

M. in Hell 511

Chapter 511 - Forward, Forward (2)

Boom—!!

A slash infused with enough power to split the world in two pierced Bael's Deific Essence and cut him from shoulder to stomach. A giant fist smashed through the cracks of the Deific Essence barrier.

Clang!

The sound of hammering steel echoed despite having punched someone. Bael was pushed back slightly.

"What the hell?"

Bael glared coldly at Kim Si-Hun and Balrog. His expression was so stiff that it was hard to believe he was laughing like a madman earlier.

Krrrk.

Black mucus gurgled and the massive wound on his chest disappeared in a flash.

"Don't get in my way." Bael gritted his teeth and shouted, "DON'T YOU DARE GET IN MY WAY!!!"

Rumble—!!

The ground Bael was standing on crumbled. The surroundings shook as if an earthquake was happening.

"Kuh," Si-Hun grimaced. He could barely breathe due to the overwhelming pressure of demonic energy. "Balrog."

He clenched his sword and turned to Balrog, who threw aside his pendant and returned to his demon form.

"What?" asked Balrog as he stood between Bael and the collapsed Oh Kang-Woo.

"Run."

"What?"

Si-Hun lowered his stance and replied, "Take hyung-nim and get out of here."

Balrog clenched his fists tightly and stepped forward. "Nonsense. I will be the one to—"

"You can't stop Bael."

Si-Hun's cold words pierced Balrog's heart. Balrog's expression stiffened. Bael possessed Deific Essence; there was no way for Balrog, someone with no Deific Essence, to stop him.

"Please take hyung and run away, Balrog," Si-Hun begged as he turned to Balrog.

Balrog bit his lip, a sense of powerlessness weighing down on him again. He carefully lifted Kang-Woo and said, "I'll leave it to you, human."

"What the fuck... do you think you're doing?" Kang-Woo said with a grimace. He ordered anxiously, "Let go of me right now. *Cough!* I told you two... to deal with Bael's army."

"I am sorry, my king." Balrog looked down at Kang-Woo in his arms and said, "I will have to disobey your order this one time."

Wham!!

Balrog leaped into the air and sprouted his wings, disappearing into the heart of the city in an instant.

"WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?!!" screamed Bael as he charged after them.

Si-Hun stopped him in his tracks. He gripped his sword tightly and declared, "I won't let you through."

"I TOLD YOU NOT TO GET IN MY WAY!!"

Crash!

Bael aggressively swung his fist, shooting a cannonball-sized black mucus at Si-Hun.

"Kuh!"

Si-Hun quickly dodged the attack and fired a wave of sword energy at Bael.

Splash.

"What the...?"

It felt as if he were attacking a liquid. The black mucus wrapped around Bael absorbed the energy.

"I... I... I don't have time to waste on you," mumbled Bael in irritation as he glared at Si-Hun standing in his way.

Just then, the sound of a staff hitting the ground echoed.

"Please go, Lord Bael. I will be his opponent."

Amon, who seemed injured based on his tattered robe, stood between Si-Hun and Bael.

"You're..." Si-Hun's expression froze.

He had not expected a third person to join the fray.

'Shit...'

There was nothing more despairing than Amon joining the battle when Si-Hun needed to buy as much time as possible for Balrog to run away.

'I have to stall Bael, whatever it takes.'

Si-Hun charged at Bael with his sword in hand.

"No, you don't!" shouted Amon as he pointed his staff at Si-Hun.

A thread of demonic energy shot at Si-Hun.

"Kurgh!" Si-Hun quickly swung his sword to cut the thread.

"Lord Bael. Please hurry and chase after the Demon King!" said Amon, his voice filled with thick desire. "Take hold of the Primordial... the true Demonic Sea."

Although the Demon God had transferred to Bael, he still needed to absorb the Demon King's Demonic Sea to complete his own.

"H-Hihi," Bael cackled. "I'll leave things here to you."

Si-Hun was the only one in Kang-Woo's party who could even try to hold Bael off. If he were incapacitated, no one else could get in the way of Bael and Kang-Woo's precious time together.

"Oh... Kang-Woo."

Bael's eyes shone fiercely as he turned around. The skin of his back split open and wings made of black mucus sprouted from it. He ferociously flapped his wings and flew in the direction where Balrog flew off.

"N-No!" shouted Si-Hun as he stretched out his sword.

However, the hunchback demon in his way did not budge.

"Kekeke."

Amon raised his staff, his expression full of greed. He expended a considerable amount of demonic energy blocking the barrage of light rays, but he still had more than enough to face a mere human.

"A-Aaaahh." Amon stared at Bael flying further away. "The Primordial Knowledge..."

Soon, he would be able to get his hands on the Primordial Knowledge that he had wished for all this time.

"Foolish human." Amon raised his staff and pointed it at Si-Hun. He smashed the staff down and continued, "The Apocalypse is near."

"*Huff, huff,*" Balrog panted heavily as he flew across Seoul at a speed far past his limit.

"Bal...rog..."

He could hear Kang-Woo faintly calling his name.

He looked down at Kang-Woo and said, "Please wait just a little longer, my king. I will take you somewhere safe."

"Let me go, dammit... At this rate, Si-Hun..."

Balrog continued to flap his wings, defying his king's command. "I am sorry, my k—"

"H-HIHIHIHI!!"

The crazed laughter of a boy echoed before Balrog could finish his sentence.

"What...?!"

Balrog's eyes widened. Even if Bael was far more powerful than Si-Hun, this was far too soon.

Bash!

Bael caught up to Balrog in an instant and smashed his leg down on him.

"Argh!"

Tear!

