

M. in Hell 501

Chapter 501 - Advent (2)

Crack! Crack!!

The space behind Arakyle began to split once he finished his sentence. The black Rift grew bigger and out came an army of demons that numbered easily over ten thousand. It was the *Despair Corps* led by Arakyle.

'That's...'

Oh Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes as he stared at the Despair Corps that had marched out of the Rift. He couldn't feel Deific Essence from them like he could from Arakyle, but something about them felt off.

"Oh."

He soon discovered the source of the oddity.

'What do they have around their necks?'

Every demon of the Despair Corps was wearing something around their neck; it was neither a necklace nor a pendant.

'... A pouch?'

It was about half the size of a human palm. Based on how puffy it looked, Kang-Woo was sure that something was inside it. Such a thing did not exist back in his Demon King days.

'They're... probably not charms.'

There was no way demons would wear charms for good luck as a group.

"You must be curious about what these are."

Arakyle smiled as he noticed Kang-Woo's gaze. He gestured with his chin toward the Despair Corps that had surrounded Kang-Woo, Lilith, and Balrog. He then took off a pouch from one of the demon soldiers.

"Show the Demon King," said Arakyle with a smile.

Arakyle's subordinate brought the unknown pouch toward their mouth and slowly tilted it. A black powder flowed out from the pouch's opening and entered their mouth.

"Kurgh!" the subordinate grunted in pain.

Crunch! Crunch!

The sounds of bones breaking echoed.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!!"

Arakyle's subordinate writhed in pain as grotesque blood vessels resembling tree roots bulged throughout their body.

Whoooooom!!

Unsettling demonic energy seeped out of the subordinate like haze. It was clearly different from regular demonic energy.

“Hah,” Kang-Woo laughed.

He could tell what the source of that demonic energy was even without using the Authority of Insight. He had experienced it once before.

“... The power of Deicide.”

The power of Deicide, or god-killing powers, was fundamentally different from Deific Essence. If Deific Essence was influenced by one's status as a god, then the power of Deicide existed only to kill those with Deific Essence. To add more detail, the power of Deicide was specialized for penetrating Deific Essence and annihilating it. Kang-Woo had made a weapon containing that power in the past.

‘I made Yeon-Joo chains using Behemoth's horn.’

Cha Yeon-Joo had been able to injure Kang-Woo even before she became his incarnation, as long as she used the chains infused with the power of Deicide.

‘Since they can't all be made an incarnation, they were given something that temporarily grants them the power of Deicide.’

If that was the case, it was not difficult to guess what that powder was.

“Poor Behemoth. Are his horns even intact at this point? No, if all these demons were provided with the powder, I guess they were repeatedly regrown and cut off?”

The pouch on each demon of the Despair Corps likely contained powder made of Behemoth's horn.

“Amon, you thorough son of a bitch.”

Kang-Woo had already thought of the possibility that Amon was controlling Behemoth since Behemoth looked as if he were being controlled by someone back when Kang-Woo and his party saw him in the satellite world. Amon's use of the power of Deicide infused in Behemoth's horns had been within Kang-Woo's expectations.

‘But I never thought he would make performance-enhancing drugs with them instead of weapons.’

Kang-Woo did not even know that ingesting the horn would temporarily grant the power of Deicide.

‘No, not just that.’

It was obvious just from seeing Arakyle's subordinate that they had not only been granted the power of Deicide but their demonic energy and physical parameters had also risen exponentially as well. Although it was only temporary, it far surpassed Han Seol-Ah's buffs.

‘But naturally...’

Such an abnormal boost in power would come at a cost.

'You'd become braindead if you're lucky, or just die if you aren't.'

Ingesting powder made of Behemoth's horn was no different than becoming a suicide bomber.

"Do you have any idea what would happen if you ate that?" asked Kang-Woo with deeply sunken eyes.

Although they were Arakyle's subordinates, all members of the Despair Corps were Kang-Woo's subordinates as well.

'Well, not anymore.'

Kang-Woo even recognized a few familiar faces among the soldiers surrounding him, Lilith, and Balrog. There was no way he wouldn't feel for them.

"Hahaha! Of course, we do!" Arakyle burst into laughter. He then exhaled ecstatically and spread his arms wide. "But even if we have to tear ourselves apart and set our souls ablaze." He raised his head high and said in madness, "We have to move forward, don't we?"

Arakyle cackled as his shoulders moved up and down.

"You used to say this all the time. Forward, forward, forward, forward!" He shouted in madness as he reminisced. "Climb higher! To a height no one has ever reached! Kffp! Kahahahaha!!"

Arakyle trembled in ecstasy.

"Yes. You're absolutely right, Demon King. If demons live by their desire and are completed by them...!" He noisily clashed his saw blade hands together. "Shouldn't we pursue power, no matter what the cost?"

"..."

"Are you not the one who put that to practice the most, Demon King?"

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent as he recalled his days in Hell— no, he did not even have to think that far back. Even now, as he was talking to Arakyle, he was constantly on a tightrope, trying to maintain control over the Demonic Sea at all times. Compared to the risks Kang-Woo bore, the risk that came with ingesting powder made from Behemoth's horn was nothing.

"Aaaahh." Arakyle twirled as if dancing. "This reminds me of when I first met you." He smiled and continued, "You did not stop eating Mammon alive even as you jumped into his flames! I still remember your madness as you devoured Mammon's entire army of a hundred thousand demons!"

Arakyle looked in a daze as if he were high.

"Ahh, it was truly breathtaking. No one was as extraordinary as you."

The Demon King back then was the paragon of *desire*. Even if his limbs were severed, intestines exploded out of his stomach, or half of his head was torn off, he desired only to devour his foes to climb even higher. His only desire was to grow stronger. All predators were reduced to mere prey before the Demon King. No other demon was a better fit for the title than Kang-Woo.

“But...” Arakyle’s eyes turned cold. “I do not see even a trace of your former self in you.” He glared at Kang-Woo and continued, “Amon told me that you’ve sided with humans and are protecting the world.”

His eyes were filled with disgust.

“Well, the fact that you sided with humans doesn’t bother me. But...”

“...”

“The fact that you are protecting others is unforgivable.”

The Demon King should never protect others. The king of demons was meant to plunder, extort, and usurp.

“Since you have lost your desire...” Arakyle’s eyes glinted fiercely. “I can no longer call you my king.”

“...”

Kang-Woo slowly looked around in silence. His former subordinates, whom he had done his best to protect, were brandishing their weapons and exuding hostility at him.

“Hahaha! What are you standing there all blankly for?” Arakyle laughed. “I don’t blame you. After all, I doubt even you are a match for an army of ten thousand, all with the power of Deicide.”

It might have been different if the Demon King they were facing was the one from the past, but a Demon King with no desire would break down due to the despairing difference in strength between them.

“That is why you are no longer our king.” Arakyle cackled. He then declared, “Your era is over. You have been... forgotten.”

Their king was now a relic of the past; it was time for demons to accept a new king.

“That aside...”

Step, step.

Arakyle strolled right up to Kang-Woo.

“...”

Kang-Woo slowly turned his head again to stare coldly at Arakyle.

“What a moron Doomguard is,” mentioned Arakyle mockingly.

Slice.

He swung down his saw blade hand and beheaded Doomguard, whom Kang-Woo laid on the ground. He then playfully bounced Doomguard's head on the flat part of his saw blade hand.

"He frantically ran away so that he could reach you, even ingesting Behemoth's horn powder in the process."

"..."

"A demon prioritizing loyalty over their desire... don't you think it's strange?"

"... own."

"We are completed only by desire... hm? Did you say something?"

"Put him down."

Kang-Woo moved his arm.

"...!"

He grabbed Doomguard's head, which Arakyle was bouncing on his saw blade hand before Arakyle could even react.

"Kurgh."

Arakyle stepped back in surprise. He had acquired power incomparable to his past self after becoming Bael's incarnation, but he was unable to follow the Demon King's movements just now.

"..."

Kang-Woo embraced Doomguard's head and then slowly placed it on the ground. He reattached the head to where it had been cut off by Arakyle's saw blade.

- Heh... hehe.

Doomguard's laughter popped into Kang-Woo's head.

'He was an adorable son of a bitch.'

In terms of personality, he was similar to Kim Tae-Hyun, excluding the fact that he was aggressive to anyone but Kang-Woo.

- Hehe. I'm happy that... I managed to see you again... Cough! Before my last breath, my king.

'Fucking idiot. You could have lived if you didn't run to me.'

- I... I have something that I need to tell you... no matter what.

'It was fucking useless information. I would've figured something out even if you didn't tell me.'

- I would have... come to see you... sooner.

'No fucking shit. You should've come to me as soon as you noticed Amon doing weird shit instead of confronting him.'

“...” Kang-Woo stood up after placing Doomguard’s head back on the ground. He then called, “Arakyle.”

“... Yes?”

Arakyle gestured to his soldiers to get ready to ingest the powder.

“I asked you why in the beginning, didn’t I?”

Kang-Woo slowly raised his head.

“I wasn’t asking why you killed Doomguard.”

His scleras dyed black.

“What I was asking was...”

His black irises dyed yellow.

“Why you forgot about me.”

His black pupils stretched horizontally.

“Betrayal? I can understand that. Let’s be honest, I completely understand why you would lick Bael’s feet if he would give you Deific Essence for free. But Arakyle, oh Arakyle. I feel you, but you shouldn’t have forgotten about me. You guys know me. You all fought alongside me and emerged victorious together.”

‘No matter how drunk you were on power... no matter how much time passed... no matter how foggy your memories have become...’

Split.

Wings made of black mucus sprouted, and from the mucus appeared mouths filled with sharp teeth. And...

“You should’ve at least remembered me.”

It marked the advent of the demon of demons, the predator of predators, the Hell of Hells... the Demon King.

Chapter 502 - Advent (3)

Clack, clack, clack!

The grotesque wings made of fluid flapped as the hundreds of teeth embedded in them noisily clacked. The horizontal goat eyes gazed at Arakyle.

“U-Urgh,” Arakyle grunted.

Chills ran down his spine. He was getting cold sweats and having trouble breathing. He felt as if he were drowning in a boundless black sea.

Arakyle bit his lip and commanded, “All forces, prepare for battle!”

The soldiers of the Despair Corps grabbed their pouches. Arakyle pointed his saw blade at the Demon King.

'It is impossible for us to lose.'

He used to be one of the Demon King's closest allies along with Balrog and Lilith; he knew exactly how strong the Demon King was as well as how to defeat him.

'I just need to make him open a Door and then run away.'

The Demon King's greatest strength as well as his greatest weakness was the power of the Demonic Sea. It was a boundless sea of demonic energy that not even the Demon King could perfectly control. Once he opened the Doors of the *Ten Thousand Demon Core*, which acted as a seal for the sea of demonic energy, he would lose consciousness and be driven out of control. They just needed to confirm that the Demon King opened a Door, and then they would run away without looking back.

'After enough time...'

The Demon King would become so weak that even a child could kill him. It was a surefire strategy. The Despair Corps numbering ten thousand plus Arakyle with Deific Essence would easily be able to force the Demon King to open a Door, and they had already prepared an escape route once he did. Arakyle was sure that this strategy was only possible because he knew about the Demon King's weakness.

'But why... why isn't this uneasiness disappearing?'

Arakyle fiercely shook his head to erase his anxiety.

Just then, the Demon King mentioned, "I have one more thing to ask."

Arakyle flinched and raised his head. He got chills as the Demon King's golden yellow eyes stared at him.

"You planned this on your own, didn't you?"

"... So what if I did?" Arakyle asked back in irritation, biting his lip anxiously.

"Yeah." The Demon King smiled brightly as if he had expected it. He then looked around the Despair Corps and continued, "If Bael or Amon had planned this, they wouldn't have brought only this many."

"..." Arakyle's eyebrows flinched. The Demon King was undermining the Despair Corps and him. "... I am no longer the commander of Despair you once knew."

Arakyle had been born anew after receiving Bael's blessing.

"And neither are the members of the Despair Corps who stand before you."

Battles in the Ninth Hell did not stop even after the Demon King left. Demons instinctively desired power and conflict; battles were no different from their purpose in life. The Despair Corps had gone through countless battles and grew stronger in the Demon King's absence. Not only that, but they possessed Behemoth's horn powder which granted the power of Decide.

Arakyle muttered, "You... will have no choice but to open a Door."

"Is that so?" The Demon King smiled. "You've changed, huh? I guess I would have to agree with that." He laughed as his shoulders moved up and down. He tilted his head and continued, "But why are you assuming that I haven't changed in that time either?"

"..."

Arakyle frowned due to Kang-Woo's mocking tone. There was certainly a possibility that the Demon King had also grown stronger than in his days in Hell, just like Arakyle.

