

M. in Hell 461

Chapter 461 - Surpassing the Wall (3)

Clang! Clang!

A sword enveloped in blue light ripped space apart. Kim Tae-Hyun barely blocked the sword with his dagger but was blown back from the impact.

“Haaa.” Kim Si-Hun momentarily stopped attacking and took a deep breath in.

‘I’m vanishing.’

Si-Hun felt like he was melting away into thin air like ice cream on a hot summer day. The feeling of his sword in his hand as well as the sensation of swinging his arm and stomping his feet felt different from usual. It was like he was controlling a game avatar; it felt like his soul had left his body and was controlling his body from above. His body felt nonexistent, leaving him with only his consciousness.

Clang!

“Kurgh!”

There was no point in using martial arts. As soon as he thought of attacking, the Qi around him responded to his will. His Qi which had been depleted before was overflowing; it was like the ocean was his energy source.

‘This must be... Deific Essence.’

It was the absolute power that separated gods from mortals. Si-Hun trembled from the power filling him to the brim. However, he did not know that this power was not given to him because he acquired Deific Essence.

Deific Essence was merely a byproduct of the power that he had realized. He had reached a realm that beings such as Zeus and Thor, who had been born with Deific Essence, could never reach. The overpowering majesty of one who acquired Deific Essence on their own was pouring out from Si-Hun.

Clang—!!

“Haaa, haaa,” Tae-Hyun panted heavily.

‘How?’

The situation changed from the moment that blue energy burst from Si-Hun.

‘I can see the future, so how am I getting pushed back this hard?’

Tae-Hyun aggressively bit his lip. He gripped the dagger that he was holding in a reverse grip harder and activated Foresight to its limit.

‘I can see it.’

He could see every single one of Si-Hun’s movements as well as how and where he would attack.

Wham!

“Kurgh!”

However, knowing the future was not enough to deal with Si-Hun’s attacks. The moment that Tae-Hyun blocked with his dagger, the massive impact destroyed his stance.

“Why, why, why?!” Tae-Hyun shouted as if he couldn’t understand.

Although Si-Hun had powered up in the moment of crisis, it did not change the fact that Tae-Hyun had the upper hand. Tae-Hyun himself did not know it but his Deific Essence was not normal. It was that of the Titans, power that not even those who had acquired Deific Essence on their own could ever possess. Tae-Hyun was objectively faster and stronger than Si-Hun, and he even possessed the ability to look into the future.

‘But I can’t block his attacks.’

Tae-Hyun panted heavily as he frantically swung his dagger. There was a fundamental difference in skill between Tae-Hyun and Si-Hun. No matter how strong the power that Tae-Hyun possessed was, he was unable to use it to its full potential because he lacked the skill to.

‘At this rate...’ Tae-Hyun’s expression was dyed with anxiety. *‘Again...’*

He recalled the day that he awakened as a Player and excitedly went to the Player Registration Office. He recalled the gazes of disdain and the voices filled with pity, telling him that he wouldn’t amount to anything and that he should give up.

‘Kang-Woo hyung.’

Tae-Hyun clenched his dagger almost to the point that it could break. Kang-Woo was the one who relighted his dream that he was about to give up; Kang-Woo was his idol as well as his messiah.

‘I...’

Tae-Hyun’s dagger was blown away from his hand and he tumbled backward.

“Fuuu.”

Si-Hun caught his breath as he stared at Tae-Hyun collapsed on the ground. His body was screaming at him that he had not yet managed to fully realize his enlightenment, but he couldn’t attack someone on the ground.

“Let’s end the d—”

As Si-Hun was about to end the duel, Tae-Hyun stood back up as he staggered.

“Haaa, haaa.”

Whoooooom!

Tae-Hyun’s necklace began to burn brightly.

“Wh-What’s happening...?” Tae-Hyun, who did not seem to know what was going on either, grabbed his necklace in perplexity.

Crackle.

“Ah.”

The scenery changed.

‘What is this?’

The world was filled with gray static as if Tae-Hyun were staring at a broken TV monitor. He saw ruins of destroyed buildings. The sky was burning red and the land was distorted.

There were countless corpses around him. A thousand? Ten thousand? No, there was an entire mountain’s worth of corpses. It was as if he were looking at a sea of corpses.

‘A-Aaaahh.’

Tae-Hyun’s expression turned pale. A chilling sense of fear took over him. There was someone atop the sea of corpses.

‘Who’s... there?’

Crackle—!!!

The gray static filled Tae-Hyun’s vision again.

“Gasp!” Tae-Hyun gasped for breath, still grabbing the necklace.

Whoooooom!

The light pouring out from the Eye of Nostrian entered his body before he could even think about what he had just seen.

Riiing.

[Strengthening the effect of the ‘Eye of Nostrian.’]

[Strengthening the ability of ‘Foresight.’]

Blue message windows popped up at the same time that blood vessels bulged around Tae-Hyun’s eyes.

“H-Haha.”

Great power filled him to the point that Tae-Hyun forgot about what he had just seen. He leaped toward Si-Hun as he reveled in the overwhelming power.

“Ngh...!” Si-Hun grunted.

Just like how Si-Hun awakened Deific Essence during their battle, Tae-Hyun also powered up all of a sudden. Tae-Hyun, who had been on the defensive this entire time, went on the offensive.

“Kuh!”

The problem was that every single one of his attacks was dangerous. It felt as if Tae-Hyun had a complete understanding of Si-Hun’s movements.

‘Five seconds? Seven? No...’

Tae-Hyun seemed to be predicting Si-Hun's movements up to at least ten seconds forward in time.

"Fuuu, fuuu," Si-Hun exhaled heavily.

He gripped his blue sword tightly and closed his eyes.

'There's no need to be flustered.'

Whether or not Tae-Hyun could see five or ten seconds into the future, it did not change what Si-Hun needed to do. Si-Hun slowly opened his eyes again and dragged into him as much of the infinite Qi around him as possible.

'It doesn't matter if he can see the future.'

He would attack Tae-Hyun with something that he wouldn't be able to block even if he knew that it was coming.

Rumble—!!

The entire training room shook. The blue light around Si-Hun grew larger. Si-Hun trembled in ecstasy. His enlightenment was melting into his sword at an extraordinary rate.

Riiing.

[Raising the stage of Mind's Sword!]

[Promoting Player Kim Si-Hun's Deific Essence rank from Upper Intermediate to High!]

Si-Hun possessed a deep understanding of martial arts. He had reached a realm that could not be reached by those who were born with Deific Essence. And now, he had an opponent whom he could unleash his martial arts understanding against. These three things were accelerating his growth at an exponential rate.

'Jesus Christ... His growth is as uncontrollable as an eight-tonne truck with its brakes broken.'

Oh Kang-Woo was watching the duel between Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun with his mouth agape. Tae-Hyun also grew stronger during the duel, but that was ultimately thanks to his item; he could not be compared to Si-Hun, who managed to grow by surpassing his limits.

'Yes! That's it!!'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists as he watched Si-Hun's explosive growth and closed his eyes.

'I knew I was right.'

It was the right decision to bet on the Si-Hun Coin than the risky Tae-Hyun Coin.

'There have been tons of tropes where protagonists get stronger by pure luck lately, but they can't hold a candle to a traditional protagonist.'

Kang-Woo had no idea who gave Tae-Hyun that absurd power, but in the end, the power was not Tae-Hyun's. Just like how someone who got rich overnight from winning the lottery couldn't compare to someone with a successful business, Tae-Hyun could never surpass Si-Hun.

Bang! Rumble—! Boom!!

The training room was falling apart— No, it would have already been obliterated if Kang-Woo hadn't set up a protective barrier of demonic energy in the middle of the battle.

“Mm...” Kang-Woo groaned as he watched the battle that was getting more violent.

‘They’re starting to get a bit too aggressive.’

Both Si-Hun who was going past his limits and Tae-Hyun who was enveloped in the light pouring out of the necklace were exuding bloodlust as if they were trying to kill each other.

‘And Si-Hun’s body looks like it has reached its limit.’

Although Si-Hun had surpassed the wall blocking his growth, it did not mean that he had fully recovered his health like a game character after leveling up. Si-Hun’s body was at its limit— no, it had passed its limit and was falling apart little by little.

‘This is enough.’

It was dangerous to let the battle go on any longer. In the worst-case scenario, he could lose both Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun.

‘I should step in.’

Kang-Woo had already decided on his lines to say to Si-Hun, so all that remained was to barge into the training room and stop their battle. Kang-Woo waited for the right time.

“Cough, cough!”

Just then, Si-Hun put his hand over his mouth and began to cough up blood.

His body was unable to handle the excessive load and was falling apart.

“Shit!” Kang-Woo cursed as he was waiting for the right time.

It was not the time to wait; Si-Hun’s body was in far worse condition than Kang-Woo had expected.

Slam!

“Si-Hun!!” Kang-Woo slammed open the training room door and ran to Si-Hun.

“Hyung... nim?”

Si-Hun’s eyes widened as he watched Kang-Woo who suddenly appeared. Kang-Woo embraced Si-Hun as he collapsed. He could feel the abundant Divinity within Si-Hun.

‘This is...’

It was at least High-rank Deific Essence; not just that, it was one that Si-Hun acquired himself!

‘Hell fucking yeah!’

Kang-Woo knew that Si-Hun had awakened Deific Essence, but he had never expected for its rank to be so high from the start. Kang-Woo shed tears as he held Si-Hun.

“The Si-Hun Coin has gone through the roof!!”

'Who gives a shit about Deific Essence?!'

"Pardon?" Si-Hun asked.

"Huh?"

Error! Error!

"Wh-Who gives a shit about Deific Essence?!"

"Umm... Hyung-nim?"

"Why are you trying to get stronger to the point that you're destroying yourself like this?!"

"Hyung."

"Si-Hun..." Tears trickled down Kang-Woo's cheeks and fell on Si-Hun's face. "Even without that... you're my precious little brother..."

Kang-Woo's tears did not stop as he held Si-Hun in his arms.

Chapter 462 - How Would You Like To Receive The Blessing Of Light?

'Am I fucked?'

The cold sweat covering Oh Kang-Woo's back was drenching his clothes. He had gotten way too excited because Kim Si-Hun's Deific Essence reached a rank far higher than he expected. Kang-Woo made a terrible blunder in a situation where the heart was crucial. Kang-Woo stared at Si-Hun anxiously.

"H-Hyung..." Si-Hun was looking up at Kang-Woo in confusion. His eyes were hazy as if he were half asleep. "Wh-Why are you here...?"

He was stuttering as if he could barely talk or listen, likely due to being in critical condition.

'Fucking safe. No, I shouldn't be happy.'

It meant that Si-Hun's condition was so bad that he could barely hear anything. Kang-Woo bit open his finger without hesitation and let his blood flow into Si-Hun's mouth.

"Haaa, haaa."

Si-Hun's pale complexion returned to its normal color. Si-Hun bit his lip as he panted heavily.

"Si-Hun."

Si-Hun remained silent as Kang-Woo called him.

Kang-Woo made a fist and said in a trembling tone, "What the hell were you doing until you ended up like this?"

"W-Well..."

"Don't you dare bullshit me that it was a duel. Anyone could see that it wasn't."

Si-Hun flinched. It had initially been a duel, but both Si-Hun and Kim Tae-Hyun had lost their sense of reason the more it went on and turned into a deathmatch. No organization was fond of internal conflicts; the duel between him and Tae-Hyun crossed the line.

“I’m sorry.” Si-Hun lowered his head in dejection.

Kang-Woo bit his lip aggressively and looked down at Si-Hun in rage. “Was it... because of Deific Essence?”

“Did you push yourself until you almost died... for something as meaningless as Deific Essence?”

Si-Hun turned away from Kang-Woo’s rage-filled gaze and answered, “It’s... not meaningless.

