"Focus on treating your wound. I... will face Odin," Kang-Woo stated.

"B-but..."

"Lady Gaia." Kang-Woo smiled faintly and grabbed her hands. "I have been the one... in your care all this time."

"I... have not done anything..."

"No, that's not true."

"..."

"If not for your sacrifice, we would not have been able to stop the Demon of Prophecy when he first came to Earth."

In terms of the result, she was unable to stop the Demon of Prophecy from crossing to Earth, but the Triad would have long since fallen if Gaia had not sacrificed herself.

"I would not be here today either if you hadn't created Guardians in preparation for the time of prophecy."

Gaia had always done her best to protect Earth as well as the Triad. Considering how restricted the gods were in involving themselves with the physical realm back when the Law of Titans was active, it was no exaggeration to say that Gaia had protected Earth at the risk of her annihilation.

"This time," Kang-Woo declared as he tightly held Gaia's hands. "It is my turn to protect you."

"Ah..."

Tears welled up around Gaia's eyes. She could feel Kang-Woo's warmth through his hands, healing her. She was getting unbearably tired for some reason.

"My... child..."

A single tear trickled down her cheek. She lost consciousness once the tear dripped down.

Deathly silence fell once Gaia passed out.

While devouring everything in the world.

Far higher than what anyone has ever reached. A place where he could devour the chaos of the gods, the otherworldly invasions, and even Bael whom Kang-Woo had never managed to defeat even once!

Kang-Woo aggressively gritted his teeth.

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo sighed deeply.

He closed his eyes and raised his head. The sound of bones cracking echoed. Goat horns sprouted from his forehead. He opened his eyes with horizontal pupils and yellow irises pointed right at Odin.

Kang-Woo smiled, the corners of his mouth ripping to his earlobes and sharp teeth sprouting from between his lips.

“Now, it’s time for a feast.”

Chapter 446 - Ragnarok (4)

“Haaa,” Oh Kang-Woo exhaled heatedly.

He scrunched up and licked his lips. He touched the goat horns that sprouted on his forehead and then extended his arm.

Fwoosh!

The Flames of Voracity burned from the ends of his fingers and began to slowly spread. His arms were now covered in flames— no, they became fire itself.

‘*More.*’

This was not enough. He needed to make flames that would set his entire body ablaze, just like when he fought against Tai Wuji.

‘*More, more, more.*’

The thirst strangled Kang-Woo. The hunger was burning him from within. He opened his mouth and stared at Odin as he stuck out his tongue.

“You... should be enough, right?” Kang-Woo asked.

Odin would allow him to reach far greater heights.

Odin stared at Kang-Woo with a stiff expression. A condensed storm raged around Gungnir’s edge. He slurred, “You...”

Odin’s blue eyes slightly trembled and a chill ran down his spine.

‘*Demon.*’

There was no better way to explain Kang-Woo, who was covered in black flames.

“Right?” The demon opened his mouth even wider and smiled.

His yellow irises filled with madness stared at at Odin. He lightly bent his knees and leaped.

Boom—!

Kang-Woo shot toward Odin along with a massive sonic boom. He pulled back his fist covered in the Flames of Voracity and pushed it forward.

Fwoosh—!

The flames of Voracity shot at Odin like a cannonball.

“Kuh!”

Odin bit his lip anxiously. He did not know what those flames were, but he could instinctively tell that he should not touch them. “Haap!”

He swung Gungnir upward. The storm raging around its edge absorbed and then deflected the Flames of Voracity. The wind mixed with the flames shot upward like a pillar.

“A mere demon...”

Odin’s one eye shone.

Crack. Rip.

His armor burst as his muscles swelled. They swelled up to a point unbelievable for an old man. His muscles squirmed as if they were alive. Odin raised Gungnir high, causing an enormous storm to rage around them.

Odin roared, “Dares to undermine a god?!”

His voice was so loud that it could overpower the storm. Kang-Woo bent backward and snapped his finger. A golden energy wrapped around the area and prevented Odin’s roar from spreading.

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo smiled. “That’s more like it.”

He laughed brightly and pulled out Ingrium attached to his waist. He raised his right arm to the side and tapped the ring on his middle finger.

“Come on out,” Kang-Woo called Slushy, who was sleeping within the Key of the Demonic Sea.

However, Slushy did not come out of the ring no matter how long Kang-Woo waited.

‘*The hell?*’

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively in irritation.

“Are you in your rebellious phase?” he asked the ring as he looked down at it.

Slushy did not respond. He would usually bounce out of the ring and cling to him, but he was not doing so.

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He could tell that something had gone wrong. As he was in his thoughts, his demonic horizontal goat pupils with yellow irises turned back to his usual eyes with round pupils and black irises.

Fwoosh!

“Fuck.”

The Flames of Voracity ate away at Kang-Woo before he even had a chance to regain control over it. His unfathomable hunger was eating away at his sanity. His burning desire was turning his sense of reason to ash.

“Argh...”

Kang-Woo lowered his head with his hand on his forehead. His desire was running out of control like a racing truck with malfunctioning brakes. No matter how hard he tried to suppress it, his unleashed desire was burning him at an alarming rate.

“Haaa, haaa, haaa,” Kang-Woo panted heavily. His eyes, which had momentarily returned to those of a human, reverted back to his demonic goat eyes. “Fuuu.”

His head turned blank and was filled with hunger.

‘What was I thinking about again?’

He did not remember— no, he did not feel the need to remember. His mind was hazy despite not opening the Doors.

‘I have to... become stronger.’

Only his desire burned brightly within his hazy consciousness.

‘I’m not good enough yet.’

At this rate, he would not be able to reach the point that he wanted. He needed to walk forward even more. No, he needed to run. Only then...

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth. The Flames of Voracity covering his arms grew larger. Ingrim burned with the Flames of Voracity.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!!” Kang-Woo roared.

He swung Ingrim at Odin holding Gungnir. The giant flames poured out from the demonic sword’s edge and burned space itself.

“Hup!” Odin inhaled shortly.

He gripped Gungnir with both hands and swung it around like a windmill.

Whoosh—!

An enormous storm surged from Gungnir and mixed with the Flames of Voracity. A powerful heat storm slightly extinguished the Flames of Voracity covering Kang-Woo’s arms. Odin’s blue eye shone.

Boom!

Odin stomped his foot and lowered his stance with the spear shaft under his armpit.

“Die.”

Crackle—!!

The storm condensed around Gungnir's edge and blue lightning crackled within it. The lightning was so powerful and blinding that Thor's lightning could not be compared to it. Odin then straightened his knees from his lowered stance and twisted his torso.

“Gungnir.”

He thrust Gungnir forward. The condensed lightning storm and Gungnir's edge burned bright red.