However, Arakyle said firmly, "That is enough of your nonsense. A demon with no desire cannot grow stronger."

The Demon King had abandoned his desire and returned to Earth. He stopped plundering, extorting, and usurping, only to protect humanity. There was no way that a demon who abandoned his desire, the fundamental core of a demon, could grow.

"Pfft! Hahahahaha!!" The Demon King laughed as he clenched his stomach. The wings made of black mucus flapped fiercely. "Yeah, you're right."

A demon with no desire could not grow stronger. Desire was what allowed demons to move forward, and the key for them to reach perfection.

"But, you wanna know something?"

Arakyle had misunderstood something. The Demon King spread his wings of black mucus widely. Desire undeniably made demons what they were. However...

"I've never once stopped desiring."

The Demon King couldn't lose his desire.

"Even now, I'm..."

Even when he casually carried on conversations. Even when he loved, got mad, sad, had fun, laughed, made a stir, touched, caressed, embraced, kissed the woman he loved, fooled around like a jester, and enjoyed a picnic with those precious to him, he was...

"So hungry that I feel like I'm starving to death."

Split.

The corners of the Demon King's mouth ripped to his earlobes as he smiled, exposing red flesh and his gums underneath. More white teeth sprouted from them.

"Kuh!"

Arakyle's expression turned pale. Demonic energy that he had never felt from the Demon King in the past exerted immense pressure on him.

"What the..." he muttered as his eyes shook. He bit his lip and raised his saw blade hand. "Eat Behemoth's horn!"

The members of the Despair Corps poured the powder in the pouch into their mouths as Arakyle commanded.

“Graaaaaaaahh!!”

The entire Despair Corps roared ferociously. Hideous blood vessels resembling tree roots bulged all over their bodies and poured out from them demonic energy infused with the power of Deicide.

“Despair Corps,” said Arakyle as he raised his saw blade high. He then swung it down and commanded, “Kill the king.”

Rumble—!

The full force of the Despair Corps charged at the Demon King as everything around them shook.

“Haaa,” the Demon King exhaled heatedly.

Unbearable hunger took control of him once he unleashed the desire he had been suppressing. He felt as if he were dying of thirst.

“Die!!”

A demon at the vanguard swung a stupidly large greatsword infused with the power of Deicide at the Demon King’s head.

“Authority of Invulnerability.”

The Demon King leaned back and used an Authority. One of the hundreds of Authorities lying dormant inside the Demonic Sea was activated.

Clang—!

The greatsword infused with the power of Deicide bounced away. The demon was about to step back once his attack was blocked, but the Demon King grabbed his arm before he could do so.

“Ah—”

A mouth filled with sharp teeth opened wide before the demon could say anything.

Crunch.

The demon’s flesh was torn and his bones were crushed. Black blood poured out like a fountain.

“Keep pressuring him!!!” shouted Arakyle fiercely.

The Despair Corps instantly surrounded the Demon King and attacked him from all directions. The Demon King smiled and raised his right hand. The black ring on his middle finger turned into a sharp wedge. He grabbed it and stuck it to the ground.

Swoosh—!!

Black blades shot up from the ground around the wedge, piercing demons from the leg, thigh, buttock, and up to the mouth. Hundreds of the Despair Corps were killed in just one attack.

Crunch, crunch!

Mouths appeared from the blades that pierced through the demons and ate away at them. The sounds of devouring flesh echoed throughout the battlefield.

“Raaaaaaahhh!”

Although hundreds were killed in one attack, the Despair Corps was made up of ten thousand demons. Demons as many as the ones that just died charged at the Demon King without rest.

Stab! Crush!

The weapons infused with the power of Deicide pierced the Demon King one by one. The Demon King, who looked like a hedgehog with weapons stabbed into him, staggered.

“Now!!” shouted Arakyle, pressing his soldiers as he waved his saw blade in the air.

‘We just have to push him a little further...!’

The Demon King would open a Door once he was pushed to the absolute limit.

“Heh.”

However, the Demon King, who had been staggering as if he had used up all his strength, stood tall with his tongue out.

Clatter.

The weapons piercing him fell to the ground.

“... Huh?”

“Sunset,” the Demon King chanted before the Despair Corps had a chance to pull themselves together.

The sky turned black as black demonic energy covered it. Flames resembling a black sun poured down on them like rainfall.

Sizzle—!!

“Gaaaaahhh!”

“Kurgh, argh!”

The smell of burning flesh and eye-stinging smoke filled the air. The black blood pooled on the ground boiled from the heat. Only one demon stood tall under the black sky.

“Th-This is...”

The eyes of the Despair Corps demons filled with terror.

“What’s wrong, guys?” asked the Demon King quietly. He licked his lips temperamentally as if his hunger had been nowhere near satiated. “I taught you that running away in fear will only give your enemies the chance to fight back.”

The Demon King enticed his prey with sweet whispers.

“Right, guys? You remember what I said, right? Now is the chance. You will never be able to kill me if not now,” he said to the terrified demons with a smile.

“U-Urgh...”

“Aaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

The Despair Corps roared and charged at the Demon King, who accepted them with open arms.

“Pull yourselves together, damn idiots!!” shouted Arakyle hurriedly. “We are the ones with the upper hand!”

Around two thousand died from the earlier attack. It was a massive blow considering all of them had ingested Behemoth’s horn powder, but several times as many soldiers were still alive.

“Haaaaaahhh!”

Arakyle charged at the Demon King as he clashed his saw blades together, his neatly swept-back hair fluttering in the wind.

“Plunder,” he chanted.

Clang!

Sparks flew as he clashed his saw blades together. He flew at extraordinary speeds to stab the Demon King’s heart.

‘I need to make him open a Door as soon as possible...!’

Only then would his plan begin to take off. Arakyle bit his lip and imbued the Deific Essence he received from Bael into his saw blade. The blade reached the Demon King’s chest in an instant.

‘I did it!’

Arakyle’s eyes shone. The Demon King crouched and stuck his head toward Arakyle’s saw blade.

Crush!

The blade sliced open the Demon King’s head and tore apart his brain.

“What the...”

The Demon King was not immortal when the Doors were not open. He would die just like any demon if his head was destroyed.

‘Just like that?’

Arakyle looked down at his hand that sliced the Demon King’s head.

Grab.

“... Huh?”

The Demon King, whom Arakyle thought was dead— no, should have died from that attack, grabbed his saw blade hand.

“Wh-Why aren’t you d—”

Crack—!!

The Demon King tore off one of Arakyle’s arms.

“Arrrggghhh!!!” Arakyle screamed.

Crunch, crunch.

The Demon King’s head, which was split into two, began to regenerate instantly. Arakyle stepped back in shock.

“H-How?”

“How else? You know I can’t die when a Door is open.”

“What...?”

Arakyle stared at the Demon King in shock.

‘Then does that mean his sanity is perfectly fine... even with a Door open?’

“D-Dammit!”

Arakyle quickly turned back. They were no match for the Demon King if he was able to maintain his sanity with the Doors open.

“Kurgh!”

Arakyle swung his remaining saw blade hand in the air. The blade shone and activated a magic circle that had been prepared in advance.

Split!

The same black Rift that the Despair Corps arrived from opened in midair. Arakyle jumped into the Rift.

‘He can stay sane with the Doors open?!’

Arakyle did not even imagine such a possibility. He had expected the Demon King to acquire Deific Essence but never to overcome the one flaw of opening the Doors. It was understandable since the Demon King’s biggest weakness, which he was unable to overcome for hundreds of years, had been solved in just a few years.

“Shit, shit, shit!!”

Arakyle bit his lip as he looked back at the closing Rift. Losing the Despair Corps was a massive loss, but it couldn’t be helped.

“Now that it has come to this, I will have to take some time to come up with—”

“No.”

The Demon King stuck his arm through the closing Rift.

“Wh-What the—” Arakyle expressed in shock.

Rumble—!

The Demon King wrenched open the Rift. Space was distorted, causing the surroundings to shake.

“You have no more time.”

Split.

Arakyle saw sharp teeth between the borders of the Rift.

“Ah...” Arakyle groaned as chills ran down his spine. “You are...”

Arakyle recalled what he had forgotten— no, what he had tried to forget. He had thought it was a thing of the past.

He recalled what kind of being the Demon King was.

Chapter 503 - The Subordinate Isn't The One Who Protects The King

Whoosh.

White ash scattered in the wind from the rooftop between Oh Kang-Woo's fingers, Doomguard's final moments replayed in his head.

“...”

Kang-Woo looked down at the white ash falling like snowflakes. Seoul was empty as if it had become a ghost town because the residents had evacuated to Aernor thanks to the guidance of the Church of Splendor and Guardians. Kang-Woo sighed deeply as he looked down at the deserted streets.

“Fucking hell... I must look pathetic right now.”

Kang-Woo brushed off the white ash on his hands and stood up.

“Are you finished?” someone asked.

Kang-Woo turned around to see Lilith smiling at him.

“... Did you see?”

“Hoho, yes. You used to do this from time to time back in the Ninth Hell.”

“Ngh.”

Kang-Woo scratched his head and averted his gaze from her. Lilith approached him with a faint smile.

“Don't take it to heart too much, my king.” She carefully embraced Kang-Woo's arm and leaned her head on his shoulder. “Doomguard... went with a smile.”

“...” Kang-Woo remained silent, his mind in jumbles.

“Hoho,” Lilith giggled and lightly caressed Kang-Woo's cheek. “You're... the same as always.”

She had seen the melancholy Kang-Woo every time he lost his subordinates in the war.

“Shaddup,” Kang-Woo said bluntly and shook Lilith away.

Lilith giggled again with his mouth covered.

“That aside, did you manage to secure some of Behemoth’s horn powder?”

“I had the muscle pig secure some. There didn’t seem to be much of it left, according to him.”

“Really?” said Kang-Woo as he stretched out his hand.

Lilith handed him a pouch filled with black powder.

‘A powder that grants the power of Deicide, huh?’

It was bound to be a pain in the ass. Kang-Woo knew that Bael’s army would be a force to be reckoned with, but he never expected them to use such an overpowered performance-enhancing drug.

“... We should strengthen our defense line.”

Fwoosh.

Kang-Woo set the pouch on fire. The Flames of Voracity devoured the black powder without a trace. He looked down at the powder, which had reduced to ash, and clicked his tongue.

‘Should I have tried using it for something else?’

The thought lingered for a moment, but Kang-Woo then shook his head.

‘It’s too dangerous.’

It granted immense power to anyone who ingested the powder, but it was useless to him at the very least.

‘And it’s not like I can let anyone take this.’

Burning it to ash for peace of mind was a much better choice.

Kang-Woo brushed the ash off of his hands and asked, “What about the angels?”

“They’re standing by in the Hall of Protection after getting the details from Layla.”

“I should visit them too.”

“You should. They should have a lot of questions about Doomguard.”

“... I’m sure they would.” Kang-Woo nodded with a sorrowful expression. Angels had been the ones on Doonguard’s tail initially. “Lilith, focus on the magic circle that will form the defense line. I’ll deal with Michael.”

Michael did not know that Lilith was a demon yet. Although Kang-Woo could now make it so that it was nearly impossible for anyone to figure out that his demon retainers were demons, it was better not to let Lilith and Michael keep making contact.

“As you command.” Lilith bowed courteously.

Kang-Woo walked past her and climbed down the apartment roof.

“... Hm?” He tilted his head after seeing a familiar face as he went down the stairs.

“Balrog?”

“... Yes.”

“What’s wrong? You hate being in your human form.”

“I have no choice if I want to come here,” mentioned Balrog as he slightly looked up at the roof of the hallway.

His head and shoulders would destroy the roof if he were in his true form.

“Then you should’ve just gotten some rest at home. Is it urgent?”

“...” Balrog stared at Kang-Woo in silence.

Kang-Woo’s eyes narrowed.

‘I’ve seen that expression before.’

Balrog’s eyes were similar to when he was staring at Kim Si-Hun before heading to the Frozen Temple.

“Oh,” Kang-Woo expressed.

He frowned as he stared at Balrog; he more or less knew what those eyes meant.

“... My king,” Balrog got on one knee and lowered his head. “Please make—”

“If you’re going to ask me to make you my incarnation, the answer is no.”

“...” Balrog’s eyes shook. He bit his lip after Kang-Woo had hit the mark. “Why...?”

Kang-Woo answered without a shadow of a doubt, “Because you’re more than capable of awakening Deific Essence on your own.”

Balrog’s expression turned gloomy. “There is not much time remaining.”

There was less than a month until the final battle; no one knew whether or not Balrog would be able to awaken Deific Essence at that time.

“I know.” Kang-Woo nodded. “You might not be able to by then— no, you never might, even. However, I won’t erase that possibility by making you my incarnation.”

“...”