“Without Deific Essence... I can’t help you in any way, hyung-nim. I can’t... lessen the weight on your shoulders.”

Beings with Deific Essence were able to do as they liked after being freed from the Law of Titans. Gods of Earth as well as outer gods would begin to covet Earth. Having no Deific Essence in a situation like this was practically the same as leaving everything to Kang-Woo.

“I...” Si-Hun bit his lip and continued, “Want to stay... as your little brother.”

Kang-Woo’s eyes widened. He had never imagined that Si-Hun would be thinking this way. He looked at Si-Hun in sorrow.

“Have I... ever said that you won’t be my little brother anymore if you don’t have Deific Essence?”

“...”

“Did I ever say that I don’t need you if you’re useless to me?”

“Th-That’s...!”

“Si-Hun,” Kang-Woo interjected. “I didn’t have a family. I’ve never seen my parents and I’ve always been alone since I was born.”

Si-Hun knew this already.

“You’re the first family that I ever had,” Kang-Woo said.

Si-Hun’s eyes widened. The word *family* impacted him greatly. Family was always associated with despair for Si-Hun as well as a nightmare that plagued his life— until he met Kang-Woo, that was.

“Who gives a shit about Deific Essence? What does it matter whether you’re of help or not?” Kang-Woo hugged Si-Hun tighter. He continued with a subtly trembling voice, “Even without that...”

Even without Deific Essence, even if Si-Hun would no longer be of help in battle...

“You’re... my one and only little brother.”

Si-Hun teared up. “H-Hyung-nim... No, hyung.”

Hearing that he was Kang-Woo’s one and only little brother touched him deeply.

“Get some rest.”

Kang-Woo covered Si-Hun’s eyes. Si-Hun fell asleep like a puppet with its strings detached, likely because his fatigue had reached its limit.

Silence fell in the training room. Kang-Woo slowly turned to look at Tae-Hyun, who was crouching with his hands on his eyes with blood vessels bulging around it. The physical burden seemed to have been great from using Foresight past its limit.

“Tae-Hyun,” Kang-Woo called him formally.[1]

Tae-Hyun, who was covering his eyes, looked up in confusion. “H-Hyung.”

“Why did you fight Si-Hun to the point that he ended up like that?”

Tae-Hyun remained silent, unable to make any excuses. He had taunted Si-Hun to fight, knowing that Si-Hun had just finished his training. He averted his gaze from Kang-Woo and slurred, “W-Well...”

“Come to think of it, you treated Si-Hun aggressively from the beginning.”

“H-Hyung.”

“Please do not call me hyung,” Kang-Woo replied fiercely. Tae-Hyun flinched in pallor. “There is no reason for me to be called hyung by someone who hurts my family.”

“K-Kang-Woo hyung.”

Tae-Hyun reached out for Kang-Woo with a stiff expression. Kang-Woo coldly slapped his hand away.

Tae-Hyun kneeled in pallor and lowered his head. He shouted, “I-I’m sorry! I’m... so sorry.”

Tae-Hyun shed tears as his shoulders trembled. “I was... jealous.”

He had been jealous of Si-Hun, who had everything that he desired but couldn’t have.

Silence fell again. Tae-Hyun stood back up and bowed to Kang-Woo. He took out a token in the shape of a shield from his pocket and handed it to Kang-Woo.

“I’m sorry. I will never... show myself to Guardians again.”

Tae-Hyun expected that he wouldn’t be able to stay in Guardians after pulling something like this. He bowed once again and turned around.

Kang-Woo stared at Tae-Hyun’s back in silence. “Fuuu.”

He sighed and grabbed Tae-Hyun’s shoulder.

“Tae-Hyun.”[2]

“H-Hyung?”

“You’d better apologize to Si-Hun later, got it?”

“O-Okay! I got it!” Tae-Hyun quickly nodded with an expression much brighter than before.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and lightly flicked Tae-Hyun’s forehead.

“Ouch.”

“You look like you pushed yourself a bit too far as well, so get some rest. I’ll set a time and place for you to talk things through with Si-Hun later.”

“Hehe. Okay, hyung.” Tae-Hyun giggled as he gripped his forehead.

Once Tae-Hyun left, Kang-Woo lifted Si-Hun.

The corners of his mouth rose and he licked his lips with his long tongue.

‘With this, Si-Hun has awakened Deific Essence and Tae-Hyun can no longer defy me. Tae-Hyun’s ability seems to have gotten stronger as well.’

Possibly due to it having been a clash between protagonists, the two of them powered up one after the other when it would have been difficult for a regular Player to do so.

“Pfft. Bwehehehehe!!”

A vulgar laughter echoed within the training room.

Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun were unable to avoid incapacitation after their aggressive bout. Since the duel had been closer to a death match, their wounds were naturally very deep.

“Shit,” Kang-Woo cursed as he entered his room.

He collapsed on his bed in exhaustion. He had no choice but to fill the vacancies that Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun while they were recuperating. Resolving the abnormal Gate phenomena that were occurring one after the other was draining Kang-Woo mentally.

“I’m so goddamn tired.”

Kang-Woo sighed deeply. He already had a mountain load of things to do even without resolving Gate issues.

‘I have to deal with the Church of Splendor too.’

He had heard from Lilith that the Church of Splendor’s influence was spreading at incredible speed on Earth as well due to the active interactions between Earth and Aernor.

The reason was obvious. With Earth’s protection gone, monsters from all over the world began to run wild, and several abnormal Gate phenomena were being spotted per day. Not only were new Gates being formed, but new monsters never seen before were also appearing from them.

Kang-Woo had expected this to happen now that the dangers of otherworldly invasions were looming over them, but this was more than he had expected. The victim count was growing larger

despite the entire force of Guardians doing their best to eliminate the monsters. When the world was in such a crisis, there was no way that the Church of Splendor wouldn't grow when simply putting one's faith in the God of Splendor would give them power.

'I can't leave an opportunity as good as this unused.'

If the Church of Splendor successfully took off on Earth, Kang-Woo would gain hundreds of millions of devotees. He needed to seize the opportunity since he was able to convert faith to Divinity, but he had no leeway to pay it any attention due to Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun's incapacitation.

"I need someone with Deific Essence."

He would have liked to borrow the power of the gods, but they did not have the leeway to help him because they were busy enough to keep the chaotic divine realm under control.

'What should I do?'

Kang-Woo needed a way to control the growing Church of Splendor and make an ally with Deific Essence at the same time. "I guess this is the only way."

'I need to make an incarnation.'

He needed someone who would control the Church of Splendor in his place.

"Mm..."

Kang-Woo fell into thought with his arms crossed. If he made an incarnation, he could let them borrow a portion of his Deific Essence.

'But the problem is that it would be far less powerful than if they acquire Deific Essence on their own.'

Han Seol-Ah and Layla were not very powerful despite possessing Deific Essence because their Deific Essence was borrowed.

'But it can't be helped.'

The difference between having Deific Essence and not having it was far too great. Not only that but those who acquired Deific Essence by themselves could be counted with two hands even after combing through the history of the entire world. Kang-Woo couldn't afford to wait for such a rarity to happen.

'There's a limit to holding[3].'

Even Si-Hun only managed to awaken Deific Essence a few days ago. It was far too inefficient to wait for his other comrades to awaken it.

'Who should I choose?'

Seol-Ah and Layla were out of the question since they already possessed Deific Essence.

'Balrog?'

Kang-Woo thought of his subordinate whom he had spent a millennium fighting together with.

He shook his head after much thought.

'Balrog has the possibility of awakening Deific Essence on his own.'

Balrog had surpassed a demon's innate limits and acquired a new power known as Overlord Armor. If he earned Deific Essence without any cost, his growth would stop then and there like Kang-Woo had feared would happen with Si-Hun.

'I need to choose someone with absolutely no possibility of awakening Deific Essence on their own.'

It sounded cruel but no matter how hard one worked, only a select few were able to surpass their limits.

"Then who should I—"

Clack.

"Huh? It's rare to see you in your room." A red-haired woman entered his room. "Hey, about the monster that appeared in Yeongdeungpo—"

"Yeon-Joo."

"Huh?"

Kang-Woo grabbed Cha Yeon-Joo by the shoulders and stared at her sincerely.

"Wh-What's up with you?"

Yeon-Joo backed away with red cheeks.

Kang-Woo continued in a low tone, "How would you like to receive the blessing of light?"

"Huh? What the fuck are you talking about?"

Chapter 463 - Soulmate

"You want me to be your incarnation?" asked Cha Yeon-Joo as she snorted after hearing a quick explanation from Oh Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo nodded and replied, "Yeah."

He had thought about Echidna, Halcyon, and others as candidates as well, but there was no one better than Yeon-Joo as his incarnation.

'She's not one to be pushed around by anyone.'

Yeon-Joo's ability to freely control chains allowed her to attack at all ranges.

'She's unmatched in terms of weapon versatility.'

There weren't many people who used weapons as unique as chains, so dealing with them was tricky. She was also capable of wide-area attacks, unlike common weapons like swords and spears.

'I need someone who can wipe out monsters quickly to stop the abnormal phenomena of Gate monsters.'

If the power of Divinity was added to the chains made with Behemoth's horn that contained the power of Deicide, the ability to kill gods, regular monsters would be torn apart like pieces of paper. But of course, Yeon-Joo also had her flaws.

'She's weak in one-on-one battles.'

Although Yeon-Joo was very strong, chains in and of itself were a disadvantageous weapon against one opponent. It allowed her to perform wide-area attacks but the power contained in each chain was weak. It was effective against those who couldn't properly deal with attacks that came at them from all sides, but it was useless against those at the level of Kim Si-Hun.

'But that doesn't matter.'

Kang-Woo did not expect her to go on death matches against powerful individual opponents.

'I just need her to wipe out the swarm of monsters.'

It sounded cruel but Kang-Woo could not expect anything more from her. No matter how hard she tried, she would never rise to be on the same level as Si-Hun.

"What changes if I become your incarnation?" Yeon-Joo asked.

"You can borrow my Deific Essence."

"Your Deific Essence?"

Kang-Woo lightly nodded. Unlike apostles who could only be granted buffs and blessings by using a certain amount of Divinity, incarnations were able to be given a portion of the god's Deific Essence. In other words, they were able to use Deific Essence at no cost to them.

"What's the catch?" asked Yeon-Joo anxiously.

She did not know much about incarnations, so she seemed to be thinking that it came at a cost.

'Well, it's not like there's no cost whatsoever.'

Kang-Woo smirked and answered, "You'll be my soulmate from now on."

Once Yeon-Joo became Kang-Woo's incarnation, they would be directly affected by each other's conditions. For example, Gaia's severe injury led Layla, Gaia's incarnation, to lose her eyesight and function in her legs. The incarnation getting critically injured or dying also affected the god, to the point that those with low-rank Deific Essence were either demoted in rank or annihilated.

'Well, simply speaking, if I die, she dies too.'

Soulmate was the perfect term to describe their relationship.

"Wh-What?" Yeon-Joo's eyes widened with her mouth agape.

Her face reddened to the point that it could explode. She kicked Kang-Woo in the groin.

Clang!

“Argh!” Yeon-Joo screamed.

Kang-Woo’s Deific Essence barrier automatically activated and blew Yeon-Joo’s leg back with a metallic sound.

“You fucking...” Yeon-Joo glared at Kang-Woo as she grabbed her ankle.

Kang-Woo shrugged and continued, “This is why you need Deific Essence.”

Yeon-Joo bit her lip and turned her head away from him. She stuttered, “S-So the catch is... I have to become your s-soulmate?”

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded without hesitation.

The relationship between a god and their incarnation was like the one between a demon and their Familiar. A master-servant relationship was more accurate than referring to it as a soulmate, but Kang-Woo couldn’t tell Yeon-Joo to become his servant.