“Heh.” Kang-Woo smiled as he stared at the spear flying at him.

Badump, badump.

His heart was beating uncontrollably and sparks of ecstasy ran down his back.

‘*Yeah.*’ Kang-Woo was reminded of his battle against Tai Wuji. ‘*This is it.*’

He had been craving this feeling— this exhilarating sense of despair.

“Kihi,” Kang-Woo laughed as the corners of his mouth ripped to his earlobes.

He stuck his tongue out and extended his left arm forward.

Stab.

Gungnir's edge pierced Kang-Woo's left hand. The Flames of Voracity began to eat the immense power contained in Gungnir's edge.

Crack, crunch!

However, the speed at which Gungnir was piercing through Kang-Woo was faster than Kang-Woo absorbing the power within Gungnir. His left arm was ripped open completely as Gungnir continued to drill into him. Kang-Woo quickly raised his right arm, but even that was ripped apart in less than a second.

Stab.

“Kurgh.”

Gungnir shot through Kang-Woo's heart after he lost both of his hands. A giant hole was made from under his collarbone to just above his belly button, obliterating his organs in the area.

“Arghh...” Kang-Woo crouched. “Not... enough.”

Wriggle.

Although almost half of his body had been obliterated, his destroyed organs began to regenerate at an incredible rate. The speed transcended logic as if Kang-Woo had opened the Doors.

‘*Or had I opened them already?*’

Kang-Woo did not know nor did he want to know. He did not feel the need to.

“A little more...”

His thirst burned his throat. He looked at Odin as if begging him. It didn't matter whether or not the Doors were open. Kang-Woo only cared about one thing.

“For...ward. For...ward.”

It was to walk toward the prey in front of him without breaking down.

“I...”

Kang-Woo had to win. He could not afford to lose. If he were to fall apart... If he were to lose...

“I have... to... win.”

Wriggle.

Black mucus gathered and regenerated his destroyed organs. He leaped forward once he was fully healed.

Odin extended his right arm, completely expressionless. Gungnir, which had drilled through Kang-Woo, flew back into his hand. Anyone would have been bewildered by a monster whose body instantly regenerated from a fatal wound, but Odin did not falter.

“If you will not die,” Odin remarked as his blue eye shone with blazing spirit. “I will keep killing you until you do.”

Whir—!

Gungnir’s edge began to divide until thousands of them filled the sky.

“Haaaaaaap!!”

Boom!

Odin’s white hair fluttered in the wind. His muscles swelled to the point that they would explode. He twisted his torso back and threw his spear with all his might at the demon charging at him. The thousands of spear edges filling the sky poured down like rainfall on the demon.

Kang-Woo looked up into the sky at the thousands of spear edges.

“Burn,” he commanded with Soul Speech.

The Flames of Voracity covering his arms burned even stronger.

“Burn, Burn. Burn. Burn. Burn.”

He used Soul Speech over and over again as if he were singing. The flames around his arms spread out like a net.

—————!!

Thousands of spear edges collided with the net of fire. The explosion that transcended sound shook the World Tree.

“Kurgh!”

Odin quickly stepped back from the explosion that distorted and tore apart space itself.

Crack, crack!

“What the...”

However, he could see the monster, who was still charging at him despite his body being torn apart by the distorted space.

Crunch!

The monster ate Odin's right arm before he could do anything. The Top-rank Deific Essence barrier was negated all too easily by the monster's teeth as they dug into Odin's flesh.

"Kurghhhhh!!" Intense pain traveled up Odin's arm. He bit his lip and raised his left arm. "You fucking monster...!"

He raised Gungnir and swung it down at the head of the monster eating his right arm.

Crack.

The monster's head exploded.

Crunch, crunch, crunch.

However, the monster's mouth did not let go of Odin's arm.

"More, more, more," the monster muttered chillingly as he continued to devour Odin's flesh. He then screamed like a crazed beast, "MORE, MORE, MORE, MORE!!"

Odin's expression turned pale.

"You—"

Odin was about to say something as his eyes trembled, but the monster covered in flames grabbed his neck before he could and pulled it down. The monster, who had been eating Odin's arm, opened his mouth wide like a snake and swallowed Odin's entire upper body whole.

Crunch, crunch.

Kang-Woo waited for the bell chime as he devoured Odin's body and Deific Essence.

'Alright, come on. Hurry up and tell me that I reached Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.'

He waited for the blue message window, but no matter how much time passed, no such message window appeared. Forget that, not even a message window saying that he absorbed Odin's Deific Essence appeared.

"What the hell?" Kang-Woo came back to his senses as if he had been doused by cold water. "Why... didn't I reach it?"

He had absorbed the corpses of hundreds of gods and even devoured the Deific Essence of Odin, a Top-rank god.

"After all I ate? Huh? I ate everything I possibly could."

No matter how long Kang-Woo waited, the message that said he reached Transcendent-rank Deific Essence did not appear.

"Fucking why?!"

Boom!

He stomped his foot aggressively.

“Haaa, haaa, haaa.” Kang-Woo crouched. “More... more, more, more, more, more.”

Even after eating hundreds of gods and devouring Odin whole, the hunger burning him from the inside did not disappear.

Chapter 447 - Shouldered Weight

“More, more, more.”

Oh Kang-Woo’s desire was overflowing; it was blazing to the point that he wondered if anything this intense had ever happened to him.

“Haaa, haaa.”

His breathing became heavy. He clenched his chest as his vision blurred.

‘More, more...’

His sanity was being devoured. His ego and emotions were being vaporized by flames, leaving only his desire.

“Fu...ck.”

Kang-Woo crouched down and bit his lip so hard that his teeth dug into his flesh. He was thirsty. He was hungry. He was lacking.

Whoooooom!

The golden barrier surrounding the area disappeared.

“M-my child!”

Kang-Woo could see the fully healed Gaia approaching him. He walked over to her naturally to devour her flesh.

“A-arghh.”

He suppressed his steps with all his might. He clenched his hair and gritted his teeth, frantically holding on to the thin thread that was his sanity.

‘This is... bad.’

No, it wasn’t bad. This was normal. He had always been like this. What was so wrong about a demon staying true to his desire?

“Haaa, haaa.”

Kang-Woo could see a black sea. An endless abyss was looking at him. It was not Bauli; it was something far more enormous. It was an infinite darkness.

‘What... the hell?’

Kang-Woo turned his head. He could see three doors of different sizes, which were keeping the darkness at bay, being drowned up by the black sea. No, that was not the right way to describe it.

'They're... becoming one.'

He couldn't understand. He couldn't think straight.

The abyss stared at him and said, - *What's wrong?*

Kang-Woo could hear the laughter of an innocent child.