“The moment you acquire Deific Essence without any breakthroughs by becoming my incarnation, your growth will stop there. You will stay stagnant for the rest of your life.”

“Even so, I need Deific Essence,” Balrog said as he clenched his fists aggressively.

Kang-Woo could feel Balrog's suppressed vortex of emotions in his voice.

Balrog lowered his head in shame and remarked, "To protect you... I need that power."

He recalled his battle against Arakyle—the memory of getting one-sidedly beaten by a traitor who dared to betray his king. The loss had been entirely dependent on Deific Essence; there was nothing one could do against an opponent who could not even be attacked.

'To protect my king... No, even just to become a meat shield so that I can block at least one attack that might endanger my king... I need Deific Essence.'

He was in desperate need of it.

"..." Kang-Woo remained silent.

Considering Balrog's personality, Kang-Woo could tell how much Balrog thought about asking him for this. He had abandoned all possibility of growth and begged for power with his head shamefully lowered. It was unacceptable for someone like Balrog, but he had done so despite that... for Kang-Woo.

"Balrog." Kang-Woo smiled faintly and let Balrog know of an undeniable fact that would not change no matter how desperately he desired it. "You can't protect me even if you become my incarnation."

"..." Balrog's expression froze.

"Yes, you'll easily acquire Deific Essence, if you become my incarnation. But did you forget what happened to Arakyle?"

"..."

"Let's just say that you become as strong as Arakyle after acquiring Deific Essence.." Kang-Woo continued, coldly, "Do you seriously think that you can protect me with that power?"

"..." Balrog remained silent.

He had witnessed his king's battle against Arakyle— no, it could not even be considered a battle. Arakyle and the Despair Corps were helpless against the Demon King's power. Would Balrog be able to keep his king safe just by becoming as strong as Arakyle?

"That's..." Balrog slurred.

He knew better than anyone that it was not even worth thinking about. The power he held was beyond pathetic to even think about protecting his king.

"There's a limit to how much power an incarnation can have."

An incarnation could only be shared power from the entity who allowed their incarnation to borrow their Deific Essence.

“Are you sure you want to have that poison which squanders your endless possibilities?”

“...”

Balrog’s shoulders subtly trembled as he clenched his fists. Kang-Woo’s words felt like blades gouging out his heart. Kang-Woo smirked as he stared at Balrog lowering his head gloomily.

“I thought your brain was also made of muscle, but I guess not,” he remarked as he patted Balrog’s shoulder teasingly.

“... My king.”

“Just do as you’ve always done, man. Since when have you been the worrying type?”

“...”

“Well, I know you can’t help but feel that way when you look at Si-Hun.”

Si-Hun had awakened Deific Essence on his own. The power that resulted from that fact was of another level compared to the one acquired from becoming an incarnation. The difference was so massive that if Kang-Woo had to choose someone to whom he would entrust his back during his battle against Bael, he would choose Si-Hun without hesitation.

‘I’m sure... it’s hard to accept for Balrog.’

Balrog was undoubtedly the one who had been by Kang-Woo’s side the longest; it was about a thousand years. Although Kang-Woo considered Doomguard and Lilith to be his precious subordinates, Balrog held a special place in his heart.

‘We’ve known each other for so long.’

It was not just a matter of time; when they met, Kang-Woo was a weakling who had only just come down from the Eighth Hell to the Ninth Hell, and Balrog had been reduced to a lifeless loser after losing his former master. A bond formed from sharing hardships had no place not being special.

‘And I’m sure Balrog feels the same way.’

Balrog’s excessive loyalty did not stem from just his personality; it was because they had overcome their wretched past selves together that Balrog was so loyal to Kang-Woo. It was then that Kim Si-Hun, someone stronger and more talented than him, appeared to swear loyalty to Kang-Woo.

‘He probably thinks his place by my side is vanishing.’

Considering what Balrog was like, he would be suppressing those emotions deep down in his heart.

“Sigh, you stupid muscle pig.” Kang-Woo lightly conked Balrog’s lowered head. “Stop filming a goddamn melodrama by yourselves, for fuck’s sake. I’m getting scared from the thought that you two might fight over me with your swords.”

“Pardon? I don’t use a sword...”

“No, I’m not talking about that sword. You know... the one down...” Kang-Woo aggressively frowned the more he continued. He yelled, “I feel like a fucking dickhead just imagining it!! No, I’m not referring to an actual dick when I say that... Fuck! You’re making me feel even weirder!”

Kang-Woo twisted as he pulled on his hair. Balrog looked up at him in confusion.

“Ahem,” Kang-Woo coughed and patted Balrog’s shoulder. “Anyway, you don’t need to bother so much with protecting me.”

“But...”

“In the first place,” Kang-Woo turned away from Balrog and continued, “The subordinate isn’t the one who protects the king.” He then turned only his head to Balrog and mentioned, “The king is the one who protects his subordinates.”

“...!”

Balrog’s eyes widened. Kang-Woo smiled and walked away.

“Whatever the case, I’m more than happy as long as you do whatever’s in your power.”

“... My king,” Balrog muttered as he watched Kang-Woo getting further away. “...”

A heavy silence fell in the hallway.

“The king is the one who protects his subordinates, huh?” Balrog recited Kang-Woo’s words. “But, my king...”

His voice was filled with sorrow. He subtly trembled and bit his lip, black blood flowing from the puncture wound. Balrog fell to his knees on the spot.

“You have protected me far too many times...”

A sense of powerlessness weighed Balrog down and burned him alive. He took something out from his pocket— it was a pouch the size of a human fist.

“...”

Balrog opened the pouch and saw a fistful of black powder inside.

“...”

Balrog closed his eyes, closed the pouch, and put it back into his pocket.

Chapter 504 - Day of the Apocalypse (1)

A month passed by in a flash. During that time, Oh Kang-Woo prepared a barrier and a defense line that would span the entirety of Seoul and selected the members who would be present for the battle against Bael and his army. Of course, he couldn’t do all of that by himself; Layla, Kim Si-Hun, Lilith, Cha Yeon-Joo, and others helped an enormous amount.

'It's finally tomorrow.'

Kang-Woo looked up at the sky. Time passed by in a flash ever since he arrived on Earth, but it had been several times faster this past month.

"They're probably in the middle of the final briefing."

Kang-Woo would have been required to participate, but Layla had allowed him to take a break after the insane schedule he had to suffer this past month.

'Well, the final briefing isn't as crucial as it sounds.'

Although the war would decide the fate of this world, it was fundamentally different from a regular war. Things like intricate strategies, impregnable defenses, and impeccable commanding of forces would not decide the outcome of this war.

'It all depends on who between me and Bael survives.'

Hence, Layla was doing her best to brief the members of Guardians not on how to win the war, but on how to minimize casualties. Even if they managed to defeat Bael's army, it would be pointless if Kang-Woo didn't defeat Bael, and it would be just as pointless if Earth were to fall to Bael's army after Kang-Woo defeated Bael.

'The battle needs to end as quickly as possible.'

There was no better option than that.

"..."

Kang-Woo looked down at his hands. He had done everything he could but there was one thing he was disappointed about.

"I didn't manage to get Transcendent-rank Deific Essence."

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and narrowed his eyes. He had been most focused on getting it during the month of preparation, but he failed no matter how many times he tried.

'I thought I'd be able to get it after devouring Arakyle and the entire Despair Corps.'

The System window did not even appear as if to spit on his hopes.

'I can't even get in touch with the System these days.'

It could be because the System was putting all of its power into keeping matters of Earth out of Bael's eyes, or it might be a sign that the Law of Titans was almost completely in Bael's control. Kang-Woo could not get in touch with the artificial intelligence that had introduced itself to him as *Eve*.

"Tsk, I guess it can't be helped."

The day of the Apocalypse was tomorrow; there was no time to sulk because he had been unable to acquire Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.

'I might as well go through some final checks too.'

Kang-Woo stood up as he circulated the enormous amount of demonic energy flowing out from his heart.

“Umm... are you here, Kang-Woo?”

The rooftop door opened and appeared from it Han Seol-Ah.

Kang-Woo turned around happily and asked, “What is it, Darling?”

“The briefing just ended so I came to get you.”

“Get me? For what?”

“Layla suggested everyone have a meal together since this is our final night,” Seol-Ah remarked in a slightly heavy tone. The word *final* seemed to have impacted her quite greatly.

“Really? Sounds good.”

Seol-Ah thought, *‘After tomorrow... no one knows how things will turn out.’*

“Hurgh,” Seol-Ah groaned and bit her lip anxiously.

Chills ran down her back from the thought that she might never see Kang-Woo again. She clenched her trembling fists and the light disappeared in her eyes. She approached Kang-Woo and caressed his arm.

“... Umm, Darling?”

‘Why are you touching my arm out of the blue?’

“Oh... I-It’s nothing.”

‘Your eyes are a bit too scary for that to be the case.’

“...” Seol-Ah lightly clenched Kang-Woo’s arm and continued, “To be honest... I want to forcibly take you with me and run away somewhere.”

“With my limbs intact?”

“... Pardon?”

“No, forget I said anything,” said Kang-Woo and smirked. He patted Seol-Ah’s head and continued, “You know that won’t change anything.”

Even if Kang-Woo were to run away, Bael would chase him to the very end. A fight against Bael was no longer a choice. The cycle would end only if one of them died.

“Yes. I know, but...”

“Don’t worry, Darling.” Kang-Woo kissed Seol-Ah. “I’m gonna win.”

“...”

Seol-Ah’s expression brightened. She smiled faintly and nodded in silence.

“Right, we shouldn’t keep Layla waiting. Has everyone else gathered?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Yes. Oh, we’re not meeting in the Hall of Protection. It’s going to be at... Balrog’s house.”

“Balrog’s house? Why there?”

“Because the angels are at the Hall of Protection.”

“Oh...” Kang-Woo nodded after understanding. “Then let’s fly there.”

He reached out his hand toward Seol-Ah, who grabbed it with an embarrassed expression. Kang-Woo reached under her knees and lifted her. Of course, Seol-Ah didn’t need to be carried since she had Seraph’s wings but take a damn hint.

Kang-Woo jumped up from the apartment rooftop and looked down at the city view under them. The streets of Seoul were *bustling* with people.

“I can’t believe that’s all fake,” Seol-Ah mentioned as she looked down at the streets filled with neon signs and people.

“We need to do at least this much to fool Bael.”

Anyone would be suspicious if the place they were about to invade had become a ghost town. To prevent something like that from happening, he filled the deserted streets with the *Key of the Demonic Sea*.

‘Slushy sure went all out.’

The Key of the Demonic Sea was able to transform into anything; its arsenal was not restricted to weapons. Kang-Woo had made Slushy create dolls the shape of humans and spread them throughout Seoul.

“...”

Seol-Ah looked up at Kang-Woo in silence. He was mentioning it as if it had been a piece of cake, but she knew how hard he had worked to create those dolls.

‘It goes to show just how important this war is.’

Seol-Ah closed her eyes as she added more strength to her arms around Kang-Woo’s neck.

“...”

An inexplicable uneasiness surged within her despite being able to feel his warmth from so close.

A boy was standing on top of a hill made of red sand below a burning red sky. He looked down with blank eyes at the enormous number of demons standing at attention in front of him.

He asked, “Is everything ready?”

“Yes,” Amon replied as he bowed. He lightly pounded his staff on the ground and continued, “Arakyle being killed by the Demon King after acting on his own was outside of my expectations...”

Amon frowned in displeasure. He had accepted Arakyle into their ranks because he said that he would betray the Demon King and join them, but he had caused a mess after acting without orders.

“But it has not affected the plan.”

Their army boasted immense power even without Arakyle and the Despair Corps. Their goal was to end not just Earth but all worlds of the Triad and to put them under the rule of the Nine Hells. Ending Earth would be a piece of cake.

“I have also prepared a trump card,” Amon expressed.

“A trump card?”

“Yes.”

Amon smiled, his wrinkled face wrinkling further. He caressed a black orb in his pocket; the soul of a demon was squirming inside of it.

“Hmm~” Bael turned around apathetically, having no interest in it. He looked down at his army as he flapped his legs. “I was a bit worried when the monitoring feature of the Law was blocked.”

“There is no need to worry. They are not prepared in the slightest.”

Amon smiled widely. They were the ones who held the initiative since the humans had no idea when Bael and his army would invade. Their victory was already set in stone.

“Once you get your hands on the Demonic Sea, all privileges of the Law of Titans will be transferred to you.”

“Hihihi!” Bael laughed as his shoulders moved up and down. “I don’t need that shit.”

Crack.

Bael’s head tilted at an abnormal ninety degrees and he stared at Amon.

“What...?”

“I don’t give a shit about what happens to the Law of Titans.”

“...”