“Y-You filthy bastard!” Yeon-Joo clenched her fists and trembled. “I knew you were scum, but... I-I never thought you would do something like this...”

She crossed her arms to cover her breasts and crouched as she glared at Kang-Woo with rage. Kang-Woo was confused by her reaction.

“I beg your pardon?”

‘What are you talking about?’

“Y-You son of a bitch! Motherfucker!”

‘What the fuck did I do so wrong? I told you that I’ll make you my incarnation! You’ll get Deific Essence for free!’

“Y-You fucking pervert! S-Seol-Ah and Lilith weren’t enough for you? Y-You’re even aiming for me...!”

“What?”

‘What the fuck have you been saying since earlier?’

“H-Hmph! I knew this would happen from the beginning!”

‘Know fucking what?’

“Y-You scumbag!!”

Yeon-Joo took off her jacket and threw it at Kang-Woo, who let himself be hit by it in the face and caught it as it fell. He was even more perplexed than before.

‘What in the world is up with her? Does she hate being an incarnation that badly?’

“Fuuu, fuuu,” Yeon-Joo took deep breaths with her hand on her chest. She gulped and said, “... Fine.”

She nodded in silence and shut her eyes tightly. She then began to lift her T-shirt little by little.

“Huh?” ‘Why is she taking off her clothes all of a sudden?’

Kang-Woo stared at Yeon-Joo in confusion.

“Oh.”

He managed to figure out what she was misunderstanding soon after.

‘Fucking hell, what does she take me for?’

Kang-Woo feigned laughter, being put in a situation that would be common in the mangas that Layla would like.

‘I guess my use of the term soulmate was the issue.’

He had not noticed since he did not have that sort of intention in any way whatsoever, but he could understand how it could have caused the misunderstanding after thinking about it.

“Sniff... Y-You piece of shit.”

Yeon-Joo lifted her shirt even more as tears flowed down her cheeks. Unlike her words expressing displeasure, her facial expression was filled with anticipation for some reason.

‘Mm... When should I stop her?’

Kang-Woo knew that he needed to stop Yeon-Joo from going off on her own, but he hesitated for obvious reasons. He stared at Yeon-Joo with deeply sunken eyes and clenched his fists.

‘It’s way too entertaining to just... stop her here, isn’t it? Right? I’m not the weird one, right? This is fun, right? I can’t just let it end here, right?’

Kang-Woo kept the corners of his mouth lowered with all his might.

“U-Urgh.”

Yeon-Joo was subtly trembling, not able to lift her shirt any higher than her waist. Kang-Woo stood up and approached her. He slowly placed his hand on Yeon-Joo’s cheek.

“Hngh!” Yeon-Joo flinched. She glared at Kang-Woo with teary eyes. *“I-I’ll never forget about what you’re going to do to me today.”*

She then closed her eyes and protruded her lips.

‘A-Aaaahh.’

Kang-Woo was filled with ecstasy and he trembled in delight as he panted heavily.

‘My god, what should I fucking do? This is so goddamn fun.’

He knew that he needed to stop, but his body refused his mind and moved on its own. Kang-Woo smiled, slowly moved his hand on her cheek to her nape, and tilted his head.

“H-Hurghhh.” Yeon-Joo trembled with her eyes closed.

Kang-Woo brought his mouth close to her ear and whispered, "Don't worry. I'll make you a memory... that you'll never forget even if you want to."

Kang-Woo could hear Yeon-Joo's teeth clacking from inside her mouth. She wept sorrowfully with her eyes closed.

"You idiot. Wh-Why would you... so forcefully..." Tears flowed down her cheeks one drop after another. She mumbled, "You didn't have to do this... As long as you properly confessed, I would have..."

Kang-Woo looked down at the crying Yeon-Joo and commanded in a low tone, "Lay on the bed."

"..."

"I will now commence the incarnation ritual."

"R-Ritual, my ass... You scumbag."

Yeon-Joo was about to take off her shirt but Kang-Woo pulled her arms down and shook his head.

"What? You want to take them off yourself, is that it?" Yeon-Joo stared daggers at Kang-Woo. She snorted as if the situation was trivial and sat on the bed. "Hmph, you've sure grown, my little Kang-Woo~ Hm? The ten millennia virgin has become a bona-fide player, hasn't he?"

Yeon-Joo was acting leisurely but her limbs were undoubtedly shaking. Kang-Woo approached Yeon-Joo in silence.

"Wh-What?" Yeon-Joo gulped as she looked up at him.

Kang-Woo pushed Yeon-Joo down onto the bed by her shoulders.

"Kyaah!"

"..."

"Wh-What do you think you're doing?!"

"Now... Swear that you'll offer your body to the great God of Splendor."

"Wh-What did you say?" Yeon-Joo looked up at Kang-Woo in shock. "Y-You've got some crazy fetishes..."

"If you don't say it, I can't make you my incarnation."

"Ngh! Th-That's enough of your bullshit!" Yeon-Joo glared at Kang-Woo in rage but sighed deeply soon after and said hesitantly, "I-I offer my body... to the g-great.... God of Splendor."

"Louder."

"I-I offer my body!"

“Louder!!”

“I OFFER MY BODY!! TO THE GREAT!! GOD OF SPLENDOOOOOOOOOR!!!”

“Good!”

Kang-Woo snapped his finger and nodded. Yeon-Joo looked at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly because of the nonsensical situation.

Kang-Woo snickered and continued, “Now then, call me *oppa* with a cute voice.”

“O-Oppa.”

“Cuter!”

“O-Oppa~!”

“Pfft! Bwehehehehehe!!!”

Unable to hold back his laughter, Kang-Woo rolled on the ground with his hands on his stomach.

Yeon-Joo looked down in disdain at Kang-Woo rolling on the ground. She had an uneasy feeling from when Kang-Woo was saying things about the great God of Splendor.

“Hey.”

“Bwehehehehe!!!”

“Don’t fucking tell me, you...”

“Ahahaha!! Kehehehe.”

“It’s not, right? It’s fucking not, right? You tried to get with me by using Deific Essence as bait, right? Right? You weren’t fucking with me, right?”

“Kehe, kehehehe, *As long as you properly confessed, I would have...* Pfft! What? You want me to confess?” Kang-Woo turned to Yeon-Joo and smiled brightly. “Yeah, I was fucking with you.”

Kahaha.

‘Ahh. It’s so fun. It’s the most fun I’ve ever had!’

Chapter 464 - I Wonder What Color I Should Make The Chains?

Shatter!! Crunch, boom!

The windows shattered as things in the room were thrown everywhere.

“You motherfuckeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeer!!!” the lioness with bloodshot eyes roared as she rampaged.

Clatter!

The chains with red thorns on them smacked Kang-Woo.

Bash!

Due to the chains containing the power of Deicide, Yeon-Joo's attack penetrated Kang-Woo's Deific Essence barrier and tore his clothes despite her not having Deific Essence yet. Kang-Woo bounced all over the room and was smashed into a wall.

"Kurgh!" Kang-Woo grunted as the chains smacked him.

'Maybe I shouldn't have made her that weapon.'

The chains made with Behemoth's horn were getting through Kang-Woo's Deific Essence barrier and injuring him.

"Waaahh!! Y-You son of a bitch! Fucking bastard!!!" Yeon-Joo swung the chains around as she bawled her eyes out.

He was capable of blocking her attacks but would feel guilty doing so because of how much she was crying.

"Hurgh! Waaaaaaaahhh!" Yeon-Joo kept crying as if it was the saddest day of her life.

Kang-Woo scanned her calmly even while being chained and flung around all over the place.

'Mm. I think I'm fucked. Did I go too far?'

His prank did not have malicious intentions but things were getting a little too serious; they had long since crossed the line of joking.

'But... I had no choice. What else should I have done in that situation? I've done nothing wrong.'

Kang-Woo could swear that anyone would have done the same as him if they were put in that situation.

Bash!

"Cough! Cough!"

The chains smacked him right on his chin. Kang-Woo gripped his chin because the blow hurt quite a bit this time.

"Huff, huff," Yeon-Joo stopped attacking as she panted heavily.

"Sorry," Kang-Woo apologized.

"Shut up!!"

"It's all my fault."

"I said shut up!! I don't wanna hear it, motherfucker!!" Yeon-Joo screamed with her face blazing red. She charged at Kang-Woo as she bared her teeth and raised her chains teary-eyed. "I won't... forgive you."

Kang-Woo instinctively flinched as the bloodshot eyes of a lioness were pointed at him.

Clatter—!

Yeon-Joo's chains moved like snakes and began to strangle Kang-Woo.

'Mm.'

Kang-Woo was left conflicted as he stared at Yeon-Joo chaining him.

'Should I just get out of them by force?'

Yeon-Joo had yet to go through the incarnation ritual so she was merely a Player without Deific Essence. It was simple for him to break free from the chains. No, even if she became his incarnation, he would still be able to get out of these chains with ease.

'But...'

The chained Kang-Woo looked up at Yeon-Joo.

"Huff, huff. I-I won't forgive you," she panted heavily, her expression filled with both humiliation and fury.

She had gotten on top of the chained Kang-Woo and subtly trembled as she gulped. It seemed like she had no idea what to do now that she had gotten on top of him. The way that she was darting her eyes around was cute. Kang-Woo smiled.

'I'll leave it be for a little longer.'

Kang-Woo had a feeling that he would see something even more entertaining. He thought that he had enough fun but thought otherwise after seeing Yeon-Joo being indecisive with her face as red as a tomato.

'A little more... Just a little more...'

Desire was the most powerful drug. Kang-Woo looked up at Yeon-Joo in anticipation, staying put as he was chained.

"I-I won't forgive you!"

Yeon-Joo bit her lip anxiously, not knowing what to do after Kang-Woo let himself be chained.

"Is that all you can say?" Kang-Woo asked.

"N-Ngh!"

A vein bulged from Yeon-Joo's forehead. She raised her fist as if she was about to punch Kang-Woo in the face.

Silence fell. *"Hurgh, urgh."*

Yeon-Joo's tears dropped on Kang-Woo's cheeks.

"You... scumbag."

She punched Kang-Woo's chest. They were closer to punches one would throw during a temper tantrum than what one would use to punch someone. Her shoulders were trembling pitifully.

'Mm.' Kang-Woo expressed guilt. *'I guess I went too far.'*

He felt bad after seeing Yeon-Joo's tears.

He grabbed Yeon-Joo's arm and said sincerely, "I'm sorry."

Yeon-Joo stopped punching Kang-Woo. She wiped her tears and glared at him. "I'll rip it off if you do this shit again."

'Rip what off?'

"Haha. I swear I'll never do it again." Kang-Woo smiled brightly and nodded.

'I should hold off on the teasing for the time being.'

Kang-Woo couldn't help but feel bad seeing Yeon-Joo in this state.

"That aside." Kang-Woo looked down at himself. "Could you let me go now?"

"Huh?"

Only then did Yeon-Joo realize the position they were in. She was on top of the chained Kang-Woo; it did not look good in any context.

"Y-You goddamn pervert!" Yeon-Joo slapped Kang-Woo.

"What? You're the one who chained me."

"Wh-Whatever!"

Clack.

As Yeon-Joo was about to get up in embarrassment, the door opened.

"Umm... I heard some loud noises. I-Is something going on?" Han Seol-Ah entered.

"Huh?"

Seol-Ah's eyes widened after seeing what was going on. Kang-Woo was on the ground in chains with Yeon-Joo on top of him. Anyone would be shocked to see such a thing.

"Darling...?"

Kang-Woo was just as shocked as Seol-Ah was. He could imagine what she was thinking, seeing them in such a position.

'Wait, wait. Aren't we fucked? What the actual fuck?'

The endless human desire caused them to repeat the same mistakes. Kang-Woo never expected that his desire to tease Yeon-Joo even more would result in an even worse situation.

"Kang-Woo...? What is... going on here?"