- This is what you desired, isn't it?

He wanted to get stronger by eating so that he could win and protect what he cherished. He wanted to do whatever it took, whatever the cost.

'For...ward.'

- That's it.

'Forward, forward, forward...'

Kang-Woo's consciousness faded.

"Gasp!"

Kang-Woo sprang up. He looked around and saw white walls. He was in one of the rooms of the Hall of Protection.

"You're up, my king."

Kang-Woo heard Lilith's voice. She was reading a thick pile of documents as she sat next to the bed.

"What happened?" Kang-Woo asked.

"The war ended with Odin's death. Olympus won."

"..."

"Gaia has remained in the divine realm to negotiate with the opposing faction. Your quick disposal of Odin resulted in minimal losses from both sides or so I've heard."

"I see."

"..."

"How long was I out for?"

"About three days."

"..."

Kang-Woo stood up with an anxious expression. He immediately checked the amount of Divinity within him, but he could barely feel a difference compared to the amount before Ragnarok. He had not managed to achieve Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.

"..."

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively.

'I rested for three goddamn days.'

The otherworldly invasions could begin at any second. Bael could bare his fangs at any second. He could not afford to waste even a single millisecond.

'I have to get stronger.'

He was nowhere near powerful enough.

'More...'

Kang-Woo's eyes turned yellow and his horizontally stretched pupils shone chillingly.

'What should I do?'

Kang-Woo had thought that he would reach Transcendent-rank Deific Essence by devouring Odin, but forget acquiring it, he did not even manage to obtain a single clue.

'Was Odin not enough? In that case, if I devour Gaia... as well as Elune...'

He was sure that he would be able to if he did.

"Yeah."

If it was not enough, he simply had to eat more. It was the most simple and surefire solution.

"I'll start with Gaia—"

"My king," Lilith interjected.

Kang-Woo turned his head to her. She was staring at him in sorrow.

"Why did you do it?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, why did you incite the war between the gods?"

"That was because Odin—"

"No." Lilith firmly shook her head and said coldly, "You did it, didn't you?"

Kang-Woo remained silent.

Lilith narrowed her eyes. "It wasn't like you, my king."

"It wasn't like me?"

Kang-Woo feigned laughter.

'Wasn't like me? Then should I have stayed true to ethics and morals like Reynald and held hands toward a better future?'

"I've always been like this," Kang-Woo claimed.

“No, that isn’t true.”

“Bullshit. I’ve done far worse things than th—”

“And you’ve done those things only when you were sure that the other party was an enemy. You only took such action when you were certain that they would get in your way. You’ve never run wild like a madman like you are doing now.”

Silence fell. Kang-Woo couldn’t deny it. Gathering allies and reducing enemies had been his fundamental survival tactic in the Nine Hells. He didn’t take into account whether the targets that he devoured were good or evil, but he at least never hunted those that would not get in his way.

“I am not saying you shouldn’t have killed Odin. The problem is how you did it.”

“...”

“You were far too sloppy.” Lilith continued coldly, “If Gaia did not have the utmost trust in you and Odin hadn’t lost himself in his rage, the fact that you were the culprit of this incident would have easily been exposed. To be honest, your plan only went without a hitch because the gods are as moronic as they could get. Jeez, thinking about it even now, they were insanely stupid. How could they not have figured it out? Their intelligence as a whole must have dropped down a few pegs after being stuck in the divine realm for so long...”

“...”

“Whatever the case, it wasn’t like you at all, my king.” Lilith stood up and walked toward Kang-Woo. “If you were your usual self, even if you wanted to devour Odin, you would have picked a fight only after eliminating as much of a chance that you would be exposed as possible.”

“...”

“My king.” Lilith gently grabbed Kang-Woo’s hands and stared at him with deeply sunken eyes. She asked, “Why are you so impatient?”

“...”

Impatient was the perfect word for it. It was not a problem that Kang-Woo killed Odin; the fact that he incited Ragnarok and caused gods to kill each other was not of importance either. Lilith couldn’t care less about those things. The problem was Kang-Woo’s current state. He was impatient as if he was being chased by something.

“Why am I so impatient?” Kang-Woo frowned aggressively and glared at Lilith with his teeth bared. “Why... you ask?”

Was she asking because she didn’t know? Did she seriously not know the reason why?

“Because I have to get stronger. If I don’t eat and become stronger... if I don’t manage to win and protect what I cherish, I’ll...” Kang-Woo bit his lip and muttered, “I’ll... lose to that son of a bitch again.”

He lowered his head and recalled his loss. He had the Demon God’s heart stolen from right under his nose. He recalled Bael cackling at him. Although their battle in the Nightmare Forest did not decide a clear winner, the result itself had no doubt been his loss.

‘I can’t stop him.’

He wasn’t sure whether or not he would have won even if he opened the Doors.

‘No, I probably would’ve still lost.’

It would have been a different story if Kang-Woo had let go of his sanity entirely, but he likely would not have been able to win if he kept hold of it. Besides, the end result would have been the same if he had let go of his sanity; if the Demonic Sea were to be fully unleashed... this world would without a doubt come to an end.

‘And he even managed to get his hands on the Demon God’s heart.’

Kang-Woo’s chance of victory had been reduced even more. At this rate, he would lose again.

“My king.” Lilith placed her hand on Kang-Woo’s cheek, her eyes filled with sorrow. She gently caressed his cheek. “It’s not like you have never suffered a single loss in your life.”

The Demon King’s path of conquest had not been clean of defeat; he had lost, been trampled on, and crumbled countless times. Despite that, he crawled his way up from the bottom and ultimately ended came out victorious.

“There is no need for you to be this impatient just because you lost to Bael once,” Lilith remarked as if scolding Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo’s eyes shook. “No need... to be impatient? Just from losing once?”

He couldn’t help but laugh.

“Ha. Haha. Haha.”

Kang-Woo burst into laughter; it was a sorrow-filled laughter as if he was wailing in tears.

“Don’t... bullshit me.”

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth and glared at Lilith fiercely. Lilith was right. He had faced defeat countless times in the Nine Hells. He overcame those defeats and came out victorious.

But... But...

But...

Slam!

Kang-Woo punched the wall. He ignored the hunger strangling him and the thirst burning him alive. He trampled on his surging desire. Once everything disappeared, only he was left. Not the savior of the world, not the Demon King who ruled the Nine Hells, not the master of the Demonic Sea, but the human Oh Kang-Woo.

Something came bursting out. Something that he had been suppressing within him with all his might exploded.

Kang-Woo shouted, "I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE A SINGLE TIME ANYMORE!! I BECAME STRONGER THROUGH DEFEAT? I CRAWLED MY WAY UP TO THE TOP? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY DIED IN THAT PROCESS?!"