“I don’t care about winning the war or making the Triad the territory of the Nine Hells.”

“What do you—”

“You see.” Bael twirled as if dancing. “All I need is to prove that he’s nothing.”

“...”

“Just seeing him struggling pathetically and powerlessly is enough for me. Everything else other than the Demon King is of no concern to me.”

Bael’s eyes glinted with madness.

“H-Hihihi!! Hihihi!!” He burst into crazed laughter as he stuck out his long tongue.

“Hey, Amon.”

“... Yes, Lord Bael.”

“Do you think the Demon King will be able to bear it... even if *that* were to disappear?” Bael asked as he hummed.

Amon firmly shook his head. “No. He... will not be able to bear it. After all, the Demon King is not the one who keeps the Demonic Sea intact.”

“Hihihi! Right? He won’t be able to do a thing, right?” Bael laughed as if making a fuss and trembled. “A-Aaaahh.”

He looked up at the burning red sky, his eyes filled with ecstasy.

“Hihihi! You’re nothing,” he said to someone who couldn’t see or hear him. “I was first, okay? Do you know that? I DID IT BEFORE YOU!!!”

Huff, huff.

Bael shouted to the point that he was out of breath and then cackled.

“Haaah.” He sprawled on top of the hill of red sand. “H-Hihi. Finally... I’ve finally made it this far.”

Much time had passed since he lost to the Demon King, regained his power, acquired the Demon God’s heart, and met the Demon King again.

“You laughed at me back then.”

Bael recalled the Demon King mocking him, saying that he was nothing.

Crack.

He clenched his fists so hard that his bones broke. Bael looked at the sky as he lay down on top of the hill. The burning red sky looked tranquil today for some reason.

“The calm before the storm, I believe it was called?”

It was the perfect phrase to describe the tranquility.

“Hi... Hihi. You or me, I wonder?”

The battle on the day of the Apocalypse would decide who was right.

Chapter 505 - Day of the Apocalypse (2)

Oh Kang-Woo and his comrades gathered in one place after the meal Layla had suggested every have together.

“Sheesh.” Cha Yeon-Joo sighed deeply and stared at Kang-Woo as if she was sick and tired. “How can you eat kimchi stew for our last meal?”

“What’s wrong with kimchi stew? It’s delicious.”

“You should seriously moderate that obsession of yours.”

Yeon-Joo grabbed her forehead as if she were having a headache.

Kang-Woo smiled and remarked, “The braised spicy chicken you made me was delicious too.”

“Wh-What?! I-I wasn’t the one who made that!! I-I just helped Seol-Ah make it because it would be hard for her to do everything by herself!!”

“Mm. Your consistent reactions... Teasing you has become one of my purposes in life at this point.”

Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction. Whenever he thought he was getting tired of it, Yeon-Joo’s tsundere reactions brought the fun right back.

‘Every single moment of it is fun. It feels fresh every single time.’

Kang-Woo smiled widely.

“Y-You son of a bitch...”

Yeon-Joo shook in rage with her face reddened. Layla, who was watching from the sidelines, took a bite of a fruit slice and giggled.

She remarked, “Hohoho. It seems you’re an S in front of Yeon-Joo, Kang-Woo.”

“Pardon?”

‘What S?’

“You’re more of an M when you’re with Seol-Ah and Lilith.”

“...”

“Are you perhaps interested in chains or whips?”

‘The fuck is this woman talking about?’

“He is! He said he was interested a while ago!” Seol-Ah shouted.

‘I’m not.’

“My, I knew it...! It seems I wasn’t seeing wrong, Seol-Ah!”

‘I said I’m not.’

“In that case, let me introduce to you this website, Seol-Ah. If you take a look at this bondage package...”

“*Gasp.* How indecent...”

‘*Stop it right now, you crazy woman.*’

“...” Kang-Woo pulled on his hair as he twisted around. “I don’t have an interest in those things. I am an advocate for normal and wholesome—”

“Hm? You weren’t interested in that kind of stuff, Kang-Woo?” asked Echidna, who was munching on an apple slice on Kang-Woo’s lap, as she tilted her head.

“What are you talking about?”

‘*Why does everyone keep perverting my tastes?*’

“Well, there were tons of stuff like that on your external hard drive...”

“...!!!” Kang-Woo’s eyes widened. He asked with a trembling tone, “W-Wait, Echidna. You couldn’t have...”

‘*Did you open it? The treasury containing the knowledge of the mysteries of life? The Ark that would save the world from its end?*’

“Hm! It looked like you kept it hidden well, but you can’t hide anything from me.”

“B-But I’d set up a password...”

“Kang-Woo, you need to think of a better password than 1q2w3e4r.”

“I-I heard this code is commonly used to protect classified military secrets!”[1]

‘*It’s uncrackable!*’

“...”

A heavy silence fell.

“Echidna.” Seol-Ah pulled Echidna by the arm with a smile.

“H-Huh? Wh-What’s wrong, Seol-Ah?”

“I’m also very curious about this external hard drive... Could you show it to me later?”

It felt as if freezing air was coming out of her mouth.

“H-Hm! K-Kang-Woo! I’m scared!”

“Me too,” Kang-Woo responded.

‘*Geeeeeeehhh!*’

“Let’s... have a long talk about this once everything is over, Kang-Woo,” said Seol-Ah, her eyes as cold as ice.

“... Yes, ma’am.”

Kang-Woo lowered his head to avert his gaze from hers, and everyone laughed.

“Man, is this what karma looks like?” Yeon-Joo smiled as if she had been redeemed and pounded on her stomach.

“That aside...” mentioned Kim Si-Hun as the laughter died down. “It’s... tomorrow.”

“...”

“...”

The air around the house froze from that one sentence. They had burst into laughter to force themselves to forget, but there was no way they could forget that this peace would come to an end tomorrow.

“Sheesh, Si-Hun. Stop being such a buzzkill,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“I-I’m sorry, hyung-nim.”

“No, that’s just how you are.” Kang-Woo chuckled and leaned back in his chair. “The invasion will begin tomorrow.”

“...”

The mood in the house fell dark because of how sure Kang-Woo was.

“Umm...” Si-Hun said to break the silence. “When this war is over.. I have something to tell you, Layl—”

“Hey, hey, shut that son of a bitch up!”

‘He’s trying to set a death flag!’

Balrog covered Si-Hun’s mouth with his hand in an instant.

“Mrp! Mmrp!” Si-Hun pushed Balrog’s hand away and shouted, “What the hell are you doing?!”

Balrog chuckled and answered, “I am just following my king’s command. No other reason.”

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo sighed and looked around.

He was surrounded by people whom he had made unbreakable bonds with after coming to Earth. He did not want to break those bonds— no, he couldn’t.

‘It’s a bit of a shame Uriel isn’t here.’

Kang-Woo had no choice but to leave Uriel out of the invitation since it would be dangerous to have an angel near Balrog and Lilith. After all, there would be nothing more of a pain in the ass than having internal troubles before the final battle.

'During the war... it should it be fine since I've stationed them as far away as possible.'

The war would take place throughout the entire city of Seoul instead of in a small area. Hence, there was no need to worry about the angels meeting Balrog and Lilith.

'No, even if they do meet, the war would be so hectic that the angels wouldn't have the leeway to find out.'

Kang-Woo turned to Lilith and asked, "How is the status of the barrier?"

"I've checked it thoroughly. A barrier that covers the entirety of Seoul will be erected as soon as it is activated."

"Good." Kang-Woo then turned to Layla and asked, "How is the defense line?"

"The mage Players and the angels have worked together to prepare a wide-area magic spell. We'll be able to deal considerable damage as soon as the battle begins."

"Are you sure it will be enough firepower?"

"I'm sure, with Seol-Ah's buffs."

Kang-Woo nodded. He couldn't fully put his faith in the Players and angels, but it was a different story if Seol-Ah was buffing them.

"What about the reinforcements from Aernor?"

"I've brought the entire army of Arnan!" answered Iris with her fists clenched.

Kang-Woo laughed unconsciously. "Even if the situation is dire, the entire army is a bit..."

"It's okay! No noble would dare act out of line, thanks to your purging spree of corrupt nobles!"

"Uhh, yeah. Sure."

'Is that something to say so brightly? Anyway...'

"What about the Church of Splendor?"

Yeon-Joo answered, "Well... I've selected volunteers after filtering out the ones who were vowing to stay even if it were to kill them. I don't think they'd be of much help, though."

Most of the devotees of the Church of Splendor were powerless civilians; not many would be of direct help in the war.

"It's okay. You're all we need," Kang-Woo mentioned.

Yeon-Joo by herself would be far more helpful than a group of nobodies.

“Ngh...” Yeon-Joo flinched and lowered her head.

“Right then, Balrog. You take Echidna, Halcyon, and the bag of bones to let loose on Bael’s army. Si-Hun, you stick with Guardians.”

“... Yes, my king.”

“Understood, hyung-nim.”

Kang-Woo stood up from his chair after getting their answers. “Okay, then. Let’s all get some rest for tomorrow.”

He turned around and opened the front door of the apartment with a dragon pattern on it.

“...”

Kang-Woo looked up at the night sky and thought about the dinner full of laughs he just had. He reached out his hand toward the sky and slowly closed it. His desire blazed so strongly to the point that the hunger starving him was dissipating.

‘For a tomorrow as great as today.’

Fwoosh.

Flames resembling a black sun burned brightly around him.

A hunchback demon with a staff stood on top of a red hill in front of countless demons standing at attention. Amon looked back at Bael, who was lying leisurely on the hill.

“Are you sure I can do it?” he asked.

“Yeah. I’m not interested in that kind of stuff,” answered Bael apathetically as he rolled around on the red sand.

Amon sighed and shook his head. He then raised his staff in front of the demons.

“Demons of the Ninth Hell.”

Bang.

A wave of dense demonic energy spread across the surroundings once he smashed his staff down on the ground.

He said with a voice as unpleasant as nails on a chalkboard, “The day of the Apocalypse has come.”

“Raaaaaaahhh!!”

“For Lord Bael!!”

“For the birth of the new king of demons!!”

The demons standing at the foot of the hill roared in unison. They celebrated the birth of the new Demon King.

“Today, the Triad will be destroyed and born anew in the name of Lord Bael!”

Sparks ran through Amon’s entire body. He had dreamed of one day seeing enough demons to fill the entirety of the Ninth Hell, standing together.

‘And...’

Amon slowly turned his head. Demons were not the only ones gathered here.

[How boring.]

[When will the battle begin?]

They were beings of worlds outside of the Triad, who had submitted to Bael and decided to follow him.

‘I’ll have to deal with them one day.’

They would be of use in Bael’s army at the moment, but they couldn’t be trusted in the long run.

‘Even Eilles cut all ties with us and ran away.’

Amon had granted Eilles the position of one of the Four Heavenly Kings due to his unyielding loyalty to Bael, but Eilles vanished after leaving a message that he would stop serving Bael about a month ago. For Amon, who was managing the army in Bael’s place, it was as if a sledgehammer had smashed the back of his head. The incident had crushed his trust in otherworldly beings.

‘Well, it matters not.’

Amon’s eyes glinted sharply. It would be a piece of cake to replenish their lacking forces once they won the war and turned the Triad into the territory of the Nine Hells.

‘And Lord Bael will be the one to win.’

Amon cackled as his shoulders moved up and down. As long as the Demon King possessed Ingrium, a branch of the corrupted World Tree, Bael’s victory was guaranteed.

‘Lord Bael will get his hands on the Demonic Sea. Once that happens...’

“... Titan,” Amon whispered.

He thought about the Titans who created and ruled over countless worlds beyond the Triad.

‘As long as those detestable beings disappear, I’ll be able to get my hands on the Primordial Knowledge.’

The Primordial Knowledge was what Hecate, the Titan who created magic, tried to acquire. Amon was getting heated just thinking about getting his hands on that knowledge.

“Demons of the Ninth Hell.”

Amon raised his staff high again.

Whooooom!

The black magic circle drawn on the entire red hill shone.

Split!

The air cracked and created a giant red Rift.

“Advance.”

“Raaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

Boom! Boom!

The demons of the Ninth Hell charged into the Rift as per Amon’s command.

‘Finally...!’

Amon’s eyes shone. He had been waiting for this day for so long.

“Slaughter to your heart’s content!!” shouted Amon with his arms spread out.

He passed through the red Rift to the concrete city.

“H-Huh?”

“Wh-What the hell?!”

The people on the streets expressed shock as they stared at the giant Rift that appeared in the middle of Seoul.

Amon cackled unpleasantly. “The pathetic screams of the humans mark the beginning of the Apocalypse!!”

Amon let the thrill take over his body and swung his staff. He created spears of demonic energy and fired them at the humans standing blankly. However...

Wriggle.

“Hm?”