Seol-Ah's eyes lost their light. Her kind eyes turned as dark as that of a corpse.

'U-Uhhhhhhhhh, wait just a fucking minute. What do I do? Seriously, what the fuck do I do?'

Kang-Woo's mind was in shambles. His thoughts turned as blank as a sheet.

"S-Seol-Ah!" Yeon-Joo shouted.

"Yeon-Joo. Could you explain to me... what is going on here?"

"U-Umm..."

Yeon-Joo was also trembling as she stuttered due to the sudden appearance of Seol-Ah. If this were an anime, her eyes would be spinning.

After much thought, Yeon-Joo pointed at Kang-Woo and shouted, "I-It was Kang-Woo's idea!"

"What?" Kang-Woo asked.

'What the fuck, bitch?'

"Kang-Woo said that he was interested in bondage! I was only helping him out!"

'What the fuck is with that bullshit, woman? You could've come up with a better excuse. No way that would work.'

"Kang-Woo is... interested in bondage?"

'Huh?'

"I-Is that true?" Seol-Ah asked.

"Y-Yeah! I was just letting him experience it because he was saying that he wanted to try it out with you next time!" Yeon-Joo claimed.

"O-Oh my."

'The fuck? Why is this working?'

"Kang-Woo... If it was something like that, you could've just asked me..." Seol-Ah twisted around with her face reddened.

'Darling... Did you hurt your head? Why are you being convinced by such an obvious lie?'

Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah dumbfoundedly. He found the answer as he watched Seol-Ah imagining something with the corners of her mouth raised.

'Her desire must've taken over her.'

People often talked about men thinking with their groin when they were turned on, and that was exactly how Seol-Ah was acting right now. Her desire for bondage was far larger than the fact that Yeon-Joo and Kang-Woo were in a sexual position. No, it might have been because the one on top of Kang-Woo was Yeon-Joo.

Seol-Ah's mad obsession was not something that couldn't distinguish between friend and foe. The key factor of her madness was her separation from Kang-Woo; the madness that she showed stemmed from her extreme fear of someone else taking Kang-Woo away from her forever. In the case of Lilith and Yeon-Joo, she trusted that Kang-Woo would not be taken from her even if Lilith

or Yeon-Joo were to sleep with Kang-Woo. In other words, Lilith and Yeon-Joo were within the levels of Seol-Ah's approval.

'Right? Am I right? You're not gonna say some shit about cutting me equally between the three of you, right?'

Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah in desperation. He easily broke free from the chains and grabbed both of Seol-Ah's hands.

"You've got it all wrong, Darling. What's really happening is—"

"It's okay, Kang-Woo."

'What's okay?'

"You don't have to hide it."

'I never hid anything.'

"Whatever it is... I'm ready to accept anything about you."

'You're acting like this because you wanna do it, aren't you?'

"Hehe," Seol-Ah giggled and kissed Kang-Woo. "Well then, I'll go finish making our meal."

She turned around as she hummed.

"Oh, right." Seol-Ah then turned back around as if she had remembered something.

"Yeon-Joo."

"Y-Yeah?" Seol-Ah slowly approached Yeon-Joo and embraced her.

She brought her mouth close to Yeon-Joo's ear and whispered, "Don't... stick too close to him, okay?"

Yeon-Joo's face turned pale. Seol-Ah giggled with her mouth covering her mouth and turned around again.

"Well then, please come to the dining room in about thirty minutes," Seol-Ah said as she hummed and headed to the door.

"Wait, Darl—"

"I wonder what color I should make the chains?" Seol-Ah mumbled.

Slam.

The door closed. Kang-Woo's arm that was reaching out for the door was frozen.

Kang-Woo and Yeon-Joo exchanged glances.

"Uhh... Mm," Yeon-Joo stammered. "So, how do I become an incarnation?"

She changed the subject.

Kang-Woo lowered his head as he grabbed his hair.

'Fuck.'

He was fucked.

Chapter 465 - What's This About?

"... Umm, hello?"

"Earth to Mr. Oh Kang-Woo?"

"Hey, Kang-Woo."

"Oh Kang-Woo!" Cha Yeon-Joo smacked Kang-Woo on the back of the head. "Ack!"

Yeon-Joo yelled in pain as her hand rebounded due to the Deific Essence barrier.

"For fuck's sake, what a stupidly broken power."

She saw again how amazing Deific Essence was. She would be lying if she said that she was not interested in the Deific Essence that she would get after becoming an incarnation.

'Since I'm... pretty much useless right now.'

She did not slack off on her training, but she knew that she would never reach Kim Si-Hun or Balrog's level no matter how hard she worked. She was frustrated and angry, but the wall known as talent was so unsurpassable that she couldn't even approach it.

'I never thought the day would come that I had a problem like this.'

Yeon-Joo chuckled. Among regular Players, she was a prodigy who had awakened an S-rank Trait in her First Awakening. Just like how she was feeling the insurmountable gap between herself and Si-Hun, other Players also likely felt the same with her.

'I was merely a frog in the well.'

She was forced to realize how meager her talent had been when she looked at the truly powerful like Kang-Woo and Si-Hun.

'But I know that they didn't earn their strength just because of talent.'

Si-Hun trained to absurd levels every single day, and Kang-Woo had struggled to survive for ten millennia. Saying that they became that strong only because they were talented was a mockery to them.

'But if I can acquire Deific Essence...'

If she was able to get even a few steps closer to them, she had a feeling that she would be freed at least a little from the powerlessness weighing her down.

'And...'

Yeon-Joo coughed as she sneaked a peek at Kang-Woo, who had not yet managed to recover from the shock earlier, clenching his head. He couldn't look any more unreliable, but she did not find it all that bad.

'If I become his incarnation... will our souls be connected?'

Yeon-Joo twisted around as she thought about Layla and then glared at Kang-Woo.

'Fucking hell, he could've just given it to me straight instead of saying shit like becoming soulmates...'

She was boiling with fury just thinking about what had happened earlier.

'Well, regardless.'

Her fury quelled soon after and was replaced with happiness.

'If I become his incarnation... I guess we'll be able to spend some more time together.'

Yeon-Joo was getting hot as all sorts of thoughts popped up in her head. The corners of her mouth had no intention of coming down.

"F-Fuck!"

The smiling Yeon-Joo stepped back in surprise. She covered her mouth and stared at Kang-Woo wide-eyed.

'I must be fucking crazy! Why am I so happy about being able to spend more time with that sly, perverted virgin?! You're better than that, Cha Yeon-Joo. Did you forget what he did to you just now?'

Yeon-Joo reprimanded her body for acting differently from how she was feeling.

"Fuuu, fuuu," she took deep breaths to calm herself down. She hugged herself and crouched.

"What are you doing?" Kang-Woo asked.

He seemed to have regained his senses after Yeon-Joo cursed loudly; he was looking down at Yeon-Joo perplexedly.

Veins bulged from Yeon-Joo's forehead. "I should be asking you that question."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

He couldn't say anything in retort since he had just been in panic mode as he clenched his hair.

'I'll... think about Darling later.'

He got chills from seeing Han Seol-Ah wondering what color she should make the chains, but nothing would be resolved no matter how much he tried to explain to her what actually happened.

'I'll have to wait until Darling's desire dies down a little.'

The crisis might escalate if he were to do anything before that.

"Haaa. Let's get back to the main topic." Kang-Woo sighed and turned to Yeon-Joo.

“How do I become your incarnation?” asked Yeon-Joo as she pouted. “I’ll kill you if you say that shit about rituals or whatever.”

“Hahaha,” Kang-Woo softly laughed, reminded of what happened earlier. “Well, you don’t have to do anything. Just accept my power without resistance.”

“That’s it?”

“You might lose consciousness as your body turns into that of an incarnation, but... you won’t be out of commission for over a month like it had been for Iris.”

Iris had taken a long time to become an incarnation because the process had been when the Law of Titans was still active, but now that the restrictions on the gods were gone, it would take nowhere near that amount of time.

“But why did you choose me as your incarnation? There are tons of people without Deific Essence,” Yeon-Joo asked with narrow eyes.

Kang-Woo momentarily fell into thought about whether or not to tell her the truth.

‘It’s a bit harsh tell tell her that it was because you’ll never acquire Deific Essence on your own.’

To be honest, that was not the only reason; there were plenty of people who had no possibility of acquiring Deific Essence on their own, such as Echidna, Halcyon, Vaal Zahak, and Lilith. However, Kang-Woo had chosen Yeon-Joo for one simple reason.

“Because I trust you,” Kang-Woo stated.

“What?”

“I’m not making an incarnation simply to give them Deific Essence.”

“Th-Then what?”

“You know that the Church of Splendor is slowly spreading throughout Earth, right?”

“Yeah. I’ve heard about it.”

“I’d like you to keep them under control.”

Yeon-Joo may not look like it, but she was a born leader. If she wasn’t, she would never have been able to create a massive guild like Red Rose no matter how high her Awakening Traits were.

“Wouldn’t Lilith be a better fit for that kind of job?” Yeon-Joo asked.

“No. Lilith is extremely capable, but she’s not a leader.”

A leader needed charismatic qualities that allowed others to be naturally drawn to them even without forcing loyalty on them. Loyalty became meaningless the moment it was pressured on someone.

‘It’s an innate quality.’

The charisma of a leader was similar to the Heavenly Martial Body in martial arts; it could not be learned.

“R-Really? Hmm. Hehe. I guess I can’t argue with that.” Yeon-Joo shrugged as she giggled, feeling good from Kang-Woo’s compliments. However, she frowned soon after. “... Wait, then do I have to say shit like *Ohmen* and preach like Iris does?”

“If the situation calls for it.”

“I don’t wanna.”

“Let’s do the ritual then.”

“You wanna die?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Haaa. Why do I have to praise a scumbag like you?”

“I won’t force you to do it.”

Kang-Woo needed an incarnation but had no intention of forcing anyone to do it.

Yeon-Joo bit her lip as she mumbled curses and then plopped down on a chair. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

Kang-Woo smiled. “I knew you would.”

Yeon-Joo turned her head away in dissatisfaction. Kang-Woo smiled and approached her. He slowly placed his hand on her head and recalled the incarnation chant that he had heard in Olympus.

“I command you in the name of my Deific Essence,” he chanted in a low tone.

Whoooooom!!

Blinding golden light poured out of Kang-Woo.

‘Draw out only Divinity.’

Yeon-Joo would turn into a demon the moment that demonic energy mixed with the Divinity.

‘I can’t let her become a demon.’

The body of a demon caused one to endlessly desire. Kang-Woo knew better than anyone how agonizing it was to keep that in check. Telling a demon to suppress their desire was the same as telling someone dying of thirst not to drink water or a starving person not to have the lavish feast laid out in front of them. Their mind would slowly deteriorate under endless thirst and hunger. Kang-Woo would be placing an unfathomable amount of weight on Yeon-Joo to bear if he were to make her a demon.

“One who accepts my power.”

The golden light gathered around Kang-Woo’s hand that was on Yeon-Joo’s head.

“Become my flesh, become my blood, and become my bones.”

Whoooooom!!

“Ngh...!” The blinding light began to flow into Yeon-Joo. “Hurgh!”

Yeon-Joo grunted as overwhelming power raged within her. She felt unfathomable fear; her body was naturally rejecting the enormous power that entered her.

‘No.’

Yeon-Joo shook her head at her instinct to reject the power. She bit her lip and clenched her fists. Kang-Woo had said to accept the power without resistance.

‘Fucking hell, easier said than done.’

Yeon-Joo cursed at Kang-Woo, who had talked about it as if it was a piece of cake. Not rejecting the power flowing into her was like telling someone not to tense up during an injection with a giant needle. They knew that they shouldn’t tense up but the body did naturally.

“Kurgh!”