They had died. Countless subordinates who had pledged their loyalty to him died in the most atrocious and wretched ways possible. They had died, died, died, died, died, and died again. They continued to die until their corpses made a giant hill.

"I HAVE TO FUCKING GET STRONGER! I HAVE TO KEEP WINNING!"

Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward. Forward.

He couldn't stop. He couldn't break. He couldn't fall. If he were to collapse, Bael would bare his teeth at the people who followed him.

"THEY'D ALL DIE, SO WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?!" Kang-Woo screamed in desperation. "DO YOU THINK NUMBERS WOULD HAVE ANY EFFECT ON HIM? HUH? OLYMPUS? ASGARD? GUARDIANS? THEY'RE ALL MEANINGLESS TO HIM!!"

Boom!

Kang-Woo stomped his foot. In the end, there was no one but him who was a match for Bael. If he fell, there was no one else.

He continued desperately, "I... have to get stronger."

He needed to get stronger. He needed to fight and win. Running away was pointless. Even if he escaped somewhere far away from the Triad, it was only a matter of time. Bael would devour the Triad and come for him; wherever Kang-Woo was, Bael would eventually come to find him and devour everything he cherished.

"I..." Kang-Woo panted heavily and lowered his head. He mustered the words. "I... have to win."

He could not afford to lose even once. He could not afford to let the things that happened in Hell to repeat.

Lilith remained silent.

This was the first time she had seen such a vulnerable side of Kang-Woo after all the time they had spent and the countless battles they had fought together.

'Just how long had he been desperately holding on for? How long had he been suppressing these emotions?'

She couldn't even begin to imagine.

“Master Kang-Woo.”

She did not address him as her king. The man in front of her was not the Demon King. He was the human Oh Kang-Woo, who had been crushed under the weight of that title.

“It must have been... so hard for you.”

Lilith took Kang-Woo’s head and embraced it tightly, patting it as if she were comforting a hurt child.

Kang-Woo remained silent.

He lowered his head as he was in her arms. He recalled the faces of countless people. They were the faces of Han Seol-Ah, Lilith, Balrog, and Kim Si-Hun. Not just them; the gazes of Cha Yeon-Joo, Echidna, Layla, Iris, Halcyon, Vaal Zahak, Uriel, and countless others were staring at him. They had a hold on him. They were the ones he was shouldering; they were the ones that he needed to shoulder.

“Yeah.”

It was hard for him. There was no way that it wasn’t. No matter how much he endured, and endured, and endured, and endured, and endured, and endured, and endured... Every time he tried to walk forward...

“It’s... so heavy.”

The weight he was shouldering was far too heavy.

“I feel like I’m... getting crushed to death,” Kang-Woo said as he wept, tears trickling down his cheeks.

Chapter 448 - You Don’t Control Me

Silence fell, leaving only the weeping sounds of a hurt beast filling the room. Lilith slowly patted Oh Kang-Woo’s head in her embrace until he stopped weeping and his bursting emotions subsided.

“DO YOU THINK NUMBERS WOULD HAVE ANY EFFECT ON HIM? HUH? OLYMPUS? ASGARD? GUARDIANS? THEY’RE ALL MEANINGLESS TO HIM!!”

Lilith recalled Kang-Woo’s screams. She could not think of a rebuttal to his words. Numbers were indeed meaningless against Bael; that had already been proven during the war to decide the supreme overlord of the Nine Hells in the past. She had made most of Bael’s forces betray him with her exceptional illusion magic, but it ended up being meaningless. That was the kind of being Bael was.

‘No one but Master Kang-Woo is a match for him.’

She knew all too well that Kim Si-Hun, Gaia, Balrog, or Han Seol-Ah would not be able to handle Bael. No, they would only become a nuisance for Kang-Woo.

‘In the end, there’s no other way to face Bael than for Master Kang-Woo to become stronger than him.’

There was just one way for Kang-Woo to get stronger: to eat without regard for good or evil, friend or foe.

'That's why...'

Lilith smiled sorrowfully and looked down at the shaking Kang-Woo in her arms. She couldn't begin to imagine how cornered he must have felt and the weight crushing him.

'Poor thing.'

Lilith hugged Kang-Woo tighter like he was a precious treasure.

"You'll win," she said.

"..."

"If you're the Master Kang-Woo that I know, you'll come out on top in the end."

"That's—"

"Yes, I know. Someone might die in the process. You might lose someone you cherish, like you had back in the Nine Hells. But..." Lilith smiled brightly. "I know you'll be able to overcome it."

"No. You're wrong."

Kang-Woo bit his lip. The dead did not return. There was no way to regain what one had lost. Victory meant nothing if everything he had disappeared as a result.

"I... don't wanna lose anything else."

Kang-Woo lowered his head and wept pitifully.

"Hohoho," Lilith laughed with her mouth covered. She swept Kang-Woo's hair back and kissed him. "I won't say anything stupid like I'll stay with you even in death, but I can at least tell you this." She stared at Kang-Woo, her eyes willed with certainty.

"Even if I were to die... I will be happy. As long as I'm with you... As long as I have the memories of the times I have spent with you, I'm sure that I can stay smiling even in the face of death."

Kang-Woo's eyes shook as he panted heavily. "No."

Die with a smile? What kind of bullshit was that?

"Don't you dare die without my permission."

"Oh, my heart skipped a beat there."

Lilith slightly blushed. She wrapped her arms around Kang-Woo's neck and leaned down to kiss Kang-Woo again.

'I feel bad for Seol-Ah, but I can't hold back my bursting emotions,' she thought.

“If you won’t let me die, then...” Lilith placed her hand on Kang-Woo’s cheek. She brought her face close to Kang-Woo’s face until their noses almost touched and whispered, “Please win.”

Whatever Kang-Woo did, even if he were to devour everything, even if the entire world were to curse and resent him, Lilith would follow him to the very end.

“If you can’t afford to lose a single time...”

“...”

“Just don’t lose. Simple, isn’t it?” Lilith said leisurely as if it was only natural for her king to be able to do it.

“Hah,” Kang-Woo chuckled and asked dumbfoundedly, “Shouldn’t you be telling me that it’s okay for me to lose or that you’ll help me shoulder the weight?”

“My, did you want something like that? Hohoho, but it’s a fact that no one but you can face Bael and that our lives are in your hands.” Lilith laughed brightly and stared at Kang-Woo with deeply sunken eyes. She continued, “So, please win.”

If it was Kang-Woo, her beloved king, he would win for sure even if his opponent was a god, an unknown otherworldly entity, or even Bael.

Kang-Woo remained silent. Forget unloading some of the weight on his shoulders, Lilith was adding even more.

“Pfft.”