The humans pierced by the spears turned into black mucus and splashed on the ground.

“... What?”

Only then did Amon realize that the humans filling the streets were not humans but dolls in the form of humans.

“What in the world is—”

“All forces.”

The Demon King enveloped in radiant splendor, floating in the air, raised his hand before Amon could comprehend what was going on.

“Fire!”

Rumble—!!!

A thunderous sound that signaled the beginning of the Apocalypse shook the entirety of Seoul.

“Shieeet, this is it! What a fantastic sound!”

The Demon King cackled as he looked down at the horde of demons getting engulfed by the explosions.

"Art!" He spread his arms out and shouted ecstatically, "Is an explosioooooooooon!!!"

SHIEEEEEEEEEET!

Chapter 506 - Day of the Apocalypse (3)

Rumble—!!!

A giant heat storm swept throughout the concrete city. The demons that were caught in the explosion were reduced to ashes and scattered. The day of the Apocalypse, which Bael's army had dreamed of, began with the wretched screams of demons.

"Kurgh!" Amon grunted.

The intense heat was penetrating his demonic energy barrier and burning his skin.

Sizzle—!!

Pus oozed out from his skin as excruciating pain attacked him.

'How...?'

Amon's eyes widened. He stared at the giant explosion that had swept the surroundings. Such firepower could not have been possible unless the humans had prepared in advance for the invasion of Bael's army.

'They must have found out about the day of the Apocalypse...!'

That was the only possible explanation.

"Gaaaahhh!" Amon groaned as unpleasantly as nails on a chalkboard.

He gripped his staff tightly and hunched back even more.

"Tent of Evil!" he chanted.

Amon had no idea how the Demon King acquired information about the day of the Apocalypse, but he did not have the leeway to think about it.

Crackle—!

A black tent spread out in front of Amon and covered Bael's army, deflecting the barrage of light rays from the mage Players and the angels.

"Whoa, the fuck? You've gotten pretty strong in the time I haven't seen you!" said Oh Kang-Woo, looking down at the black tent.

Amon was well-known in Hell as a demonic scholar even during Kang-Woo's days as the Demon King, but his strength was only in academics; he was of no threat whatsoever combat-wise. However, seeing Amon single-handedly blocking the barrage of attacks from Players and angels, he was no longer the weakling scholar whom Kang-Woo knew.

"Tsk, tsk." Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and shook his head in disappointment. "This is why power balancing is important. Make someone too overpowered and the author is forced to power everyone up like it's some clearance sale."

"Kurgh!"

"You think so too, right, Amon? If you were to be set up as nothing but a scholar, you should've stayed that way. How does it make any sense for the story if you just power up out of nowhere?"

"Shut up, Demon King!!!"

"And one more thing, dammit. What is a mastermind-in-the-shadows character like you doing in the vanguard? Huh? Why is a mage like you the first to come out?"

'You Galdalf?'

"Guh..."

Blood vessels bulged from Amon's forehead. He had seen the frivolous side of the Demon King many times, but he couldn't help but surge with rage now that he was the target of ridicule.

"*Huff, huff,*" Amon panted heavily.

He raised his staff and stomped his foot.

Boom!

A massive wave of demonic energy spread out in all directions like a rock dropped into a pond. The wave began to push back the barrage of attacks.

"Man, you sure are going all out for a frail son of a bitch." Kang-Woo crossed his arms and looked down leisurely at Amon. "Now, then." He slowly raised his hand and smiled crookedly. "Try blocking this."

He pressed a button on his earbud communication device, made by Khadgar's blood, sweat, and tears.

"Darling."

- Yes, Kang-Woo.

"Cast the buffs."

After his concise instruction, a massive pillar of light shot up into the sky from where the barrage of light was coming from.

"That's..." Amon slurred with his eyes widened. He knew exactly what the twelve wings overlapped with the pillar of light signified. He hurriedly shouted, "Disperse!! Disperse right now!!!"

The army of demons, who were marching in formation like highly-trained soldiers, clumsily scattered as per Amon's command. Their airtight formation crumbled almost instantly.

"Right, here comes another one!" Kang-Woo cackled and spread out his arms widely. "Art!!!"

Whoooooom!!

Mana, incomparable to the amount from before, poured from the defense line once Han Seol-Ah's buffs were cast.

"Is an explosiooooooooooon!"

Rumble—!

The magic circle that the mage Rankers and angels spent an entire month creating brightly shone blue.

"Kyahahahahahaha!!" A blonde angel standing at the center of the magic circle with a bottle of alcohol in one hand laughed madly.

It was Gabriel, the archangel who had worked the hardest to make the magic circle.

"So these are Lady Seraph's buffs, huh?! This is just cheating!!"

Gabriel's face reddened as she trembled. Kang-Woo had been hiding the fact that Seraph's soul was lying dormant within Seol-Ah, but he revealed it in advance so that there would be no chaos during the final battle. However, this was the first time Seol-Ah directly revealed her power.

Gabriel burst into laughter as she felt the extraordinary effects of Seol-Ah's buffs. "Kyahahahaha! I thought this girlie only had her breasts going for her, but she had something even more amazing!"

"Ah, u-umm... P-Please don't suddenly touch my breasts..."

"Hihihi! Okay, okay. Right, then!"

Gabriel, who had been feeling up Seol-Ah, sprouted her wings, threw aside her bottle of alcohol, and narrowed her eyes sharply.

"Those tainted by darkness," she said coldly, unlike how much she was laughing a few seconds ago.

The Players and angels around her placed their hands on the magic circle.

Gabriel stared coldly at Bael's army and declared, "Receive the judgment of light."

Rumble—!!

Rays of light poured down like rainfall from the shining magic circle.

Kang-Woo frowned as he stared at Gabriel standing at the center of the magic circle.

"That bitch, how dare she lay her hands on my Darling...?"

He wanted nothing more than to smack her on the back of the head this instant, but it was not the time.

"What the...?! Are you planning on wiping out the entire continent?!" Amon shouted as he was just barely blocking the light rays.

Kang-Woo smirked. As Amon had said, the barrage of light rays was powerful enough to wipe out not just Seoul but the entire Korean Peninsula.

"You think I don't know that?" Kang-Woo said.

"... What?"

Amon frowned and looked around. The light rays were reflecting off of the barrier surrounding the entirety of Seoul and falling on the demons. It was as if a flamethrower was being used in a small room. The energy trapped within the barrier was destroying everything inside.

"Kurghhh!!"

Amon aggressively bit his lip.

'I have to destroy that magic circle first.'

They couldn't endure the barrage of attacks for much longer.

Amon raised his staff and chanted, "Zazas, zazas, nasatanada zazas."

"Mm, it kinda looks like our roles are reversed."

Kang-Woo tilted his head and looked down at Amon, who was doing his best to block the rain of attacks.

'I feel like the villain.'

Amon, who was blocking the barrage as he chanted spells, looked more like a hero protecting his comrades than a demon trying to end the world.

"Well, not like it was any different before."

Kang-Woo laughed as he looked down at the demons scattering all over the place like flies.

'Not a bad start.'

Amon being in the vanguard worked in their favor. A mage needed time and safety to display their full potential; if Amon had cast magic from a safe space at the rear, they would not have been able to deal this much damage to Bael's army.

'But...'

Guardians still did not have the upper hand despite dealing considerable damage to Bael's forces.

'This is only the beginning.'

They had overpowered the demons using the element of surprise, but it was short-lived.

'Here they come.'

Kang-Woo slowly turned around and saw ancient demonic beasts over twenty meters tall running out of the Rift.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!!!"

The ancient demonic beasts used their extraordinary physical prowess to charge right through the barrage of light rays.

'It's not enough.'

Although a few demonic beasts died from being unable to handle the barrage, the demons began their charge by using the demonic beasts as their shield.

"For Lord Bael!!!"

"For the Apocalypse!!!"

The demons who managed to get out of the barrage's range flew toward the defense line. Kang-Woo gripped Ingrium on his waist as he stared at them.

"... No."

He shook his head after some thought. Taking action himself would certainly tilt the momentum in the favor of Earth's forces.

'But Bael has yet to make an appearance.'

He and Bael were the ones who would decide who would win or lose. As long as Bael was keeping himself hidden, Kang-Woo couldn't take reckless action either.

'I need to dissociate myself from those small fry.'

Kang-Woo needed to keep his focus on Bael.

'And...'

Kang-Woo smiled; he had already prepared a method to wipe out the demons flying toward the defense line.

"Destroy that magic circle first!!"

Several thousand demons had flown out of the range of the barrage. There were so many that they covered the sky.

[Gods of Olympus.]

Just then, Gaia walked out from the defense line. Behind her were other gods, who had manifested into Earth, glaring at the demons with weapons in hand.

[Bring down judgment on the forces of evil who have dared to set foot on the Triad!]

The gods of Olympus flew up toward the swarm of demons who had covered the sky. There were not many of them due to Bael's attack on Olympus, but each of them possessed Deific Essence.

Boom—!!

"Gaaaaaahhh!"

"Arghhh!"

The gods of Olympus flew right into the swarm of demons, the Deific Essence barrier protecting them, and began to tear the demons apart.

"Kuh." Amon frowned. He clenched his staff and shouted, "ingest the horn powder!"

Every demon raised the pouch hanging from their necks and poured its contents into their mouths.

Whooooo!!

Explosive demonic energy filled the sky.

[Kurgh...] Gaia grimaced. [So this is the power of Deicide.]

Just as Kang-Woo had told her, the demons had prepared a way to fight against those with Deific Essence.

Gaia stretched out her arm and shouted, [Fall back!]

It was impossible to slaughter the demons one-sidedly as they were doing before now that the demons possessed the power of Deicide.

"Raaaaaahhh!!"

The demons roared ferociously and flew down to the defense line once the gods of Olympus retreated. It looked as if the night sky was falling on the ground.

"E-Eek!"

"Wh-What should we do?!"

The Players who were infusing mana into the magic circle looked around frantically.

"Stay focused on maintaining the magic circle!" Gabriel commanded.

However, the panic that had already been spread did not die down. No human could stay calm when a swarm of demons were flying down on them. The panic spread to the angels as well.

Clatter.

Just then, red chains enveloped the magic circle like a dome.

"Red Lotus, Eighth Form."

Step, step.

A slender woman with red hair spread out her arms and stood at the center of the magic circle.

Clatter—!

The hundreds of chains squirmed as if they were alive with each step the woman took.

"Red Lotus Kaleidoscope."

Swoosh—!!!

The red chains in the shape of a dome shot at the demons. The chains, which possessed the power of Deicide like the demons who ingested the horn powder, tore the demons apart.

"Finally..."

Cha Yeon-Joo clenched her fists as her shoulders trembled.

"Finally...!"

She pumped her fists into the air.

"I finally get a badass scene!!!"

Her sorrow, which had been built up from constant teasing by the Demon King, burst out all at once.

Chapter 507 - Day of the Apocalypse (4)

Grind—!!

The chilling sound of meat being ground in a mixer echoed. The demons wrapped by the red chains burst into little pieces. Black blood poured like rain.

"Haaa, haaa," Cha Yeon-Joo panted heavily.

'Maybe I was a bit too greedy.'

Although it was an emergency, she had used far too big of a technique to wipe out the demons. Yeon-Joo staggered momentarily due to mana exhaustion.

"Yeon-Joo!" shouted Han Seol-Ah, who was maintaining the buffs.

"Don't worry about me!" replied Yeon-Joo as she shook her head.

Seol-Ah's buffs were necessary to keep the power of the light rays as they were. Yeon-Joo couldn't allow Seol-Ah to stop the buffs just for her.

"Grrr! Die, human woman!!!"

A demon charged out of the storm of chains and swung his hammer at Yeon-Joo's head with enough force to kill her instantly. Yeon-Joo tumbled backward to dodge the hammer and extended her arm.

Clatter!

Red chains shot out of her wrist wrapped around the hammer.

"Huup!"

Yeon-Joo lightly jumped.

"Foolish girl!"

The demon with the hammer smiled. Wrapping chains around a hammer that could be swung with enough force to kill her instantly was just asking to die.

Whoosh!

The chains were pulled taut and Yeon-Joo shot up into the air.

"Die!!!"

The demon swung Yeon-Joo all over the place and then swung the hammer down.

Boom—!

The force of impact made a crater on the ground.

"Hm?"

The demon's eyes widened. The woman, whom he thought would have become paste after being smashed into the ground, was nowhere to be seen.

"Over here, bastard."

Tap.

Yeon-Joo had instantly unraveled the chains around the demon's hammer and landed on the demon's neck. She then wrapped her chains around the neck of the five-meter-tall demon.

"Red Lotus, Fifth Form."

Clatter—!!

Chains spread out like a spider web with the demon as the epicenter and wrapped around other demons in its area as they slithered across the ground like a snake.