The mana within Yeon-Joo was desperately rejecting the Divinity flowing into her through Kang-Woo. She could instinctively feel that it would be for naught if Kang-Woo’s Divinity forced her mana to submit. Knowing that, Kang-Woo also did not try to force Yeon-Joo’s mana to submit.

“Huuu, huuu,” Yeon-Joo panted heavily.

‘I have to... trust Kang-Woo.’

She needed to trust the man who had embedded himself deep within her heart before she had realized it.

“Hah,” Yeon-Joo chuckled.

Her body began to accept Kang-Woo’s Divinity without resistance as soon as she thought about trusting him.

‘It’s... not so hard.’

She easily realized the reason why but she shook her head to deny it as she snorted.

‘There’s no way I trusted that pervert from the very beginning.’

She had simply decided to trust him so that she could acquire Deific Essence. There was no other reason.

‘Yup, that’s it.’

Yeon-Joo nodded with a leisurely expression. The entirety of the golden light flowed into Yeon-Joo through Kang-Woo’s hand.

Riiing.

[You have been chosen as the incarnation of the ‘God of Splendor(???)’]

[Drastically raising all stats!]

[Promoting all Traits by one rank!]

[You have acquired a portion of the ‘Deific Essence of Voracity.’]

[You can now use Deific Manifestation!]

“Huh?” Yeon-Joo’s eyes widened as she stared at the messages in front of her. “Hey... Wh-What’s this about?”

“What?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Uhh... Weren’t you the God of Splendor? It said that I acquired the Deific Essence of Voracity.”

Kang-Woo remained silent.

‘Oh fuck. I forgot I was the God of Voracity.’

Chapter 466 - What Am I The God Of Again?

Silence fell as Cha Yeon-Joo and Oh Kang-Woo looked at each other awkwardly. Kang-Woo bit his lip anxiously.

‘Shit.’

It was not like he had thought that he had become light itself after preaching it all the time. He knew very well that he possessed the Deific Essence of a predator underneath the facade of Splendor.

‘But you hid it for me all this time.’

Although there had been question marks next to it, the System hid his true Deific Essence until now. It was likely thanks to the Deific Essence of *Lies* that he possessed before Voracity.

‘So why?’

Why were they snitching on him so blatantly this time?

“... Did you say Deific Essence of Voracity?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Uhh, yeah.”

“Fuuu.”

Kang-Woo took a deep breath and clenched his fists as he thought about the System.

‘I can communicate with them to some extent if I remember correctly.’

It was around when he had completed the *Road to Becoming a Demon God* quest.

‘I don’t know how, but...’

The System was able to read the minds of individuals and possessed an ego that was closer to artificial intelligence than that of a person.

‘In that case.’

He had a feeling that his sincere feelings would reach them.

‘System. System. What’s with you all of a sudden? Was the bond between us that shallow? Hm? You’re the Law of Titans, right? There’s gonna be issues if you keep doing stuff like

this. I told you before, didn't I? I'm gonna come after you once I deal with Bael. Screw the Law of Titans. The Gaia System is gone anyway, so how about I destroy you too? Hm? How about I just fucking destroy everything?

Riiing.

[It is strictly prohibited for a being with no privileges to meddle with the Law.]

'I'm not asking for much, am I? You're just editing one word. This is good for both of us, don't you agree?'

[It is strictly prohibited...]

'Hm? You want to protect the world too, don't you? Isn't that why you put restrictions on the gods and blocked otherworldly invasions until now?'

[F-For a being with no privileges to...]

'Fucking fine. Let's just speedrun straight to the bad ending, then. I'm just gonna keep running away from Bael, okay? I'm sure he'll devour every world in his path to chase after me. Do you think he's gonna leave the Titans alone? I guess we can just all die together miserably ever after.'

[...]

'I'm out here busting my ass trying to save the world, but the System that's supposed to be managing the world is not only being unhelpful but getting in my way?'

[The privileges of the auxiliary control system 'Eve' have greatly reduced due to the Law's privileges being transferred to Bael—]

'Huh? More excuses? Is that all you have to say for yourself? Do you even love me?'

[Why am I being treated like a lover caught in an affair?]

'Forget it! It's over between us!'

[...]

An awkward silence fell. Moments later...

Riiing.

[A System error has been detected.]

[You have acquired a portion of the 'Deific Essence of (fucking) Splendor!']

"... Huh?" Yeon-Joo stared at the blue message window with her mouth agape again.

"What's wrong?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Th-The contents changed. A System error...? I-I've never seen something like this. But what's with the *fucking* in brackets...?"

“Oh, I’ve experienced that a few times too.”

“You too?”

“Yeah. There have been many instances of errors popping up on message windows lately. I think it’s because of the Gaia System’s collapse.”

Yeon-Joo tilted her head, confused by Kang-Woo’s words. “Didn’t you say before that the messages Players get have nothing to do with the Gaia System? You said it had to do with, umm... what was it? Earth’s protection? That thing.”

“Yeah. The Gaia System refers to the barrier that protects Earth from otherworldly invasions, and the message windows that Players get are produced by a superior system known as the Law of Titans.”

“Then—”

“But you can’t say that they’re completely unrelated to each other. You know who the privileges of the Law of Titans have been transferred to, don’t you?”

“... Bael.”

“Exactly. There’s no way he just left the System be.”

“...”

Yeon-Joo nodded reluctantly. She more or less understood what Kang-Woo was talking about, but she couldn’t help but feel that things did not add up.

‘No matter how much I think about it, it sounds way too forced.’

She was able to tell from how flustered Kang-Woo had been when she mentioned the Deific Essence of Voracity.

‘Getting such a reaction out of that snake means I’ve hit the bullseye.’

Kang-Woo would have expertly talked his way out of the situation if it was trivial, but Yeon-Joo couldn’t help but be doubtful since he had been so flustered. No, even if she left all that aside, it made no sense to push it off as a System error.

“...” Yeon-Joo crossed her arms and glared at Kang-Woo. “... I knew it was strange.”

“What was?”

“Hmph, what else? That you’re the God of Splendor.”

“...” Yeon-Joo continued triumphantly, “I at least believe that I know you better than Kim Si-Hun. All your talk about being the light and salvation is an act, isn’t it?”

A lioness never let go of their prey once she had them in her clutches.

“To be honest, you’re more fitting as the villain than the savior of the world, wouldn’t you say?” Yeon-Joo asked.

“...”

Yeon-Joo smiled as she looked at Kang-Woo who couldn't make any excuses. She could feel that she had the upper hand. She shrugged and nodded.

“Well, I understand. I'm sure you were hesitant to say that you became the God of Voracity to Gaia and the other gods. Just the name makes you sound like an evil god.” Yeon-Joo patted Kang-Woo's shoulder as if she understood and continued, “Hmph, but I don't think of you as an evil god. You're sly, a pervert, and a goddamn scumbag, but you're working harder than anyone to protect the world, aren't you? So... you can be honest with me, okay? We're soulmates, aren't we? Soulmates shouldn't be hiding anything from each other.”

Yeon-Joo continued to press Kang-Woo's weakness with a wide smile. She couldn't help but shrug from the satisfaction of exacting revenge.

“... Yeon-Joo,” Kang-Woo said to the brightly smiling Yeon-Joo. “What are you talking about? I'm the God of Splendor.”

“Hmph,” Yeon-Joo snorted as if telling Kang-Woo not to lie. “Are you trying to talk your way out of this? I already know that you're not the God of Splendor from your reaction.”

She shook her head as she clicked her tongue. She then recited a line that could be straight out of a manga, “Who cares if your Deific Essence is Splendor or Voracity? What matters is that you're Oh Kang-Woo, right? Anyway, I don't care what god you are, so just be honest with me.”

‘That's different from me getting hold of your weakness, though.’

Yeon-Joo smirked. There was no way that she would let go of Kang-Woo's weakness that she had barely managed to obtain. She didn't give a damn about what God Kang-Woo was, but Gaia surely would.

‘Hihhi.’

She couldn't help but giggle as she thought about all sorts of things that she would order Kang-Woo to do.

‘First, I'll take revenge for earlier.’

Yeon-Joo's eyes set ablaze. She was planning on exacting divine punishment on the man who had toyed with her feelings.

“No, it doesn't matter whether you care or not.” Kang-Woo slowly raised his head and continued with a serious expression, “Trust me, Yeon-Joo. I'm not the God of Voracity, but the God of Splendor.”

“Why are you trying so hard to hide—”

Kang-Woo took out his smartphone before the irritated Yeon-Joo could finish her sentence and clicked on something.

- I-I'll never forget about what you're going to do to me today.

A familiar voice came out of the smartphone.

"...!!" Yeon-Joo's eyes widened in shock as she trembled. "Y-You bastard, don't tell me..."

"Haaa. Yeon-Joo." Kang-Woo sighed deeply and continued, "Why don't you believe me?"

- You idiot. Wh-Why would you... so forcefully...

"Why don't you understand how I feel?"

- You didn't have to do this... As long as you properly confessed, I would have...

"We became soulmates who trust and rely on each other!" Kang-Woo clenched his fists in sorrow and shouted, "So why won't you believe me?!"

- I OFFER MY BODY!! TO THE GREAT!! GOD OF SPLENDOOOOOOOOR!!!

A desperate scream flowed out from the smartphone.

"..."

Yeon-Joo trembled in pallor. She thought about immediately snatching the smartphone away and crushing it, but she knew how unrealistic it was considering who was holding it.

"Y-You goddamn... fucking b-bastard."

"Yeon-Joo..." Kang-Woo raised his smartphone volume to the max and grabbed Yeon-Joo's shoulder. "Tell me." - *O-Oppa~!*

"What am I... the god of again?"

A deathly silence fell in the room. Yeon-Joo collapsed on the spot.

"Hurgh. Waaaaahh." Tears flowed down her cheeks as she wept pitifully. She said with all her might, "Th-The God... of Splendor."

Kang-Woo wiped his own tears away and nodded. "Thank you... Thank you so much for believing in me."

The truth always won. Blinding golden light poured out of Kang-Woo.

A boy sitting on top of a red hill made of dry sand suddenly looked up into the sky.

"Heh," the boy laughed.

"Is something wrong?" asked a musclebound giant who was kneeling next to the boy.

He was Marax, a demon subordinate of Bael and the *Third Heaven*. Bael crouched as he gripped his stomach without answering Marax.

“Pfft! Hahahahahahaha!!” A crazed laughter echoed throughout the arid hill. “I can’t believe he meddled with the Law without any privileges.”

The boy’s eyes were fierce despite his bright smile. He clacked his teeth and licked his lips.

“Really...”

The Demon King always exceeded his expectations and looked down on him from above as if mocking him.

Grit.

“It’s... not you.” The boy’s eyes filled with madness. He continued, “You’re not... the master of the Demonic Sea. I am.”

The boy burst into laughter as he panted heavily.

“Well, whatever.”

Viscous demonic energy flowed out of the boy as he looked up into the sky. He opened and closed his hand repeatedly as if grabbing something invisible and smiled.

“Hehe.” The boy said innocently, “It’s about time... they arrived.”

The boy hummed in anticipation.

“I wonder what otherworldly beings taste like?” He licked his lips and thought about the Demon King. “You’re curious too, aren’t you?”

The boy laughed as he shrugged.

Spark.

A small Rift appeared in the sky that the boy was looking up at.

Chapter 467 - Attack

He dreamed of a burning sky and a distorted land. The soaring hill was filled with corpses. No, the hill itself was made of corpses. The hill of death felt familiar for some reason.

It was Seoul, the city he had lived in all his life. It was reduced to ruins but a little of its form remained.

‘A-Aaaahh.’

Someone was on top of the mountain made of corpses in the ruined city.

‘Who... are you?’

A nightmarish being... a despair-inducing being was smiling brightly as they were munching on the corpses.

Crackle.

His vision distorted as his consciousness sank— no, it was resurfacing.