The pressure on his shoulders lessened for some reason.

‘Just don’t lose, huh?’

“You make it... sound so easy,” Kang-Woo remarked.

He couldn’t help but laugh as he shrugged.

‘Yeah, it was so simple.’

If he had always ended up coming out on top every single time, he just needed to do the same this time as well.

‘Without losing anything.’

He would win by a landslide.

“Haha, for fuck’s sake.”

Kang-Woo burst into laughter with his hand on his face. He felt like an idiot for being crushed by the weight on his shoulders all this time.

‘I just don’t have to lose, right?’

If that was the case, there was something he needed to do first.

“I’ll be right back,” he said.

“Master Kang-Woo?”

Kang-Woo turned away from Lilith, who was tilting her head in confusion, and closed his eyes to reach the black sea within the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

‘I’ll beat the shit out of this motherfucker first.’

The black sea, an infinite darkness, was drowning the three Doors that kept it at bay. There was no need to think deeply about what was trying to take over the Ten Thousand Demon Core and Kang-Woo himself.

‘Desire.’

It was the entity that those who possessed demonic energy inevitably had to face. It was the source of demonic energy itself.

“A-arghh.”

Kang-Woo trembled as intense hunger and thirst burned him alive.

Fwoosh.

The flames blazed fiercely. The gold and black flames were made only out of Kang-Woo’s desire to eat.

“Haaa, haaa,” he panted heavily.

His desire was boiling to the point that he could barely hold it back. His mind felt hazy and his vision looked as if static was filling it. His sense of reason was getting devoured and his sanity was getting burnt to a crisp. Everything in the world was falling apart. It was being vaporized by flames. The only thing left among the ashes was his desire.

- More, more, more, more.

His desire shouted as if it had not had enough. The powerful impulse to devour everything in the world was taking over Kang-Woo’s mind. He slowly raised his head within the unfathomable sense of desire.

‘It was you.’

The entity that had been trying to take control of him by taking advantage of his weakened mindset was the flames of desire— his Deific Essence of Voracity.

‘I knew something was off.’

Thinking back on it, there were several irregularities. He would never do what he had done even if he had been cornered by stress and the pressure of needing to get stronger.

“It wasn’t like you, my king.”

Yes. It wasn’t like him. He didn’t care about good or evil. He paid no mind to ethics and trampled on a concept as trivial as morals. That did not change in the past or the present. He killed anyone who got in his way and even those whom he thought would in the future. If he needed something,

he would do whatever it took to get his hands on it. Lilith knew very well what kind of person Kang-Woo was but she still judged that his actions until now had not been like him.

'It must've been because I was getting eaten by this thing.'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and stared at the blazing flames. The Flames of Voracity was formed only by his desire to eat; it was filled with his thirst and hunger. He had been controlled by his own Deific Essence this entire time.

'So this is why I was so desperate to acquire Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.'

He could finally understand the situation somewhat.

'But since when?'

Kang-Woo searched back on his memories. It did not take long for him to find out when he had begun to change due to the Deific Essence of Voracity's control over him.

'Right after I lost to Bael.'

Kang-Woo chuckled. "This fucking body of mine is so goddamn popular."

Not just Bauli, but even his Deific Essence of Voracity was coveting his body. It was trying to devour Kang-Woo through the Flames of Voracity by making him succumb to his desire.

Fwoosh—!!

Enormous flames easily over thousands of meters tall, large enough to devour the entire world, charged at Kang-Woo.

Bounce!

"Grrrk, grrrk!"

Just then, Slushy appeared in Kang-Woo's consciousness. It stood between Kang-Woo and the flames, glaring at the flames fiercely.

"Grrrk! Grrrrrrrk!"

It opened its mouth threateningly and kept the flames in check.

Kang-Woo smirked. "The hell, man? Took you long enough to crawl out."

"Grrrk, grrrk..."

Slushy flinched and looked at Kang-Woo as if he was wronged. Kang-Woo snickered and lightly tapped Slushy's glistening skin.

Splosh, splosh.

"Stop acting all tough and stay behind me."

"Grrrk?"

Kang-Woo grabbed Slushy by the head and threw him back.

"Grrrk!!!"

Slushy bounced backward as he rolled.

“Now, then.”

Kang-Woo raised his head to see a burning black sea. This was probably how it would look if one set fire to a sea of gasoline. He could feel the intense heat burning him despite this being a world in his consciousness. The giant pillar of fire made of desire opened its mouth and swallowed Kang-Woo.

Tsssss—!

His skin burned and his blood evaporated. Intense hunger and thirst distorted his senses. His sense of reason was being ground away as his sanity was devoured.

- It's not enough.

Kang-Woo heard a voice.

- It's not enough, is it? More, more, more, more. We need to move forward. We need to climb even higher, somewhere no one will ever reach. You know as well, don't you? You—

“For fuck's sake, you talk too much.” Kang-Woo cut off the voice echoing in his head and spat on the ground. “Hey.”

Kang-Woo stared at the Flames of Voracity eating away at him.

“Know your fucking place.”

He couldn't believe that he, none other than the Demon King himself, was trying to be controlled.

“You don't control me.”

Desire was an undefiable instinct for a demon; all demons acted on their desire and were controlled by it. However, that was only in the case of a regular demon.

“I reign above you.”

Kang-Woo was the pinnacle of all demons.

He, who had trampled on the Demon God and became the master of the Demonic Sea, said in a low tone, “Kneel, you son of a bitch.” He commanded the colossal flames that had swallowed him whole.

Chapter 449 - Ruler of Voracity

Fwoosh—!!

The Flames of Voracity aggressively bounced away from Oh Kang-Woo. The flames tried to charge at him several more times.

“You still haven't learned your lesson, motherfucker?”

Kang-Woo frowned. The Flames of Voracity charging at him were being bounced away by an invisible force. The battle between a single human and flames colossal enough to swallow the world whole looked like it wouldn't even be a contest from a glance.

‘But this is a space formed within my consciousness.’

The laws of physics did not apply here. It did not matter who was stronger; one’s willpower and ability to control energy did, and Kang-Woo had far surpassed even the Demon God in those two aspects.

Fwoosh—!

The Flames of Voracity exuded intense heat in anger and twisted around as if it couldn’t understand. If willpower was the most important in this space, this phenomenon couldn’t be. After all, desire was the most powerful instinct for a demon.

Fwoosh.

The Flames of Voracity condensed in midair and took the form of a human. It was similar in size and shape to Kang-Woo as if it had used him as a template. The flames in the form of a human slowly walked toward Kang-Woo.

“What do you want?” asked Kang-Woo as he smirked fiercely.

He lightly stomped his foot and then the Demonic Sea wrapped around the Flames of Voracity.