"Spider Wrestling."

The chains spread out like a spider web and connected every demon in its radius.

"Enough of your tricks!"

The demon with the hammer tried to shake off the chains wrapped around him.

"Gaaaaaahhh!!!"

"S-Stop, dammit!!!"

The chains connecting the demons were pulled along the demon's movements. The sharp thorns on the chains sunk into the demons' flesh and tore it apart.

"Heh, go as wild as you want," said Yeon-Joo as she snorted and jumped off of the demon's neck.

"D-Dammit!"

The more the demons tried to shake off the chains, the deeper the chains' thorns dug into them. They were given no choice but to stay in place.

"Now then, that should more or less take care of them..." Yeon-Joo expressed satisfaction after restraining the demons who had reached the magic circle and turned around. "... Shit."

However, there were just as many demons flying toward the magic circle. Although the barrage of light rays continued, countless demons were also charging out of the Rift. Not just that, even more demons were escaping the barrage area using the ancient demonic beasts as meat shields and were flying toward the defense line.

'There's no end to them.'

Although Yeon-Joo specialized in dealing with many enemies at once, not even she could deal with an endless number of demons by herself.

"Grrrr!"

On top of that, the ancient demonic beasts who managed to charge through the barrage were running straight to the defense line. Each of them was easily over twenty meters tall.

'I can't stop them.'

The demonic beasts did not possess the power of Deicide, but their baseline level of physical strength was far too high for Yeon-Joo to handle.

"... Shit," Yeon-Joo cursed.

"Grrrrrr!"

The giant ancient demonic beasts shook their bodies and whipped their tails. Yeon-Joo hurriedly shot her chains at them.

Clunk!

"Ngh!"

Yeon-Joo had used so many chains when dealing with the demons; her bracelets became heavy and the chains shooting toward the demonic beasts fell lifelessly on the ground.

"Dammit!" she cursed and prepared to retreat.

Spark! Crackle—!!

Just then, blue lightning struck the demonic beasts' tails.

"Red-hair! We can't hold the line any longer!" shouted Uriel.

"... Who are you calling red-hair, brat?"

"What? Brat? I've lived ten times longer than you!"

"Hmph, if you look like a brat, then you're a brat."

"You obnoxious human...!"

Yeon-Joo and Uriel glared at each other.

"Both of you, please calm down," said Michael as he landed between them and sighed.

"... Sorry. This isn't the time." Yeon-Joo lowered her head and backed down. "Urgh... there's no end to them."

She stared at Bael's army as if she were sick and tired of them. Each demon was powerful, but the bigger issue was their endless numbers. An enormous number of demons were charging at the defense line like a swarm of bees trying to protect their nest.

'This is bad.'

They were protecting the defense line the best they could, but they no longer had the strength to.

'But if we were to fall back...'

Yeon-Joo looked back to see the Players and angels pouring their mana into the magic circle. They were already exhausted; if she were to retreat, everyone here would be torn apart by the demons.

"..."

Yeon-Joo clenched her fists tightly. She had no choice but to protect everyone here with her life.

- Ah, ahh, can you hear me?

Just then, Yeon-Joo heard a voice from her communication device in her ear.

"K-Kang-Woo?"

- Yeah.

"Can you send Si-Hun here? I don't think we can hold out much longer."

- Fall back.

"... What? F-Fall back?"

- Yeah. Give up on the defense line.

"Wh-What the hell are you talking about?!" shouted Yeon-Joo, her eyes widened.

Abandoning the defense line was no different from leaving everyone here to die.

- Don't worry.

Yeon-Joo heard Kang-Woo chuckle.

- I've already prepared an escape route for them.

"But if you do that, the magic circle will..." Yeon-Joo slurred as she looked back at the magic circle.

- It's fine.

"... It is?"

- Yeah. After all...

Kang-Woo cackled menacingly.

- That magic circle was bait from the very beginning.

"..." Yeon-Joo remained silent.

Hearing that, she felt as if she had been hit on the back of her head.

'This magic circle was bait?'

Based on the details of the plan she was given, this magic circle needed to be protected at all costs, so she did her best to protect it. But it was bait all along?

"Why are you deceiving even your allies?!" Yeon-Joo shouted as she frowned angrily.

If the magic circle was bait, then it meant the forces stationed here were all bait as well.

- Because...

Kang-Woo snickered from across the communication device.

- That would make you more desperate.

"..." Yeon-Joo was left with her mouth agape. She slapped her forehead. "You son of a..."

She thought that Kang-Woo was the shittiest person in the world.

"..."

However, she realized that he was that kind of person from the start.

'No wonder the System called him the God of fucking Splendor.'

Yeon-Joo clicked her tongue and shook her head.

"So, what do you need me to do?" she asked.

- You'll see three blue crystal orbs at the center of the magic circle. Just infuse mana into them.

"... Got it." Yeon-Joo nodded and turned around. She shouted at the angels and Players, "Everyone, get in the magic circle!!"

She reached the center of the magic circle and found the three blue crystal orbs.

"Fuuu."

She infused mana into them as Kang-Woo instructed.

Whooooom!!

"This is..."

"Wh-What's happening?"

Blinding light poured out of the magic circle and enveloped everything in its radius. The Players and angels above the magic circle vanished as if they dissipated into thin air.

"Now!"

"Destroy the magic circle!"

The demons, seeing that the forces protecting the magic circle had retreated, charged at the magic circle as they roared.

"Shit! Run away, you idiots!!" Amon shouted.

The demons looked back at Amon in confusion. He had commanded them to destroy the magic circle, but now he was commanding them to run away.

"It's a trap!! Get away from there right now!" Amon yelled.

"Pfft!" Kang-Woo laughed, unable to hold it in. "It's too late."

He licked his lips and snapped his fingers.

"Ah..." Amon muttered.

BOOOOOOOOM!

He reached out in desperation but was unable to stop the explosion of the magic circle.

"Bwehehehe!!" Kang-Woo burst into laughter, grasping his stomach. "Why would you even charge all together like a bunch of morons?"

Throwing so many demons at the magic circle to destroy it ended up being the worst possible decision. Kang-Woo cackled as he looked down at the demons who had been reduced to ashes.

"K-Kekeke. You sure thought things through, Demon King."

Amon clenched his staff tightly with his trembling hand. That was not all of Bael's army that was caught in the explosion, but it was still a significant portion; so many that the number wouldn't be restored for a very long time even after ending Earth and turning it into the territory of the Nine Hells.

"How very... very interesting..."

"Hey, hey."

"To think the king of demons would pull such an undignified trick."

"Hey, you crying? Hm? You crying for real?"

"Lord Bael would be terribly disappointed in y—"

"Bwehehehe!! This son of a bitch is crying!! Hey, guys! Take a look at this crybaby!"

"..."

Amon clenched his staff so hard that it could break. Blood vessels bulged from his forehead and he glared at Kang-Woo.

'He can only act leisurely for so long.'

The explosion had dealt a massive blow to Bael's army, but they were still going strong.

Boom!

Amon aggressively slammed his staff down on the ground. The red Rift grew bigger.

[So this is Earth.]

[Kahahahaha!! How long I've waited for this day!]

[This is our territory now!]

The otherworldly beings walked out of the Rift.

"Wow, there sure are a lot of them," Kang-Woo mentioned as he stared at the otherworldly beings of diverse appearances.

He crossed his arms and slowly turned his head.

Schwing!

Si-Hun unsheathed his sword and walked out as if he had waited for this moment.

"The Sirius Corps is ready," he said.

"Good."

Kang-Woo nodded. Now that the defense line was destroyed, the only thing left to do was to scuffle it out on the battlefield known as Seoul.

"Charge!" Si-Hun shouted.

The Guardians Players charged at the otherworldly beings.

Clang! Boom!

The number of injured among the Players rapidly increased as the battle went on.

"..." Kang-Woo stared at the red Rift with deeply sunken eyes. "Isn't it about time you crawled out of there?"

- H-Hihi.

The voice of a boy echoed in Kang-Woo's head as a response.

Chapter 508 - Reason For His Desire

- You've really outdone yourself, huh?

A boy's voice echoed inside Oh Kang-Woo's head.

Kang-Woo smiled faintly and answered, "I had plenty of time thanks to a certain dumbass, after all."

- H-Hihi.

A quiet crazed laughter echoed. The corners of Kang-Woo's mouth lowered and he stared at the red Rift coldly.

"Bael," said the king of demons. "Let's end this."

Crack!

The red Rift contorted and ripped open further. Kang-Woo heard footsteps from across the Rift and walked out a boy with black hair.

"Yeah, it's about time we did." Bael took a deep breath after walking out of the Rift. He looked around and cackled. "It's been a while."

He stretched out his long tongue and licked his lips. The corners of his mouth tore up to his ears, exposing his red gums and the sharp teeth that protruded out from them.

"I don't think it's been that long," Kang-Woo responded.

"I wasn't talking to you."

"... What?"

Kang-Woo frowned.

"Hihihi!" Bael cackled, having no intention of elaborating.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes as he stared at Bael. "Let me ask you something."

"Hm?" Bael tilted his head.

A question had been on Kang-Woo's mind ever since his reunion with Bael, and he was unable to find the answer no matter how much he thought about it.

"Why do you have the Authority of Predation?"

The Authority of Predation was what made Kang-Woo what he was now— no, it was pretty much a part of him at this point. However, Bael had it as well.

'There can't be more than one of the same Authority.'

Kang-Woo could use more than one Authority because he had absorbed the Authorities themselves with the Authority of Predation, but they were ultimately different Authorities; multiple copies of the same Authority couldn't exist.

"H-Hihi!" Bael snickered in exasperation. "You're asking... why do I have the Authority of Predation?" He spread his arms widely and continued, "Because... I was first."

"..." Kang-Woo wasn't following. "What does that mean?"

"H-Hihi!! It means exactly what it sounds like! I... I was before you."

"And I'm asking what that m—"

"I!!!" Bael stomped his foot fiercely. He cried, "I CLIMBED FIRST!! FROM THE FIRST TO THE NINTH HELL!! I CLIMBED TO THE TOP BEFORE YOU!!"

"..."

"H-Hihihi!! I suffered like crazy, you know? To live! TO SURVIVE!! I DESPERATELY STRUGGLED!"

Bael had crawled pathetically, miserably, and desperately.

"I ate, ate, ate, and ate again! And then I reached the Ninth Hell while you were still idling away in the upper floors! But why?! Why were you the one who completed the Demonic Sea?!"

Kang-Woo, a mere amoeba slower and weaker than him, managed to complete the Demonic Sea that Bael couldn't.

"..."

Kang-Woo's eyes shook. Bael's wretched screams etched into his mind.

"So, what you're saying is..." Kang-Woo stared at Bael as if he had never even considered the possibility. "You were... also a human who fell into Hell on that day."

Kang-Woo was not the only one devoured by the black Rift and fell into Hell.

'Ohhh. I see, so that's what he meant.'

Kang-Woo chuckled.

- It's been a while.

Bael had not been referring to Kang-Woo but to Earth, which he was looking around at.

'Yeah, I've heard about it.'

Bael was the very first demon to start from the First Hell and reach the Ninth, not Kang-Woo.

'And...'

He was also the first to kill a prince of Hell and take over his seat. Although the history was buried because of Kang-Woo's miraculous feats after reaching the Ninth Hell, Bael had also undeniably rewritten the history of the Nine Hells.

"Yeah, I was." Bael glared ferociously at Kang-Woo and gritted his teeth. "And I reached the Ninth Hell several times faster than you."

"..."

"You and I..." Bael shook his leg temperamentally and continued, "We are but vessels made to complete the Demonic Sea."

The Demon God had created Bael and Oh Kang-Woo solely for that purpose.

"No, I guess it wasn't just you and me," Bael mentioned.

"... It wasn't?"

"Yeah! The Demon God made countless vessels like you and me!" Bael gritted his teeth and mumbled, "And among those who survived, the one closest to completion wasn't you... but me."

"... Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled.

'So that's why that son of a bitch called me a puppet.'

Kang-Woo was nothing but a vessel to hold the Demonic Sea, destined for the Demon God to take over once the Demonic Sea was completed.

"Alright... I more or less understand what you're talking about now, but... so what?"

"... What?"

"You're making all this sound so fucking grandiose, but it just means you're nothing but a dumbass who wasn't able to complete the Demonic Sea, doesn't it?"

"..."

"If you were the best of us, then you would have completed it."

But the one who did was not Bael but Kang-Woo.

"..." Bael's eyes shook. He grimaced and temperamentally bit his nail. "H-Hihihi!! I don't understand... Why was it you and not me? Hm?"

He was the most perfect out of all the vessels the Demon God created, but he had ultimately failed.

"Why? Why? Why? Why?"