“Gasp!” Kim Tae-Hyun fell from his bed. *“Huff, huff!”*

He panted heavily on the ground. His eyes felt like they were burning. Tae-Hyun touched the area around his eyes.

“Huh?”

Only then did he realize that blood was flowing from his eyes.

“Wh-What the hell?”

Tae-Hyun touched his face drenched with tears of blood. The fact that blood was pouring out of one’s eyes was enough to make anyone stricken with fear. He wiped the blood away with his shaking hands.

Tae-Hyun remained silent as he looked down at his hands smeared with blood and uneasily gripped the Eye of Nostrian around his neck.

‘Is it a side effect from using its power?’

He didn’t know; he had never experienced something like this even after using Foresight many times until now.

‘Did something go wrong during the duel?’

Since the duel had been closer to a death match, it was not strange for there to be lingering side effects. Tae-Hyun had been bedridden for the past few days after his duel with Kim Si-Hun.

“Haaa.”

Tae-Hyun took some tissues from his desk and wiped the area around his eyes. He threw the tissues drenched with blood into the trash can.

‘What could that have been?’

He wondered if the vision in his dream would be what the end of the world would look like. The burning sky and the distorted land were engraved in his mind.

“It has to be a dream... right?”

Tae-Hyun shook his head to get the horrifying scene out of his head, but he couldn’t shake off the uneasiness that had made itself home in his mind. No, it might have been because Tae-Hyun knew deep down that the scene of the end of the world wasn’t a dream.

Tae-Hyun remained silent as he bit his lip and stood up.

‘I have to... let hyung know.’

He needed to tell Kang-Woo about the horrifying future he saw. Tae-Hyun went out the door.

“You saw the end?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Yes.” Tae-Hyun nodded with a serious expression.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

‘The end, huh?’

He would have told them to cut the bullshit if it had been anyone else, but it was a different story if it came from Tae-Hyun, who could see the future.

‘Could it be... Bael?’

That was naturally the first individual Kang-Woo thought of. It was not hard to imagine how the entire world would become Bael’s meal if Kang-Woo were to lose.

“Hah,” Kang-Woo smirked.

‘How interesting.’

Kang-Woo already knew that he was severely outmatched; he was unfazed by someone prophesizing the end of the world.

‘However the future turns out, it doesn’t change what I have to do.’

Kang-Woo licked his lips with his long tongue. A powerful hunger that he had not felt since he brought the Deific Essence of Voracity under control strangled his stomach.

He swept up his hair and asked, “And you said the demolished city was Seoul, right?”

“Yes, I’m sure of it.”

“Hm.”

If that was the case, it meant there was a high chance that his final battle against Bael would be in Seoul.

‘Not good.’

Seoul was one of the most populated cities in the world both before and after the Day of Calamity. Whether Kang-Woo won or lost the battle, the damage would be far too great.

‘I at least need to move the battlefield elsewhere.’

He did not know when the battle would take place, but he needed to make as much change as possible before then.

‘If I can’t change the location, then I should make several underground bunkers throughout Seoul.’

If the future Tae-Hyun saw was about Kang-Woo’s battle against Bael, there was a high chance that the battle would take place in Seoul no matter what Kang-Woo did. If that was the case, he needed to prepare so that there would be as little casualties as possible.

“Umm... Kang-Woo hyung.”

“Hm?”

“Could the future I saw be related to the abnormal Gate phenomena?”

Kang-Woo thought about Bael but Tae-Hyun was thinking about the otherworldly invasions that were already taking place through the Gates. It was only natural since Tae-Hyun had not seen Bael.

Kang-Woo shook his head and answered, “No, I’m sure it’s related to—”

He stopped himself and frowned aggressively.

‘Wait.’

Kang-Woo was thinking that it couldn’t be anyone else but Bael; he had ruled out all other dangerous possibilities, including the otherworldly invasions, and focused only on Bael.

‘No, no.’

Kang-Woo rejected his thoughts. No matter what the situation was, it was foolish to think about only one possibility among the countless.

‘Bael might have nothing to do with the future Tae-Hyun saw.’

The otherworldly invasions were gradually getting worse and worse. The chance of it was low, but it couldn’t be ruled out.

‘I should make my move quickly.’

Tae-Hyun could only see five to ten seconds into the future. Even if he saw a far-off future due to the amplification of his power, Kang-Woo doubted that it would be as far as several years away.

“We need to gather the Guardians memb—”

Beep—!

A loud alarm rang from Kang-Woo and Tae-Hyun’s chests. Kang-Woo took out the white token engraved with a golden shield from his pocket. It was the magic tool provided by the executives of Guardians that could open a Gate leading to the Hall of Protection.

[E-Emergency!] Layla’s panicked voice echoed from the magic tool. [Requesting all Guardians members to gather in Seoul!!]

‘The hell? Since when did it have a feature like this?’

Kang-Woo had been a Guardians member for years but it was the first time it was being used for an emergency gathering. In other words, the situation was so urgent that it needed to be used. Kang-Woo thought about the future Tae-Hyun talked about and his expression stiffened.

[W-We’re being attacked! An enormous number of monsters are attacking Seoul!]

The communication cut off.

Kang-Woo and Tae-Hyun stared at each other with stiff expressions.

“Hyung, this is...”

“Let’s move.”

Kang-Woo quickly turned around. Fortunately, they did not have to go far since the Player hospital that Tae-Hyun was staying in was in Seoul.

“H-Hyung?”

“Stay still.”

Kang-Woo lifted Tae-Hyun with the Authority of the Sky and flew out from the window.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!” Tae-Hyun screamed.

Kang-Woo ignored the screams and flew across the sky at supersonic speed.

“What the hell is that?”

He saw a massive red Rift several kilometers wide above Seoul. It was as if the sky was burning red.

“Shit.” Kang-Woo clenched his fists. “They’re done playing around, is it?”

There had been countless signs ever since the abnormal Gate phenomena first began. No, something like this was inevitable from the moment the Gaia System collapsed. Otherworldly invasions were the fate of a world with no protection.

“Alright.”

Kang-Woo bared his teeth as he frowned aggressively. He swept up his hair and smiled.

‘They dare covet this world?’

It was the world where he and the people precious to him lived... as well as the home of kimchi stew.

“Not a chance, you sons of bitches. This is my world.”

The Demon King bared his teeth at the red sky.

Fwoosh!

Smoke covered the sky as intense heat filled the streets.

“Kyaaaaaahhh!!”

“S-Save me!!”

Screams rang throughout the burning city.

“Karakarakarakara!”

Monsters that looked like giant cockroaches were hunting the running humans. The three meter-long roaches were scurrying across the streets at incredible speeds. One of the insects grabbed a middle-aged man and opened its mouth.

Crunch!

It ate the man alive without hesitation.

“A-Aaaahh.”

The woman who had been running with the man collapsed on the spot and looked up at the monster in despair.

“O-O light...” She recited the prayer of the Church of Splendor that she heard about recently, despite knowing that it wouldn’t change anything. “O-O li—”

The roach that ate the man alive turned to her before she could finish her prayer.

Slash—!

Just then, a golden light fell like lightning and split the roach in half.

“Fucking hell, that’s disgusting.”

Viscous green fluids were flowing out of the roach’s split halves.

“Let’s see.”

The man enveloped in golden light lifted one of the halves and opened his mouth widely.

Crunch.

The predatory insect was being eaten instead.

“*Ptooeey*. Ew, that tastes like shit.” The man who took a big bite out of the insect’s corpse frowned and spit on the ground. “There are so goddamn many of them.”

The man covered in golden light sighed and turned around. Countless insects were falling from the Rift above Seoul. The man slowly raised his hand.

Snap.

“Let’s kill about half of them.”

Golden flames engulfed the swarm of insects like a tsunami.

Chapter 468 - Attack (2)

“*Skreeeeeeee!!*”

“*Grrrrrrrk!*”

Golden flames engulfed the insects filling the sky like the sun had descended. The swarm of insects that could be mistaken for clouds screeched as they burned and turned to ash, resembling black snow as it fell.

“K-Kurgh,” grunted one of the monsters that barely survived the flames.

Unlike the other insects, this one, who had been commanding the insects from the sky, had the appearance of a human. However, it was easy to identify him as an otherworldly being due to his bulging vessels and a green mucous stem protruding from the back of his head to his waist.

“H-Half of the Cockroaches were eradicated in just o-one blow...?”

The otherworldly monster widened his fully black eyes in disbelief. It was not just the Cockroaches; the evolved lifeform Medusa as well as the Nest that endlessly birthed Parasites had severely reduced in number due to the flames. The attack was overwhelming to the point that the monster wondered if their king would be capable of such an attack.

“I-I must let him know.”

The death of the Medusas was of no consequence, but the destruction of the Nests would negatively influence their plan. The Nests were the key to their plan to invade the area with an infinite number of Parasites. The king said that he would not participate in the invasion, but that was no longer an option, considering how overwhelming that attack had been.

The otherworldly monster sprouted transparent wings and flew into the red Rift in the sky. Inside the Rift was a land corroded by countless Nests. It looked as if the land itself was covered in giant blood vessels. The Parasites had completely invaded this world, previously known as Huan.

The otherworldly monster arrived at the largest Nest among the countless and bowed.

“M-My king,” the monster said.

A handsome middle-aged man was sitting on a giant throne with his eyes closed. The king couldn't be distinguished from a human in appearance, but the otherworldly monster knew exactly who was inside the human body.

[Raging Temperance.][1]

The voice echoed directly into the head instead of being transmitted through sound waves. The middle-aged man slowly opened his chilling fully black eyes and gazed at the otherworldly monster.

“I-I have something to report!”

The otherworldly monster known as Raging Temperance quickly reported what had happened on Earth. The eyes of the middle-aged man, who had been listening in silence, gradually began to shine.

[Half of the Cockroaches were killed in one blow?]

“N-Not just the Cockroaches. The number of Nests added to the vanguard was greatly reduced as well!”

[Oh?]

The middle-aged man leaned on one side of the throne, highly intrigued. He slowly raised his arm and looked down at himself. To be more exact, he thought about the *former* owner of this body.

[He was disappointing,] the man said as he clicked his tongue.

The man had been highly anticipating the battle against the strongest martial artist in Huan but was utterly disappointed after getting to fight him.

[Haaa.]

The Parasite King[2] sighed deeply. He had not managed to find anyone who could break his boredom. He had been bored for a very long time; being the strongest for what seemed like forever was no different from suffering a long and gruesome death. Parasites endlessly desired to evolve,

and the Parasite King arrived at the Triad to search for someone who could give him some sort of thrill.

[Then is he the one known as Bael?]

To be more exact, he had come in search of Bael.

“I-I do not know.” Raging Temperance shook his head. “But... I do not believe it is Bael because I heard that he is a demon.”

There was no way that a demon would use golden energy.

[Hmm.] The Parasite King shook his head in disappointment and slowly rose from his throne.

[Well, I might as well warm up before I face Bael.]

The Parasite King headed to the red Rift with a smile.

“Fuuu,” Oh Kang-Woo exhaled.

The ashes made from burning the insects filling the skies of Seoul were falling like snow.

“Not bad.”

Kang-Woo lightly warmed up with a smile. He could now use wide-area attacks like this after his mastery over the Flames of Voracity rose.

‘Though it consumes an ungodly amount of Divinity.’

He needed to mix Divinity with his demonic energy to use the Flames of Voracity effectively. He could use as much demonic energy as he liked, but it took quite a lot of time to replenish Divinity.

‘That’s enough for now.’

Kang-Woo did not want to risk running out of Divinity before fighting the boss because he was spamming AOE attacks. Making the insects that were attacking civilians retreat was good enough.

Crack! Crunch—!

“Hyung-nim!”

“Kang-Woo hyung!”