Fwoosh—!!

It writhed aggressively but could not escape from the enormous Demonic Sea’s clutches. Now that Kang-Woo was free from the shackles of desire, the Demonic Sea was back in his full control.

“Got a problem?”

Fwoosh—!

“Hah. You’ve sure had it easy, huh?”

Kang-Woo slowly walked toward the blazing Flames of Voracity. It struggled with all its might and burned even more fiercely to get out of the Demonic Sea’s grasp. The sticky black mucous energy began to evaporate little by little.

“After ten millennia of being under my feet, you happily decide to crawl up after seeing a sliver of a crack in my defense to take advantage of?”

Kang-Woo smiled widely at his desire. He had never once succumbed to his desire in the long span of ten millennia. He had overcome it every single time and emerged victorious. His desire was unable to control him; he was always the one to control it.

Split.

Kang-Woo opened his mouth. The corners of his mouth ripped to his earlobes and sharp teeth emerged from between his lips.

Crack!

Goat horns sprouted from his forehead.

Grrrrk.

The Demonic Sea surged and wrapped around Kang-Woo.

“Hurghhh.”

He crouched within the raging Demonic Sea. An unfathomable sense of omnipotence filled him.

Fwoosh—!

The Flames of Voracity in human form stepped backward. Feeling uneasy, it then turned around and began to run away. Kang-Woo cackled as he stuck his long tongue out.

“I told you—”

Boom—!!

Kang-Woo shot forward like a bullet and the Demonic Sea wrapping around him followed as if stuck to him.

Whoosh!

The Demonic Sea stuck to Kang-Woo’s back spread out like a fan. The Demonic Sea spread on each side of his back looked like giant black wings made of sticky mucus.

“To kneel!”

Splash!

Kang-Woo clenched the fleeing Flames of Voracity and shoved it into the Demonic Sea. The endless abyssal sea swirled around like a vortex and began to devour the Flames of Voracity.

Grrrrk! Grrrrk!

The Flames of Voracity floundered desperately. The black sea was greedily devouring the Deific Essence of Voracity.

Fwoosh!

The Flames of Voracity stuck within the Demonic Sea extended its arm toward Kang-Woo as if begging him to let it out.

Kang-Woo cackled and asked teasingly, “What? You want to live?”

Fwoosh, fwoosh!

It nodded with what looked like its head. Kang-Woo grabbed the Flames of Voracity stuck within the Demonic Sea.

“Hmm. What to do?”

He narrowed his eyes and fell into thought. It would be the best choice to eliminate it since it had risen against him.

‘But I can’t abandon something that I went out of my way to raise to Top-rank Deific Essence.’

He couldn’t afford to abandon the Deific Essence of Voracity because the Flames of Voracity were extremely powerful.

“Come out.”

Kang-Woo pulled out the Deific Essence of Voracity stuck within the Demonic Sea.

Fwoosh—!

The flames that had been blazing so fiercely that they could devour the entire world stepped away from Kang-Woo as if running away. The blazing flames then bowed to Kang-Woo like a loyal subject of a king, or a devotee to a god.

Riiing.

[The ‘Flames of Voracity’ have surrendered to you!]

[Raising the rank of the ‘Flames of Voracity’!]

[You have absorbed the Deific Essence within the ‘Flames of Voracity.’]

[Raising the level cap from 100 to 110!]

[You have reached your Twelfth Awakening!]

[You have fulfilled a portion of the condition to acquire Transcendent-rank Deific Essence!]

[There are ten more levels left until you reach the maximum level (Thirteenth Awakening).]

“Sheesh, this thing is loud as hell. Why are you coming out only now when you didn’t when I was telling you to?”

Kang-Woo smirked as he picked his ear. The blue message windows did not appear in front of him because this was a space within his consciousness. In exchange, the messages were read out within his head.

‘Well, I’ll think about them later.’

Kang-Woo slowly turned to the flames in human form bowing to his feet and narrowed his eyes.

“Bow down properly.”

The flames flinched, properly smashing its head down on the ground.

“Stand up.”

The Flames of Voracity stood up.

“Sit down.”

The Flames of Voracity quickly squatted down. Kang-Woo chuckled.

‘I don’t see the point of something like this in my consciousness, but...’

It at least showed that the Flames of Voracity had submitted to him completely.

‘That aside, do Deific Essence usually have individual will?’

Kang-Woo thought for a moment and narrowed his eyes.

‘It’s a fact that gods are influenced by their Deific Essence.’

Gaia with the Deific Essence of Parental Love deeply cherished her children and retainers, and Tirion with the Deific Essence of Heroes possessed a heroic personality that one would only see in comic books. Even Odin, the God of War, stood at the forefront of the battlefield during Ragnarok.

‘So gods are usually meant to be influenced by their Deific Essence.’

If that were the case, Kang-Woo would also naturally be influenced by the Deific Essence of Voracity.

“Is it really okay for me to get this thing to Transcendent-rank?”

The rise in rank of one’s Deific Essence would also mean that its influence over them would also rise. Kang-Woo had been fortunate that he had not acquired Transcendent-rank Deific Essence after devouring Odin. If he had acquired it while there had been cracks in his defense...

‘I might have been completely taken over by the Deific Essence of Voracity.’

Kang-Woo could not afford to take it lightly.

‘But it’s not like I can give up on Transcendent-rank Deific Essence either.’

Kang-Woo smiled softly. He was in a situation where he couldn’t give up on Transcendent-rank Deific Essence but was unable to block the influence that the Deific Essence had on him.

‘In that case, I’ll just make the Deific Essence submit.’

He would make it so that the Deific Essence couldn’t even look up at him.

“Up, down, up, down.”

The Deific Essence of Voracity stood up and squatted repeatedly at Kang-Woo’s command.

“Sit, sit. Huh? Are my words going out the other ear? Did I tell you to stand up? Huh?”

Fwoosh!

“What? You didn’t know? Huh? Do you think saying that solves everything? Do you want to be annihilated? Get your shit together.”

Fwoosh, fwoosh.

“Down. Up, down, up, roll to the left, roll to the right, jump, fly.”

The Flames of Voracity moved exactly as Kang-Woo commanded. Kang-Woo smiled as he stared at the Flames of Voracity.

“Well, since this is a world within my consciousness, I’m sure we have plenty of time...”

Fwoosh, fwoosh...

“I’ll make sure to put you in your place.”

‘So that you can never even think about coveting my body.’

Kang-Woo burst into laughter. The Flames of Voracity flinched.

Fwoosh...

“Fuuu... Haaa.”

Kang-Woo slowly opened his eyes. He wondered how much time had passed; his sense of time had been so distorted in the world of his consciousness that he was not sure. Kang-Woo turned his head and saw Lilith, who was staring at him in the same spot and posture that he remembered her being when he closed his eyes.