Bang, bang, bang.

Bael stomped his foot and shouted, "WHY?! WHY WAS IT YOU AND NOT ME?!!!"

Bael glared madly at Kang-Woo. There was only one emotion filling his eyes.

"Sheesh, I can feel your inferiority complex from here, you loser," Kang-Woo mocked.

He couldn't help but laugh as he felt Bael's intense sense of inferiority directed at him.

"You wanna know why you weren't able to complete the Demonic Sea? Isn't it obvious?" Kang-Woo stared at Bael with deeply sunken eyes. "It's because you didn't desire it."

Arakyle was right. Desire was what made demons what they were; only desire could complete them.

"I... didn't desire?" Bael muttered.

"Exactly."

Kang-Woo recalled the Bael he had met back in the Ninth Hell. He became the most powerful prince of Hell after killing Beelzebub and taking his seat as the Prince of Gluttony.

"But that's all you amounted to."

"..."

"You killed a prince of Hell and took his seat."

"What's so wrong about th—"

"And what did you do after that?"

"I..."

"That's right. You were..." Kang-Woo smiled. "Satisfied with that."

Bael stopped desiring after becoming known as the strongest prince of Hell and realizing that no one was his equal. He had given up.

"Unlike you..."

Kang-Woo took a deep breath. Unlike Bael, who was satisfied with the seat of a prince of Hell, Kang-Woo was never satisfied even after becoming the king of demons and completing the Demonic Sea.

"... How?" Bael stared at Kang-Woo in disbelief. "How can you be like that?"

"Because we desired different things." Kang-Woo chuckled. They were both vessels for the Demonic Sea but had different desires. "That's probably the difference between you and me."

"H-Hihihi!!" Bael laughed like a maniac. "So, what was it that you wanted? What grandiose thing did you desire so badly that you were able to get your hands on the Demonic Sea?!"

"Mm, well..."

Kang-Woo crossed his arms and thought about what he desired in the Nine Hells so badly to the point that he managed to gain the immense power of the Demonic Sea.

"I wanted... kimchi stew."

"... What?"

"Come on, man, didn't you miss it too? You're from Earth, too. I mean, I don't know if you were Korean, but the spicy soup, the sour kimchi, the white rice, and the thick meat..."

'I had more than enough desire left over even after completing the Demonic Sea, no cap.'

"What the fuck...?"

"I mean, there were some other things as well... No, a lot of other things."

"..."

"Women. Yeah, I wanted to see women, too. Let's see... Yeah. I wanted to curl up in some warm bed covers and read novels with the air conditioner blasting."

'What a life.'

Bael was left with his mouth agape as he stared at Kang-Woo.

"What?" Kang-Woo snickered. "You think they're dumbass reasons? You think they're pathetic?"

Bael remained silent but his fiercely blazing eyes were giving away his answer.

"Okay, then." Kang-Woo smiled and asked, "Would you have been able to do it?"

"What?"

"Would you have been able to make my desires a reality back when you were hailed as the strongest prince of Hell?"

"That's..." Bael slurred.

Kang-Woo's desires were impossible to make a reality in the Nine Hells. In other words...

"It would have only been possible by killing the seven princes of Hell, collecting the weapons containing the princes' souls, and getting the help of a demonic scholar knowledgeable enough to bend space and time."

No, it would have been impossible even with all those factors; Kang-Woo didn't know about it at the time, but he also needed to break through the defense system known as *Earth's protection* with nothing to protect him.

"..."

"Would you have been able to do all those things?"

"Well..." Bael's voice shook.

It would be a piece of cake for him now since he had the Demon God's Heart, Deific Essence, and even the privileges to bend the Law of Titans.

'But if it were me back then...'

If it had been the Bael who had taken the seat of the Prince of Gluttony, was satisfied there, and stopped desiring...

"..."

Would he have dared to even think about an absurd goal like going back to Earth? Would he have been able to continue desiring desperately for it and push through to the very end?

"..." Bael gritted his teeth.

"Right, then. You understand why I'm the one with the Demonic Sea now, right?"

Kang-Woo did not want to live as a demon. He did not want to stay in Hell.

"At the very core, I'm not a demon but the human Oh Kang-Woo."

"Human? Human, you say? Hihhi!" Bael grabbed his stomach and crouched. "No."

"..."

"You and I..." Bael pointed at Kang-Woo and then at himself. His eyes glinted with madness as he said, "Yes, we have never once been human."

"..."

Kang-Woo recalled the memory of when he was inside his consciousness.

- Do you remember the face of your mother?

He recalled what Demon God Bauli said to him.

- How could a normal human possess the Authority of Predation? Could a human that is nothing remain sane after absorbing such an enormous amount of demonic energy?

The answer was simple. Kang-Woo was never human from the very beginning. He had been a monster wearing human skin since his days on Earth.

'... I kinda expected that.'

He had expected that he was not normal ever since he used the Authority of Predation when he first fell into Hell.

"So what?" Kang-Woo asked apathetically.

"... You're not surprised?"

Bael tilted his head, unable to understand. Kang-Woo chuckled at Bael's reaction, which was the same as that of Bauli.

"What? Do you want me to be shocked? Huh? Do you want me to kneel in despair, saying shit like '*T-To think I was never human!!*'?"

It didn't matter whether or not Kang-Woo was human at this point. Even if he was nothing but a monster in human skin...

"Why should I give a shit?"

Whatever he was, he had lived, survived, and desired as a human.

"Can't I just be classified as a human if I did all that?"

Bael remained silent, completely flabbergasted.

"You've been going on with the exposition as you excitedly expose grandiose and dumbass hidden secrets like us being vessels to complete the Demonic Sea, monsters in human skin, but it doesn't change shit."

Whatever Oh Kang-Woo was, it did not erase the life that he had lived as Oh Kang-Woo. It was as impossible as erasing the world just by closing one's eyes.

Chapter 509 - I Knew You Would Open A Door

"H-Hihihihi," Bael laughed in a twisted way. He swept up his black hair and mumbled, "Yeah, you were always like this."

The Demon King had been this kind of person even when he used to crawl like a dog and lick Bael's feet back in Hell. No matter how humiliating a situation he was put in, he was always shamelessly prideful. He never broke nor bent down; he was always so relaxed as if he were always mocking his opponent.

'No.'

The Demon King was not like that at all times. Bael knew how to break that vulgar and shameless Demon King.

'You'll break soon enough.'

"H-Hihihihi!! Kihihihhi!!"

Bael's shoulders moved up and down as he stuck his long tongue out and cackled.

"..."

Oh Kang-Woo frowned slightly.

'What is this?'

An unknown sense of uneasiness ran down his back. He unsheathed Ingrium from his waist.

"Fuuu." Kang-Woo could feel himself calming down after grabbing the sword made with the branch of the corrupted World Tree. He erased the uneasy feeling from his head and said deeply, "Why don't we leave the chit chat here? We're not here to discuss whether we're human or not, are we?"

It was certainly surprising that Bael had been one of the humans who had fallen into Hell with Kang-Woo and that they had never been human.

'But that doesn't matter right now.'

The truth did not matter after all this time; Kang-Woo couldn't care less about an insignificant surprise twist. All that mattered right now was his battle against Bael.

'Think.'

Kang-Woo thought about ways to defeat Bael and stop the Apocalypse.

'... I shouldn't hold off on opening the Doors to the last minute.'

He had never opened the Doors as soon as the battle began— no, he couldn't because it was a trump card with a time limit. If he used it initially, he would only be driven to a disadvantage as time went on. For example, it was like a berserk mode that bosses used in games when they were in low health. Not opening the Doors was never an option against Bael, but it was far too inefficient to use it before the battle even began.

'But...'

Kang-Woo was prone to death when the Doors weren't open. He would die if he were beheaded or if his heart were crushed, just like all lifeforms.

'Should I shoulder the risk and put off opening the Doors, or eliminate the risk and choose an inefficient option?'

The later the Doors were opened, the better it was. However, if Bael was far stronger than Kang-Woo had anticipated, Kang-Woo might die just because he was adamant about putting it off.

"..."

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He still wasn't sure when to use his trump card.

'In the first place, I have no idea just how strong Bael is at the moment.'

The Bael Kang-Woo had met in Aernor was not strong enough for Kang-Woo to immediately open the Doors. It was more efficient to buy some time as they fought and find the perfect time to open the Doors.

'But...'

Now that Bael possessed the Demon God's heart, it was near impossible for Kang-Woo to predict how much stronger Bael had become.

"Hihi, what's wrong? Weren't we gonna fight right away?"

Bael stared leisurely at Kang-Woo, who simply gripped Ingrium tightly without answering.

"I guess I have no choice, then." Bael spread out his arms and slowly placed his right hand over his heart. "Open."

"...!" Kang-Woo's eyes widened. "Oh, sh—"

He quickly jumped backward.

Crash—!!

Black mucus poured over the area where Kang-Woo had been standing. Countless mouths contorted, broke, and tore apart the surroundings.

"How did you...!" said Kang-Woo in shock.

He then recalled what Bael had said.

- You and I... We are but vessels made to complete the Demonic Sea.

"Shit!" Kang-Woo cursed.

Based on that, it meant he and Bael were fundamentally the same— vessels made to hold the colossal power known as the Demonic Sea.

'In that case...'

It was not strange at all for Bael to be able to open the Doors as well.

"... I thought you said you weren't able to complete the Demonic Sea," asked Kang-Woo after just barely dodging Bael's attack.

"Heh." Bael smiled. "Yeah, it's not as complete as yours."

He nodded and raised his arm which had turned into black mucus and swung it.

Splash!

Black mucus covered in mouths shot at Kang-Woo. He quickly rolled to the side to dodge them.

"But I can also use it to an extent. Hihhi."

Bael burst into innocent laughter and stared at his hand hazily. Kang-Woo frowned.

'It must be thanks to acquiring the Demon God's heart.'

Bael did not open the Doors when Kang-Woo fought against him in Hell— no, to be more precise, he couldn't. Considering that, the only possible explanation he could use the Demonic Sea to an extent was because he now had the Demon God's heart.

'Because the one who keeps the Demonic Sea intact is... the Demon God.'

Kang-Woo did not want to admit it, but the Demonic Sea inside him could only stay intact thanks to the power of the Demon God inside the Abyss. It was only natural since the Demon God was the one who created the vessels. In other words, if a portion of the Demon God's power flowed into Bael, there was no reason why Bael couldn't open the Doors.

"H-Hihi. Kurgh!" Bael flinched. "Bleeeeeeghhh!" He suddenly clenched his chest and vomited black mucus. "Kurgh, urghhh!"

Bael trembled and swayed as if he lost strength in his legs. Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

'But it's not perfect.'

Although Bael could open the Doors, it was nowhere near as stable as Kang-Woo's technique. He wasn't sure, but Bael probably wouldn't be able to open anything past the First Door.

Crunch—!

"Kurgh!"

Mouths attached to Kang-Woo's arm and bit into it relentlessly.

Slash!

Kang-Woo severed his entire arm without hesitation using the Authority of Blades. The black mucus would never come off of a body part once it stuck to it; the only way to remove it was to sever the body part that it had attached to.

"..."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It would be pointless to stall for time and hope for Bael's Door to close. Not only was it highly risky, but he had no idea when it would end.

'No, maybe...'

There was a possibility that it wouldn't end.

'Because his Demonic Sea isn't complete.'

Kang-Woo couldn't keep the Doors open forever because the power of the Demonic Sea would grow so massive to the point he couldn't keep it under control and devour him whole. Bael's Demonic Sea was not complete— that fact might rather be what could allow Bael to keep the Door open and avoid the Demonic Sea from devouring him.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo sighed deeply.

He looked down at his severed left arm and raised his right arm. He did not have to think for long.

'I have to open it.'

There was no other way to face Bael. He slowly placed his right hand over his chest. Just then...

Zzzzzzt.

[A specific incantation is required to use the second effect of 'Ruler of the Demonic Sea.']

[The incantation is ??????????????????????????????????????.]

"Kurgh."

Kang-Woo's vision blurred. The system window which he hadn't seen in a while appeared in front of him.

'The second effect? An incantation?'

All sorts of questions popped up in his head. Even if he wanted to check what the incantation was, he couldn't because the letters were filled with static.

'What the hell?'

What was the point of an incantation if the letters were covered?

Crunch!

"Kurgh!"

Black mucus bit off Kang-Woo's flesh before he even had a chance to finish his thoughts.

'I'm out of time.'

He did not have the leeway to think about the second effect. He placed his right hand on his chest again and muttered, "Open."

Two Doors opened.

Fwoosh—!!

The surrounding area shook as the Flames of Voracity wrapped around Kang-Woo. A thrill traveled across him as he felt an inexplicable sense of omnipotence. He could feel the sea of demonic energy flooding into him through the open Doors.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo sighed heatedly.