As for the rest of the insects that survived the flames, Kim Si-Hun and Kim Tae-Hyun were running toward Kang-Woo as they killed the insects. The monsters that were like natural disasters to regular people were nothing more than slightly larger cockroaches to the two of them. Several insects were wiped out with each of their sword swings.

‘Nice.’

Kang-Woo smiled. Saving his own Divinity stores was exactly why he had raised Si-Hun.

‘Thank God I made him awaken Deific Essence before this happened.’

Kang-Woo couldn’t help but smile, seeing the asset that he had steadily raised pay off.

“What in the world are these monsters...?” Si-Hun looked around with a stiff expression.

Their numbers had considerably reduced thanks to Kang-Woo’s attack, but there were still countless monsters flying around Seoul.

Si-Hun looked up at the Rift in the sky and asked, “Has the otherworldly invasion... finally begun?”

“I think it’s safe to assume so.” Kang-Woo nodded with a frown. He slowly raised his arm, spreading golden energy throughout the area. “I have no idea which world they came from, but there’s only one thing we need to do.”

Crunch, crunch.

Kang-Woo absorbed the insect corpses with the Authority of Predation and narrowed his eyes. He couldn’t see the memories of those whom he devoured with the Authority of Predation, but he could at least find out their habits, characteristics, and weaknesses.

“Parasites...”

Kang-Woo was able to find out from the information flowing into his head that these otherworldly lifeforms were known as Parasites.

‘I guess that explains their insect-like appearance.’

They followed the commands of a superior just like bees and ants.

‘The difference is...’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He flew into the sky as he checked the information that he gained from the Authority of Predation.

“That must be the *Nest*.”

He could see a giant red cocoon-like mass on top of a high-rise building. It was getting larger as it corroded the building with the giant stems that protruded from it. The red mass split open and hundreds of Parasites poured out from it.

Kang-Woo brought the Guardians token to his mouth. “Layla.”

[Ah, yes! K-Kang-Woo!] Layla answered through the token.

Kang-Woo could also hear the screeches of monsters; Layla seemed to be fighting against the Parasites as well somewhere else in Seoul.

“Please let the members tasked to evacuate the citizens to destroy the red cocoons on top of high-rise buildings.”

[But what about the civilians—]

“I have a plan.”

Layla remained silent for a moment. [Okay. I trust you, Kang-Woo.]

She made a quick decision as always. She ordered the Guardians members to destroy the cocoons as soon as she ended the call with Kang-Woo.

“Now, then.”

Kang-Woo put the token back in his pocket and closed his eyes.

- Yeon-Joo.

- Kurgh! Wh-Where the hell are you?! And what the hell are these crazy-ass insects?

Cha Yeon-Joo’s voice echoed within his head. Kang-Woo did not have the time to explain to her what was happening.

- I’m going to send you a portion of my Deific Essence, so kill as many Parasites attacking civilians as possible.

- ...

- Iris is near you as well, right?

- Y-Yeah.

Yeon-Joo was working with the expeditionary troops from Aernor in Seoul after becoming Kang-Woo’s incarnation. It was to build friendly relations with the people of Aernor, who had spread the Church of Splendor throughout Earth, now that she had become the God of Splendor’s incarnation.

- Evacuate the citizens with the help of Aernor’s troops.

- Then what are you going to...

Yeon-Joo was about to say something worriedly but stopped herself because she knew how pointless it was to worry about him in this situation.

- Got it. I’ll get right on it.

Kang-Woo nodded after getting Yeon-Joo’s answer and turned to Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun.

“There should be evolved lifeforms commanding the Parasites near the Nests. I’ll be counting on you guys to kill them.”

“What about y—”

“Si-Hun,” Kang-Woo cut Si-Hun off and said in a low tone, “I’m counting on you.” Si-Hun closed his eyes and bit his lip. He created a formless blue sword, narrowed his eyes, and nodded. He responded energetically, “Understood, hyung-nim.”

Kang-Woo smiled.

“Kang-Woo hyung...” Tae-Hyun called anxiously.

Blood mixed with sweat was pouring down his cheeks from his eyes. The burning sky and the distorted earth... Things were playing out exactly as the future he saw. All that was left was the hill made of corpses.

“Don’t worry.” Kang-Woo placed his hand on Tae-Hyun’s shoulder and smiled faintly. “I won’t let that future... come to be.”

Kang-Woo turned away from Tae-Hyun, who was blankly staring at him in silence.

‘Now, then.’

Kang-Woo looked up at the red Rift burning the sky.

“Let’s go.”

He did not intend to wait to be attacked like an idiot.

‘If Earth is being attacked because it’s linked to the outer world, I don’t see a reason why we can’t attack them.’

“But man, I don’t wanna eat goddamn bugs.”

‘Well, I guess I have no choice. They’re a great source of protein.’

Taste was not important; nutrition was all that mattered.

Boom—!!

Kang-Woo stomped on the ground and flew up into the air without hesitation.

Chapter 469 - Parasite King (1)

Oh Kang-Woo flew up toward the horrifying red Rift that tens of thousands of Parasites were pouring out of.

“Karrrrrrgh!”

“Krrrk! Krrrk! Krrrk!”

Once Kang-Woo came near the Rift, the Parasites falling toward Seoul sprouted their wings and flew at him. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue as he stared at the swarm of Parasites so large that they could be mistaken for a cloud.

“There are still so many of them even after I wiped half of them out.”

The problem was that they would endlessly pour out of the Rift no matter how many were killed.

“Kraaaaaaahhh!!”

“Shut the hell up, dammit.”

Kang-Woo did not falter even after being surrounded by the swarm of Parasites. He slowly unsheathed Ingrium from his waist.

“Krrrrrrrrrk!!”

The swarm of Parasites charged at Kang-Woo, who enveloped Ingrium with the Flames of Voracity.

“Krararararara!!”

The ear-splitting roar of a dragon echoed, stopping the Parasites flying at Kang-Woo in place.

“Good work, young dragon.”

A red muscle-bound demon smiled on the back of a black demonic dragon.

“Balrog?” Kang-Woo called.

“Were you planning on going by yourself again?” Balrog raised his head and flexed his muscles. “Hup!”

He spread his massive bat wings, flew into the air instantly, and punched one of the Parasites.

Bash!

“Skreeeee!”

Green fluids splattered all over the place as the Cockroach’s head exploded.

“My, how filthy. Could you please take care not to make it splatter this way?” said Lilith, sitting with one leg over the other and wiping off the green fluid staining her clothes.

“Kang-Woo!”

“M-Master K-Kang-Woo. W-We’re here to h-help.”

Han Seol-Ah and Halcyon were also on Echidna’s back.

“You guys...” Kang-Woo sighed as he watched them flying toward him. “What about the Nests?”

“The Guardians members are taking care of them. There’s no need to worry since your attack already wiped out a considerable number of them.”

“Then you should help Si-Hun and Tae-Hyun kill the evolved—”

“Si-Hun is wiping them out before we even have a chance to do anything.” Lilith smiled faintly and bowed modestly. “We will follow you, my king.”

“...”

“Kang-Woo. Y-You were planning on going by yourself again, weren’t you?” Seol-Ah as she sprouted her white wings.

Kang-Woo could faintly hear her mumbling that she would need the chains as she had thought.

[Hm! You get on my back too, Kang-Woo!] Echidna’s shout was transmitted directly into Kang-Woo’s head.

“Ngh,” Kang-Woo groaned and then smirked.

He let Balrog take care of the Parasites flying at them as he got on Echidna’s back.

‘I guess I have no choice since they’re already here.’

It was for the better; however many Parasites they killed down there, more Parasites would take their place until the Rift was taken care of. It was better to add more people to dispose of the source of the Parasites.

‘Besides, I don’t need to put on an act in front of this lineup.’

Lilith, Balrog, Halcyon, Echidna, and Seol-Ah knew Kang-Woo’s true self under the persona of the God of Splendor. He would not be forced to do anything unnecessary from bringing them with him.

“That’s enough of that, Balrog. Come here.”

Crush. “Yes, my king.” Balrog, who was covered in green goo, flew toward them as he smiled. The goo splattered like rain every time he flapped his wings.

[Balrog, you’re dirty! Don’t get on my back!]

“Y-Young dragon.”

[I’ll get angry if you do!]

Echidna glared at Balrog fiercely. Balrog’s shoulders drooped as if he were shocked.

“Man, I guess you’re gonna have to fly on your own, Balrog.” Kang-Woo snickered as he stared at the dejected Balrog.

He felt like his shoulders were lighter than when he was about to enter the red Rift by himself. He could barely feel his burning hunger or suffocating thirst.

“Hoho.” Lilith approached Kang-Woo and giggled elegantly with her hand covering her mouth. “What do you think, Master Kang-Woo?” She placed her hand on Kang-Woo’s shoulder and continued, “It’s lighter than shouldering everything on your own, isn’t it?”

Kang-Woo remained silent. He looked up at the red Rift with a faint smile. “Let’s go.”

Whoosh!

Echidna flapped her giant wings and flew toward the red Rift.

A strange sensation spread throughout Kang-Woo as they passed through the red Rift.

‘This is...’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It was a faint memory but he remembered feeling something like this once before.

‘But when?’

Kang-Woo combed through his memories and came across one hidden deep within the thick fog.

“Oh.”

He recalled the colossal tree that linked the Triad when he followed Gaia into the divine realm.

‘Huan.’

The branch of the World Tree linked to Huan had been engulfed by darkness for some reason.

“I see what happened.”

Kang-Woo frowned as he feigned laughter. He had a feeling that the darkness was related to the Parasites that attacked Earth.

‘In that case, this red Rift is... linked to Huan.’

“Hmm,” Kang-Woo groaned.

The world beyond the red Rift came into view before he could think more.

“Hah.”

“This is... horrible.”

“Kyaaahh!”

Lilith’s chuckle and Seol-Ah’s scream echoed.

Kang-Woo looked around with narrow eyes. The land contaminated by the countless Nests looked horrifying as if it was covered in blood vessels.

“Is this a Hatchery[1] or what?” Kang-Woo Grimaced aggressively as he stared at the world taken over by Parasites.

“A-Aaaahh.”

“Ahihi, ihi.”

Faint voices could be heard. Kang-Woo turned to the source of the voices.

Krrrrrk, krrk.

At the end of the red stems protruding from the Nests covering the land were humans wearing clothes that one would see in Chinese martial arts films.

“Argh, ahhh.”

“Ehe, hehehe. Heh.”

The red stems were attached to the back of their heads. They were laughing soullessly as if they had lost their minds. Kang-Woo slowly turned around. So many humans had become nutrients for the Nests that it was pointless to count. There was nothing but despair left in this world.

‘So this is... what awaits worlds that fall to outer worlds.’

All the history, culture, lives, and land that the world had built were trampled on and were reduced to nutrients for the predators.

“Echidna. Fly a little higher.”

[Okay.]

Echidna flapped her wings and flew higher.

“Kraaaaaahhh!”

Countless Parasites flew toward them to kill the invaders. Their numbers back in Seoul paled in comparison to how many there were here, and they were all baring their sharp teeth at Kang-Woo and the group.

“Fuuu.” Kang-Woo closed his eyes, ignoring the swarm that could be mistaken for the ground itself.

He placed his hand on his heart and felt the infinite demonic energy flowing into him through the Demonic Sea. He drew out an ember from the sea of demonic energy that could engulf the entire world whole.

Fwoosh.

Gold and black flames enveloped Kang-Woo. He unsheathed Ingrium, which the Flames of Voracity traveled up to envelop, from his waist. He then opened his eyes.

“A-Argghh.”

He could hear a voice. A child no more than ten years old was attached to the red stem. No, not just the one child; the elderly, children, women, men, and everyone in this world had been parasitized.