He asked, “How much time passed?”

Lilith’s eyes were subtly shaking anxiously. She answered, “About... three hours.”

“Really?”

He felt as if it had been three years. Kang-Woo looked at Lilith as he stretched. He could see her gaze shaking anxiously.

“What is it?” he asked.

Lilith looked at Kang-Woo’s back without answering.

Kang-Woo tilted his head in wonder and looked back as well.

“Wha...”

Black wings had sprouted from his back. Demonic energy condensed to its absolute limit was dripping from the wings that looked as if they were made from sticky mucus.

‘The hell are these?’

He had indeed made wings when he was in the world of his consciousness, but they were still there in the real world.

Fwoosh!

Just then, gold and black flames set the black wings alight.

“M-Master Kang-Woo...!”

Lilith quickly reached out to Kang-Woo, who lightly shook his head and grabbed her hand.

“It’s okay,” he replied as he lightly moved his blazing wings around.

This was the first time that he gained wings despite being a demon for ten millennia, but he was able to control them easily as if he had them from the beginning.

Riiing.

[The ‘Flames of Voracity’ has surrendered completely to Player Oh Kang-Woo!]

[You have acquired the title ‘Ruler of Voracity’!]

[You can control the impulse of Voracity as per the title’s effect.]

'Whoa.' Kang-Woo's eyes shone as he read the message in front of him. *'Is this because the Flames of Voracity's rank rose?'*

He now possessed wings of gold and black flames.

"So fucking cool..."

'It's sick as fuck. I might fall for myself.'

"Master Kang-Woo?"

"Look at these, Lilith. Aren't they cool as fuck?"

"..."

"They're wings! Yeah? Wings!!"

'You can't get any cooler than this!!!'

Fwoosh, fwoosh.

Kang-Woo excitedly flapped his wings of fire.

"Phew..." Lilith sighed in relief after finally realizing that there was nothing wrong with Kang-Woo. She gave him an angry look and said, "I thought something bad happened to you."

Kang-Woo snickered and placed his hand on Lilith's cheek. "... Thanks."

If it hadn't been for Lilith, he would have gone insane after getting his mind devoured by his desire.

Lilith lowered her head as she blushed. Kang-Woo patted her head. "Are you... completely fine now?"

Kang-Woo nodded and snapped his finger instead of answering. The wings of fire were immediately sucked back into him. He then looked at Lilith and smiled gently.

"Ah..." Lilith expressed. It was the smile that she knew and had seen all this time.

"Master Kang-Woo."

She hugged Kang-Woo tightly, teary-eyed. She had acted like she was fine, but her heart had felt like it would burst from the thought of Kang-Woo being taken over by some other entity.

"I'm... I'm so glad. *Sniff.*"

She was so glad that a tentacle slowly sprouted from her chest and burst, putrid yellow pus splashing on Kang-Woo's clothes.

Kang-Woo grimaced.

He was about to say something but stopped himself. He sighed and turned around.

"Let's go."

He took off the jacket stained with Lilith's pus and burnt it to ash with the flames that casually ignited from his finger. His use of the flames was so natural that it couldn't even be compared to when he first learned the Flames of Voracity.

"..."

Lilith stared blankly at Kang-Woo's back. She smiled widely and knelt on one knee.

"Victory—"

To her beloved, who stood up in the end despite being crushed by unfathomable weight.

"To my beloved king."

Chapter 450 - Aernor Delegation (1)

The first thing that Oh Kang-Woo did after waking up from the world of his consciousness was to settle the aftermaths of Ragnarok. The war had wrapped up as Olympus's victory due to Odin's defeat, but Asgard did not acknowledge their defeat despite losing their commander; they resisted aggressively and desperately.

Kang-Woo and Gaia focused on calming Asgard. It did not take very long since the difference in their power was clear now that Odin had been annihilated. In addition to that, Gaia proposed a compromise to all of the opposing factions to form a sort of association whose purpose was to ease the restriction. The anti-Gaia faction had no choice but to accept the proposal as they were despairing over the overwhelming difference in power.

"It looks like things in the divine realm have calmed down a little."

Kang-Woo nodded as he looked through the documents that Uranus had sent him. The gods had worried that a large majority of the gods would die due to Ragnarok, but they had managed to come to a compromise without major casualties.

'Well, I bet there are still gods who strongly oppose the law in their minds.'

Forget just their minds, Kang-Woo was sure that there would be gods who would ignore the law entirely and manifest into the physical realm anyway. Even so, they had managed to prevent the Earth from falling into chaos due to the gods. As long as the gods were afraid of being annihilated, they would not recklessly manifest into the physical realm.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo sighed as he leaned on the backrest of his chair. He was exhausted after working his ass off needlessly in the divine realm.

'If only I came to my fucking senses before things got this big...'

Multiple waves of regret swept over him.

'I mean, I probably would have had to eliminate Odin sooner or later from what he was saying.'

However, he would have been able to do that without needing to cause an all-out war between gods.

'And most of all...'

Kang-Woo closed his eyes. Someone knocked on his door and entered. It was Lilith, who had another pile of documents in hand. Kang-Woo flinched as he saw her bowing to him.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Hoho. This is the file containing the activities of Guardians while you were away.”

“Oh, okay.”

Kang-Woo took the documents awkwardly. He was not feeling down because he was given more work to do.

Kang-Woo peeked glances at Lilith in silence and gulped.

“My, what’s wrong, Master Kang-Woo?” Lilith tilted her head in confusion, wide-eyed.

“Huh? No, nothing.”

Kang-Woo shook his head frantically like a common dazed anime protagonist.

“My~ Is that so?” Lilith looked at Kang-Woo with a smile.

“What?”

“Nothing at all~”

Lilith smiled even wider. She hummed and walked toward the seated Kang-Woo as she looked at him teasingly.

“...”

Kang-Woo turned his head from her. He had gone through this several times already after *that incident*. Lilith giggled as she lightly placed her hands on Kang-Woo’s shoulders.

“Master Kang-Woo~”

“You can go if you’re done. I still have a ton of things left to do.”

“My, my. How cold you are.” Lilith placed her hands on her chest, overly acting like she was heartbroken. She then spread her arms out and continued, “Here, Master Kang-Woo. You can smother yourself in my embrace... like back then.”

“Kurgh,” Kang-Woo groaned and bit his lip.

His shoulders subtly trembled with his head lowered.

“Go on, hurry. You’ve been having a hard time lately, haven’t you? You can unwind in my arms...”

“S-stop...”

“And cry to your heart’s content.”

“Please fucking stop!” Kang-Woo shouted as he sprang up from his chair as if having a seizure.