It was only in moments like this when the Doors sealing the Demonic Sea were opened that the concept of death disappeared.

Kang-Woo turned his head and said, "Bael."

Although the duration he could maintain the Demonic Sea had increased thanks to his Twelfth Awakening Trait, he could still feel his sanity flickering.

"I'll show you what the real Demonic Sea looks like."

Kang-Woo smiled and stared at the incomplete and shabby-looking Demonic Sea. He couldn't tell before, but he could now tell after opening the Second Door how pathetic Bael's Demonic Sea was.

"As I've thought." Kang-Woo chuckled. "You're nothing."

He was sure of his victory. He could feel the power of the Demonic Sea spreading from his heart eating away at his sanity. No, it was more apt to say that it was melting away. Kang-Woo slowly raised his hand and the branch of the corrupted World Tree, which fell on the ground after he severed his right arm, floated into the air.

Fwoosh.

Kang-Woo grabbed Ingrium wrapped in the Flames of Voracity. The space around him distorted as he dashed at Bael, reaching him in an instant. He gripped Ingrium tightly and stabbed Bael who was almost half black mucus.

Pierce!

"Argh!!"

Ingrium went straight through Bael.

"..."

Kang-Woo frowned.

'What was that?'

Bael was not unable to dodge Kang-Woo's attack; rather, he did not bother dodging. He simply spread his arms widely as if he wanted to be stabbed by Ingrium.

'Something is...'

Kang-Woo felt uneasy and tried to pull out Ingrium. However...

Grab.

"Kihi! Hihihihihhi!!!" Bael laughed like a maniac as he clenched Ingrium's blade. "Pfft! Hihihihhi!! Yeah! I knew you would do that!!!"

Bael looked right into Kang-Woo's eyes.

"Yeah, yeah. I knew it. After all, you're smart. You're not an idiot. You're... You're... You're..." Bael mumbled as if humming. "Special."

He stretched out his long tongue and licked his lips. He then leaned his head toward Kang-Woo.

"..."

The two demons' eyes locked.

"I knew you would open a Door," said Bael with a smile.

"... What?" Kang-Woo stared at Bael, unable to understand.

Whoooooom!!!

Ingrium began to shine black.

"Do you know what the role of the World Tree is?" Bael asked.

"Kurgh!"

Kang-Woo tried to let go of Ingrium but no matter how hard he tried, his hands did not leave its hilt.

Bael continued, "It acts as a link between worlds. Then what do you think the role of a corrupted World Tree is?"

Wriggle, wriggle.

The black mucus pouring from Bael's chest and the Flames of Voracity wrapping Kang-Woo connected as one.

"It's no different. A corrupted World Tree... also acts as a link for something."

"Oh, shit—"

Kang-Woo grimaced.

Crush—!!!

A colossal hand shot out from Kang-Woo's chest.

Chapter 510 - Forward, Forward

Crush—!!

A colossal— no, something so big that no word could ever describe its size shot out from Oh Kang-Woo.

"Kurgh! Argh!" Kang-Woo clenched his chest and writhed in unimaginable pain. "A-Arghhh."

His legs swayed. He could feel something in his heart struggling madly to get out.

"Ahhh."

Something was being broken; it was shattering like dropping a glasswork on the ground. His vision was blurring and he was panting heavily. His heart was not beating properly. The boundless black sea was raging and pouring out through the cracked vessel.

"Hihihihihii!!!"

Kang-Woo could hear Bael's laughter. He was in far too much pain to even think that it was annoyingly loud.

'This is...'

He desperately held on to his sanity and forced the pieces of his fragmented mind back together. He looked inside his cracked vessel.

- At last! I can finally get out of this Abyss!!

Kang-Woo heard the bellows of the Titan born from the Primordial Darkness. He crawled out of the Abyss of the Demonic Sea holding him down and stood up. The power of the Titan was being transferred from Kang-Woo to Bael through the branch of the corrupted World Tree linking them.

"Kihi!! Kihihihihihii!! Ahhh, so this is it! This is the power of the Demon God!"

Bael burst into uncontrollable laughter. Kang-Woo fell to his knees. The black sea of demonic energy with no Demon God to hold it together was raging madly.

Crack.

'It's... breaking.'

Kang-Woo could feel something that was keeping him intact breaking.

"*Cough! Cough!*"

Fwoosh.

The Flames of Voracity wrapped around him were extinguished. Kang-Woo crouched and coughed up black blood.

"Heh, I'm surprised you're still conscious." Bael looked down at Kang-Woo in surprise. "I thought you wouldn't be able to handle it and go insane."

"Ba...el..." mumbled Kang-Woo as if he would lose consciousness at any moment.

He could tell what Bael did and what happened even while he was rapidly losing his sanity.

'The Demon God... jumped from me to Bael.'

Bauli had escaped the Abyss of the Demonic Sea and switched bodies using the link formed between Kang-Woo and Bael. Such a thing was only possible because the two of them were both vessels for the Demonic Sea.

"Kurgh." Kang-Woo bit his lip.

He could feel the Demonic Sea inside him falling apart. He clenched his fists. Kang-Woo was only able to trap the Demon God inside the Abyss of the Demonic Sea because it had been he who was acknowledged as the Ruler of the Demonic Sea, not Bauli.

'But...'

Kang-Woo couldn't become the root that held the Demonic Sea together because he was nothing but a vessel; he was but a puppet made to complete and hold the Demonic Sea.

"Sh...it," Kang-Woo cursed.

He was played— no, he had no other choice but to be played. He had no idea what Ingrim's true role was or that he was a vessel to hold the Demonic Sea. He did not even imagine that the Demon God, who was trapped inside the Abyss, would transfer from him to Bael.

'What should I...'

His mind was going blank. He frantically thought about a way to resolve this crisis, but...

"Cough! Cough!"

Kang-Woo coughed up even more black blood. This was probably what Qi deviation felt like. The rampaging energy of the Demonic Sea was tearing him apart from the inside. Demonic energy ran wild uncontrollably like water pouring out of a broken dam.

"Fu...ck," Kang-Woo cursed again.

He crouched as he coughed up blood. A single blunder— no, it couldn't be called a blunder. An inevitable disaster destroyed him with no way to resist.

- Kehehehe! It looks like the puppet finally learned its place!

Kang-Woo heard an elated voice!

- Hmm. This vessel is still incomplete, but... It can't be helped.

Bauli, who had entered Bael, clicked his tongue in dissatisfaction.

- Kehehe. At last... I get my hands on the Demonic Sea!

"Heh." Bael smiled. "What kind of bullshit are you spewing?"

- What?

"Hihihhi!" Bael laughed, his shoulders bouncing up and down. "Stay the fuck down." He stared at the collapsed Kang-Woo, his eyes filled with madness. He trembled in ecstasy and said, "Don't get in my way. Do you have any idea how long I've waited for this moment?"

Bael stuck out his long tongue and licked his lips. He had waited a long time to see the moment the Demon King break down after he took everything from him.

"Kihihihihihihihihihhi!!! I told you! I did, didn't I?! Hm? I was right!!" Bael spread his arms wide and shouted madly, "YOUUUUU!!! AREEEEEEEE!!! NOTHHHHHHHIIING!!!"

Boom, boom, boom.

Bael approached Kang-Woo, stomping his feet, and kicked Kang-Woo's head.

Bash!

Kang-Woo tumbled across the ground.

- Hmph. You are no different from that puppet.

The Demon God's cold voice echoed inside Bael's head.

- Do you think I will allow myself to be humiliated twice?

The Demon God cackled.

- If you don't accept me... you will also face annihilation as an incomplete vessel.

It would have been a different story for Kang-Woo since he was complete as a vessel, but Bael was incomplete; he was unable to keep the Demonic Sea intact without the Demon God's help. At this rate, Bael's body would also fall apart like what was happening to Kang-Woo and he would die.

"I don't care," the boy replied brightly with a smile.

- What?

"Hihihi! I don't care." Bael's gaze was only on Kang-Woo as if he couldn't care less about the Demon God or death. "As long as... I can grant you a terrible end... As long as I can throw you into a pit of endless despair... I don't need anything else."

Even his own life was of no worth to Bael.

- Wha...

The Demon God expressed shock. Oh Kang-Woo and Bael, two of the greatest vessels he had created, were both defying him.

"Oh Kang-Woo."

Bael ignored the Demon God's annoying screams and grabbed the collapsed Kang-Woo by the collar.

"Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, Oh Kang-Woo, OH KANG WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

Bael screamed as if he were desperate.

"OKAY! NOW, ADMIT IT! HM?" He shouted as if pleading. "ADMIT THAT I'M NOT NOTHING!!!"

'Please.'

"THE MISERY THAT I ENDURED IN THE NINE HELLS!!!"

'Please don't say that I'm nothing.'

"MY LIFE! MY EXISTENCE! MY DESIRE!"

'Please say that they had meaning.'

"Please..."

'Please, Please, Please, Please, Please, Please, Please.'

"Please... acknowledge me."

Bael fell into Hell on the Day of Calamity. It was a terrifying and horrific place. Everything there tried to kill and devour him. He had no choice but to become a predator to survive there. He did whatever it took to survive. He struggled wretchedly and desperately. He needed a goal that would extend his survival within the unending despair that was his life.

- I was chosen.

That was what he brainwashed himself to believe as he used the unknown power that was the Authority of Predation. He continuously told himself that he was chosen and special, which was why this horrifying Hell was but a trial.

He gritted his teeth and endured. He endured, endured, and endured again. That one sliver of thought extended his life as his body changed the more he devoured demons and as his mind slowly broke.

"Say it... Hurry up and tell me."

However, he had not been the special one. He had not been the chosen one. The life he had endured fell apart the moment the Demon King was born.

"TELL ME THAT MY LIFE WASN'T MEANINGLESS!!"

"Fuck off... bitch," answered Kang-Woo faintly as he listened to Bael's pathetic screams. He panted heavily and smiled. "In the end, you're... just a dipshit... who can't do anything... on his own."

Kang-Woo continued with a mocking smile, "Fucking hell... Are you some... sort of edgy... teen?"

Kang-Woo couldn't even laugh at how pathetic Bael, a ten millennia-year-old geezer, was, still trying to find himself.

"You're..."

'Your life, your existence, your desire, your life that can't even be acknowledged without someone's approval is...'

"Nothing."

"..." The light in Bael's eyes disappeared. "A-Aaaahh."

He pulled his hair and crouched.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!!!!" Bael screamed hysterically. "OH KANG WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

Eyes filled with pure resentment and madness pointed at Kang-Woo.

'Fuck.'

Kang-Woo grimaced.

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

Bael punched Kang-Woo, causing him to tumble across the ground.

Bash! Bash! Smash!

Kang-Woo could feel himself getting trampled on. His ribs broke and his shoulder blades shattered. He could feel his blood flowing out of his torn skin.

"Kurgh! Krrrk."

The blood gathered in his throat turned into foam and poured out of his mouth.

"H-Hihihihi!! Forget it. I don't need your pathetic acknowledgement anymore!! H-Hehehe!!"

Bael laughed as if he had completely broken. The kicks smashing down on Kang-Woo grew stronger.

'Dammit...'

Kang-Woo's consciousness grew fainter as the violence grew more aggressive. He wanted to do whatever it took to control the demonic energy tearing him apart from the inside, but it was impossible now that the Demon God, the pivotal component of the Demonic Sea, was gone.

'I have to at least...' Kang-Woo closed his eyes and focused. *'Close... the Doors.'*

Two of the three Doors were open. He needed to close those Doors first to have any chance at gaining back control.

Crush!

"Kurgh!"

"H-Hehe. How does that feel? Stings, doesn't it? Hihi!"

Bael twisted Kang-Woo's ankle to an unnatural angle. He then placed one foot on Kang-Woo's thigh and tore Kang-Woo's foot off with all his might.

Rip!

Flesh and muscles were visible as clear as day once the skin tore off. Bael grabbed Kang-Woo's kneecap and ripped it out. Horrible pain shot up from Kang-Woo's leg.

'This is... nothing.'

He had already become used to the pain of this level through molting and opening the Doors.

"Damn... it." Kang-Woo gritted his teeth.

However, the pain from the demonic energy tearing him apart from the inside hurt far more than Bael's violence. It was as painful as tiny sharp scales circulating through his blood vessels. Pain far worse than that of molting prevented Kang-Woo from focusing.

'I need...'

He needed time.

"Hehe. Now, why don't we move on to the other leg?" said Bael as he giggled in elation and reached for Kang-Woo's left leg.

"Heavenly Dragon..."

"Sky..."

Just then, two voices overlapped with each other.

"Flash!"

"Breaker!"

Kim Si-Hun and Balrog appeared from each side of Bael.