Kang-Woo did not care about their despair. He did not think about their pain. It was none of his business whether the people of this world had wept or struggled in agony during their demise. He couldn't care less if hundreds of thousands of people he didn't even know the names of died. He did not feel the least bit of sympathy. That was the kind of person he was as well as how he needed to live so that he could survive.

- M-My... king.

However, only for a tiny moment...

- P-Please ru...

His vision blurred and distorted. A clear memory fragment appeared from within the hazy fog of memories. The appearance of Earth overlapped with the world that had already met its end.

“For fuck's sake,” Kang-Woo cursed.

He was extremely displeased for some reason once he looked at the people taken over by Parasites. Irritation swept over him.

“What an unpleasant bunch of insects.”

Kang-Woo slowly raised his sword. His displeasure was reason enough for him to wipe out the Parasite race.

Fwoosh.

The Flames of Voracity burned brightly.

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo exhaled deeply.

Unlike in Seoul, he did not need to hold back his strength. He could let loose his irritation and displeasure as much as he liked in this world. Kang-Woo smiled and swung down his sword vertically as if splitting the earth.

“Twilight.”

Flames poured like a tsunami from the line made with his sword that linked heaven and earth.

“Skreeeeeeeeeeee!!”

An enormous number of Parasites were engulfed by the flames. The Flames of Voracity filled the sky, burning it orange like a sunset. Its power was of another level compared to the flames made with the Authority of Mammon, the Prince of Greed. The flames that burned as if they would devour the entire world poured down on the Parasite Nests all over the ground. The flames were so powerful that they could drive an entire race to extinction.

“Genocide Flame.”

‘Sheesh.’

“That’s cool as fuck...”

He felt like he would cream his pants just hearing the name.

“I’m gonna call it Genocide Flame instead of Twilight from now on.”

Kang-Woo nodded as he stared at the flames pouring down on the ground.

Booooooom!!

Just then, the earth shook. The (cool as fuck) Genocide Flame that was about to reach the ground and burn the Nests was split in half. A man wearing a blue martial arts robe flew into the sky from between the split halves.

“Who the hell is that?”

Kang-Woo frowned.

Chapter 470 - Parasite King (2)

“Why is a human—” As Oh Kang-Woo was about to ask why a human was here, he stopped talking once he saw the middle-aged man walking closer. “Tsk, of course.”

He wondered why a human was among the swarm of Parasites, but he could tell the man was not human from a closer look. The man’s eyes were fully black and blood vessels were bulging around them; he even possessed a form of energy which Kang-Woo, who possessed sacred power, mana, and demonic energy, had never seen before. The man was not human in any aspect; although he looked very similar to being human, Kang-Woo could tell the being within the man’s body was a monster from an outer world.

‘He must have taken over the body.’

The middle-aged man’s clothes were similar to the other humans around Huan, whom Parasites also took over.

'These insects are as unpleasant as I thought.'

Kang-Woo felt extreme displeasure as he stared at the unknown middle-aged man with his body taken over by a monster. It was because Kang-Woo also had several beings lying in wait to take over his body.

"Fuuu," he took a deep breath.

The demonic energy drained from using Twilight was filled back up through the Demonic Sea. Kang-Woo gripped Ingrium and lowered his stance.

Split.

Translucent wings sprouted from the middle-aged man's back.

Boom!

A sonic boom rang as the man flew toward Kang-Woo, causing a wave of compressed air to rage like a storm. The man charged at Kang-Woo along with a thunderous sound. He stretched his arm out to the side, creating a formless sword like Kim Si-Hun usually did.

Clang—!

Ingrium and the formless sword clashed. Kang-Woo and the middle-aged man were both blown backward from the powerful recoil.

"Oh?" The man looked down at his numb hand and then stared at Kang-Woo with great interest, his eyes shining.

"A mere insect knows how to use a sword?" said Kang-Woo as he smiled and lightly shook his hand that had been holding Ingrium.

His eyes filled with a powerful sense of hunger as he stared at the middle-aged man.

'Not bad.'

Kang-Woo smiled and licked his lips. They only clashed swords once but Kang-Woo could tell that the Parasite was powerful from the fact that he was blown back.

'But that's all there is to it.'

He did not know how much more power the insect was hiding, but the battle would be nothing but leisurely entertainment for him.

'You have more to give, don't you?'

Kang-Woo smiled widely and stared at the Parasite King in anticipation. He recalled his battle against Tai Wuji and the feeling that he could only feel against those with phenomenal power. He recalled the spark that he could only experience from devouring such prey, which was even more satisfying than the passionate hunger and thirst.

"This isn't all you've got, is it?"

Kang-Woo gripped his sword stronger as he relished in the thrill he had not felt in a long time.

[To think there was one this powerful in the Triad.] The Parasite King expressed astonishment.
[Wonderful.]

The king shivered in excitement at the fact that he would be able to replace the immense disappointment that he had felt when facing the strongest being in Huan, with ecstasy all at once.

[It's been a while... since I've felt this way.]

The Parasite King's heart beat faster. He had traveled across countless worlds to conquer and destroy them for a time so long that he could not even remember when he had begun, all for the sake of finding someone who would allow him to evolve. He desired to be freed from the endless boredom that he had been weighed down by ever since he became king.

[No... It is too soon to be sure.]

The Parasite King quelled his growing anticipation and shook his head. He had yet to bring out even a quarter of his full power. It was far too soon to be elated that he had found his match just because his opponent managed to block one of his attacks. His immense ecstasy immediately turned into disappointment back when he faced the most powerful being in Huan.

[I beg of you, entertain me,] the Parasite King said desperately.

“Hah, the insect even knows how to talk,” Kang-Woo chuckled.

The two predators stared at each other in silence.

Boom!

Kang-Woo and the Parasite King leaped at each other simultaneously after a short period of silence. Immense powers clashed against one another, the ground tearing apart from the shockwave.

Bang! Slam! Crash!

The two kings moved so impossibly fast that they couldn't be seen with the naked eye.

[Haaaaaaaahh!] the Parasite King roared.

The hideous blood vessels around his eyes spread throughout his entire body. The memories of the body that he had taken over, especially the power known as martial arts and the way to use weapons, flowed into him, and he moved his sword based on that.

Boom! Boom—! Explosive sounds similar to dozens of cannons firing rang each time the swords clashed and shook the earth.

[Hah, hahahaha!]

The Parasite King laughed in ecstasy, feeling the numbness in his hands and staring at the human who was blocking all of his attacks without getting overpowered.

[You're much better than I'd expected!]

The Parasite King had expected it from the moment of their clash, but the man in front of him was far stronger than the self-proclaimed strongest being of Huan. The human was easily blocking the Parasite King's attacks, which could easily split a giant mountain, and was even counterattacking. His anxiety of his ecstasy turning into disappointment melted away.

Kang-Woo blocked the attacks in silence.

Unlike the ecstatic Parasite King, he was slightly frowning as if he was dissatisfied.

Bash!

Kang-Woo deflected the Parasite King's sword aimed at his head and kicked him in the stomach with his right foot. The Parasite King was blown backward but managed to stop after tumbling on the ground for several hundred meters.

"Hey," Kang-Woo said to the Parasite King on the ground. He asked in disappointment, "You didn't spout that badass line about entertaining you for this childish nonsense, did you?"

Kang-Woo had slight anticipation for the Parasite King, who managed to push him back, but he couldn't help but gradually grow disappointed as the battle went on.

"Are you seriously using those shitty martial arts techniques you learned from who knows where against me?"

Kang-Woo had trained with Si-Hun countless times and even battled Tai Wuji, whose martial arts skills were unmatched. There was no way that martial arts one was performing through memory would work on him. The Parasite King's attacks aiming for Kang-Woo's vitals couldn't be poorer and his swings were awfully simple to read. It was like someone wearing clothes that didn't fit them at all.

"If you're an insect, then fight like one, dammit."

Kang-Woo glared at the Parasite King.

The Parasite King stood up. [My apologies.]

He bowed courteously and flew up into the air again, letting go of the green formless sword which dispersed into thin air.

[I will treat you with respect,] said the Parasite King in a low tone.

Performing untrained martial arts against a worthy opponent, whom he found after an excruciatingly long time, was highly disrespectful. Mere martial arts did not suit the Parasite King.

Crunch, crunch.

Sounds of bone breaking and distorting could be heard. The Parasite King was slowly turning from being close to human to a hideous monster. An exoskeleton covered his skin and another pair of eyes formed— no, the four eyes then became eight, sixteen, then thirty-two. Every eye covering the Parasite King's face stared at Kang-Woo.

[Before we begin,] remarked the Parasite King as he flapped his translucent wings, [Why don't we talk for a little?]

"Talk?" Kang-Woo chuckled. He smiled fiercely and shook his head. "Screw that."

Talking was pointless after the battle they just had.

"John Wick would have killed at least five people during the time we just spent talki—"

"Please wait, my king," Lilith interrupted.

“Hm?”

She approached Kang-Woo and whispered calmly, “Why don’t you at least pry as much information out of him as you can before resuming the battle?”

Kang-Woo remained silent as his expression full of excitement relaxed.

‘Prying as much information as I can, huh?’

Kang-Woo realized why Lilith had suggested such a thing after calming down a little.

‘She’s right. This is the first time Earth has been invaded by an outer world and it can happen again at any time.’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. The otherworldly invasions had only just begun; as long as Earth’s protection was gone, not even Kang-Woo could predict how many more invaders like the Parasites would come to invade Earth. As Lilith said, they needed as much information about outer worlds as possible.

‘I got too excited.’

Kang-Woo admitted his blunder and turned to the Parasite King.

“Alright, let’s talk.”

[Let us exchange introductions first. Battling against a worthy opponent without even knowing their name lacks elegance,] said the Parasite King calmly.

‘Elegance, huh?’

Kang-Woo more or less had an idea of why the Parasite King offered to talk all of a sudden in the middle of a battle.

‘He’s quite intelligent for an insect.’

Unlike the Cockroaches which seemed to be lower lifeforms, the evolved lifeforms and above seemed to possess intelligence on par with or even greater than that of humans.

‘I didn’t think they would be mindless monsters just because they were from outer worlds, but still.’

It was weird to see monsters, that looked as if they would appear in games about wars in space, conversing normally and worrying about elegance.

[I am a resident of the Eight Realms.]

‘Eight Realms?’

Kang-Woo was reminded of the Nine Hells but shook his head.

‘There’s no way.’

There was no demon like the Parasite King in the Eighth Hell— no, it was impossible.

‘If there was a demon like that back when I was still in Hell...’

The one on the throne would have been that insect, not Kang-Woo.

'Since I didn't have Deific Essence back then and the Demonic Sea wasn't as big as it is now.'

Kang-Woo would have been easily overpowered even if he had opened the Doors at the time.

'But not anymore.'

Kang-Woo stared at the Parasite King leisurely.

[The mortals refer to me as the *Parasite King*.]

Squelch.

The Parasite King's skin around his neck split open and poured out green tentacles covered in sticky mucus.

[Now, it is time for you to tell me your n—]

Bash—!!

Kang-Woo ran up to the Parasite King and punched him in the face before the Parasite King could finish his sentence.

[Kurgh! Wh-What is the meaning of this?!] shouted the Parasite King in confusion.

"M-Master Kang-Woo?" Lilith asked wide-eyed, also shocked by Kang-Woo's sudden behavior. She stared nervously at the Parasite King and whispered to Kang-Woo, "I told you that we should pry information from—"

"Kill him," Kang-Woo interjected as he looked down at the Parasite King with the eyes of a dead fish.

"Pardon?"

"We have to kill him."

Kang-Woo bit his lip aggressively.

'Talk? Information? What does any of that matter?'

Squelch.

Multiple green tentacles were hideously squirming around the Parasite King.

"A-Aaaahh," Kang-Woo groaned as he gripped his sword in pallor. He screamed desperately, "We have to fucking kill that son of a bitch now!!!"