“Hohohoho!” Lilith burst into laughter with one hand covering her mouth. She poked Kang-Woo’s chest with her finger and asked, “What’s wrong, Master Kang-Woo~? I, Lilith, am always willing to lend you my embrace whenever you need it!”

“...”

“Now, don’t hold back and jump into my— Kyaaah!”

Kang-Woo grabbed Lilith by her hips and threw her out of the room. Lilith turned her hair into tentacles and gracefully landed on the ground.

“I told you to stop...” said Kang-Woo as he panted heavily.

Lilith giggled even more. “Hoho, my apologies. I couldn’t help it from how entertaining your reactions were.” She elegantly bowed and continued, “Layla asked me to tell you that there will be a Guardians general assembly soon, so she would appreciate it if you could participate.”

“Okay.”

Kang-Woo nodded and flopped back down on his chair.

Clack.

The door of his room closed and silence fell.

Kang-Woo lowered his head. “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

He screamed as he clenched his hair.

“It’s... so heavy.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!!

“I feel like I’m... getting crushed to death!

“ilJASDHFkLJWHDFILFBWlidbflkjABDFKLBklldbfljlb.”

Kang-Woo muttered incomprehensibly. He jumped into his bed and clenched his hair. He kicked the sheets that he had left untidied after waking up and rolled around.

“Why... Why did I say shit like that...?”

He wept in deep sorrow. There was no darker past than this.

‘Deific Essence of Voracity, you fucking son of a bitch. Should I go back into the world of my consciousness and fuck it up again?’ Fwoosh, fwoosh.

A small ember set alight from Kang-Woo’s finger as he was deep in thought and wriggled as if it were wronged.

“What? What the fuck do you want from me?”

Fwoosh.

The ember flinched and went back into Kang-Woo.

“Urghhh,” Kang-Woo groaned bizarrely as he clenched his hair again.

Clack.

“K-Kang-Woo?!”

Just then, Han Seol-Ah opened the door anxiously after hearing Kang-Woo’s groans.

“Darling.”

Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah with shaking eyes. All the humiliation that he had experienced at Lilith’s hands swept over him. He let the surging emotions take him.

“Darliiiiiiiing!”

“Wh-whoa!”

Kang-Woo jumped into Seol-Ah’s arms. His face buried into her well-endowed chest. His cheeks were enveloped by a warm and soft sensation. A delightful scent entered his nose. He could feel his stress melting away in a flash.

“Aaaahh.”

‘I’m so fucking happy. I can’t even remember the dark past anymore. I’m sure my darling won’t make fun of me. She’s... she’s different from Lilith.’

“Is something wrong?” Seol-Ah asked as she looked down at Kang-Woo in worry.

Kang-Woo regained his composure and stepped away from her as he cleared his throat.

“No, nothing at all.”

“It doesn’t look like it.”

“I was just worked up over a past mistake.”

“A past... mistake?”

Seol-Ah tilted her head in wonder, but Kang-Woo forcibly changed the subject so that she couldn’t dig into it.

“How are you doing lately, darling? I’ve barely been able to see you.”

It had been to change the subject, but he was considerably worried about it.

‘Darling doesn’t only just get sad because we haven’t been able to see each other.’

Kang-Woo did not know why, but Seraph’s soul was within Seol-Ah. She had awakened through Seraph’s power and ended up becoming an angel in the body of a human, similar to Kang-Woo, a demon in a human body. However, she was unable to control her obsession because the change had been too sudden, and the target of her obsession was none other than Kang-Woo.

‘She won’t fall from grace again, would she?’

Kang-Woo looked at Seol-Ah uneasily.

“Ah...” Seol-Ah bit her lip aggressively and nodded. “Yes... That’s right. You’ve been... fairly busy lately.”

“...”

“I-I’m f-fine!”

‘You don’t look fine.’

“I-I know that you’re very... busy. *Grit*. So... I’m fine. *Grind*. Even if you’re not here... I can take care of myself just fine.”

‘You seriously don’t look fine.’

“...”

Seol-Ah bit her lip, brought her legs together, and twisted them as if she were holding in her pee, possibly having recalled the time that Kang-Woo was away. Her bloodshot eyes were staring intently at Kang-Woo’s limbs.

‘The hell? It kinda looks like she’s contemplating whether or not to cut them off. You’re not, right? Huh? It’s all in my head, right, Darling? You’re not gonna dismember me or anything, right? They’ll grow back even if you cut them off, so don’t cut them. You better not.’

“Haaa, fuuu~ haaa.” Seol-Ah shut her eyes tightly and took deep breaths. Her bloodshot eyes returned to normal. “A-ahem. I’m sorry, Kang-Woo.”

“Are you sure you’re fine?”

“I-I’m sure! I...” Seol-Ah’s eyes darted around. She grabbed Kang-Woo’s hands and then kissed him. She said quietly as she blushed, “... I missed you, Kang-Woo.”

Kang-Woo smiled faintly.

‘It looks like she can control her instincts somewhat now.’

Her condition was not as bad as when she had fallen.

‘But you never know.’

Suppressing one’s desire was easier said than done. Even Kang-Woo himself had made a huge blunder because his desire had almost taken control of him.

‘It’s not good to suppress it at all times either.’

It would only have the opposite effect. Just like how Kang-Woo unleashed his instinctive desire to eat whenever he faced powerful foes like Tai Wuji, one needed to unwind and fulfill their desire every once in a while.

“Darling. It’s just gonna be the two of us today after all this time, so is there anything you want to do?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Pardon?” Seol-Ah’s eyes widened due to Kang-Woo’s sudden question.

Kang-Woo smirked and continued, “The matters in the divine realm have more or less been resolved, so... I have some free time today. If there’s anything you want to do, let me know.”

Seol-Ah’s target of obsession was himself, so the best way to fulfill what she desired was to let her do what she wanted to him.

An awkward silence fell. Seol-Ah’s eyes darted around as she stole glances at Kang-Woo.

“Wh-what I want to do...?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Well...” Seol-Ah lowered her head as her face reddened. “I-is it really okay for me to say it?”

“Haha. Of course, anything.”

It was obvious what a pure and innocent woman like Seol-Ah would want to do.

‘Yeah, I’ve been wanting to go on a date with Seol-Ah after so long.’

It would be nice to go to a cinema with her as they held hands, or even spending some quality time in a nearby cafe would be nice in its own right.

‘We could even go to the department store that we went to with Echidna a while ago.’

Mhm.’

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction as he thought of date courses in his head.

“Umm... In that case,” Seol-Ah cautiously said. She took off the house slippers that she had been wearing and said, “P-please lick my... feet.”

“...”

Excuse me?