One of Balrog's wings was ripped off, sending his gigantic red body hurling down to the ground.

Slam—!

"Kurgh!" Balrog landed on the ground while keeping Kang-Woo safe despite one of his wings missing.

"*Cough! Cough!*" Kang-Woo vomited black blood.

Balrog carefully set Kang-Woo down on the ground and glared at Bael. "How did you catch up to us so soon?"

"H-Hihi. The Demon King isn't the only one with subordinates."

"..."

Balrog frowned. He did not expect any demons to remain who could face Si-Hun, who possessed Deific Essence.

"Haaa, haaa. Move, Balrog." Kang-Woo got on his trembling feet with one hand on the ground. He grabbed Balrog's shoulder and yanked him back. "I have to... face him."

His body was falling apart due to the Demonic Sea's rampage... he was barely holding on to his sanity which could be devoured at any minute, but he was the only one who was a match for Bael.

"Go... away."

"..."

"GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE, DAMMIT!!!" Kang-Woo shouted.

Balrog flinched.

"I told you. You can't... protect me. I... protect you."

Balrog was weak; it would have been a different story if it were Si-Hun, but Balrog had no way of protecting Kang-Woo.

"If you stay here..." Kang-Woo pushed Balrog away with a trembling hand. He continued, his voice sounding like it would die out at any second, "You'll die... you fucking muscle pig."

"Hihi. You're saying something right for once." Bael cackled as he stared at Kang-Woo. He then looked to Balrog and said firmly, "The Demon King is right. There's nothing you can do here."

Balrog was far more insignificant than the human with a sword who had gotten in his way.

"Move." Bael glared fiercely at Balrog. "You are not worthy of being here."

He and the Demon King were the chosen ones. There was no place for a pathetic worm like that on their stage.

Balrog clenched his fists in silence. He could feel his king's hand on his shoulder. It felt like he was begging Balrog to get away and that he would die if he didn't.

"My king."

"Stop... fucking talking and just... screw off, dammit." Kang-Woo's eyes shook. "Please... Please go away. Y-You're of... no help."

Kang-Woo, who was trying to yank Balrog back with all his strength, fell to the ground.

"*Cough!* Kurgh!" Kang-Woo grabbed his chest and vomited black blood.

Balrog looked down at his king. He had no idea how his king ended up this way. "Bael."

However, he stood between his king and Bael.

"Your opponent is me," declared the demon without Deific Essence, to the demon with the Demon God inside him.

"H-Hihi." Bael smiled. "HIHIHIHIHIHIHIHIHIHIHI!!!" He burst into laughter as he rolled on the ground. "My opponent is you? Hm? Are you okay in the head? Ohhh. Come to think of it, you used to be Beelzebub's subordinate, right?"

Bael trembled ecstatically as if he couldn't be more entertained. "Hihihhi! Looks like you're gonna lose your king again!"

"Fuuu," Balrog exhaled.

He looked down at his king on the ground and then back at Bael.

'I'm surely no match for him.'

Even Si-Hun, who possessed Deific Essence, could only hope to stall for time against Bael. There was no way Balrog would be a match for that powerful demon.

'If...'

Balrog wondered if things would have been different if he had become Kang-Woo's incarnation.

'... No.'

He shook his head. He still would not have been able to stop Bael since he would not have awakened Deific Essence on his own like Si-Hun.

"Cough! Balrog, you fucker... Get the fuck... out of here, please."

Balrog could hear his king's faint voice.

He closed his eyes. He knew that he was no match for Bael. He knew that he needed to follow his king's order and run away.

- The king is the one who protects his subordinates.

Balrog suddenly recalled his conversation with his king.

"Hehe," he chuckled.

'There's no demon less demon-like than you, my king. You're probably the only demon who would say such a thing.'

Balrog burst into laughter, his shoulders moving up and down.

"What the fuck... are you laughing... about? Hurry up and—"

"You said that the king is the one who protects his subordinates, not the other way around, didn't you?" said Balrog without turning to Kang-Woo. "But you, my king. You have already protected me countless times. It's time for me... to protect you."

"Hihihi. Now, be a good subordinate and follow your king's order, remnant." Bael approached Balrog. "I don't have time to waste chatting with you."

His power was as boundless as the abyss.

"Hehehe."

Balrog laughed as he faced the black sea and took out from his pocket a pouch filled to the brim.

"You... that's..."

Balrog heard his king's anxious voice.

"Huup."

Balrog emptied the contents of the pouch into his mouth before his king could finish his sentence.

Whooooom!!

"Kurgh!!"

The demonic energy inside him ran wild as soon as he ingested the horn powder that temporarily granted the power of Deicide.

"Gurghhh."

It was about ten times as much compared to what Arakyle's subordinates were taking at the time. Immense demonic energy poured out from Balrog.

'It's... not enough.'

Balrog doubted he could be a match for Bael just by gaining the power of Deicide.

'Even just a little is fine.'

He did not even think about the possibility of defeating Bael.

'As long as I can buy enough time for the king to get back on his feet...'

As long as he could become his king's shield and be devoured in his place...

'That's all I need.'

"Overlord Armor."

Balrog summoned his black armor.

He looked back at his king, who was reaching out to him with his trembling hands, in silence.

'The characteristic of the Overlord Armor is...'

The more he bled, the more power the armor granted him as it absorbed that blood.

'In that case.'

There was only one thing he could do. Balrog slowly reached for his chest.

"Wha—"

Balrog could hear his king calling him, possibly because he had a bad feeling.

"What the... fuck are you... trying to do, motherfucker?"

Balrog did not answer.

Pierce.

His finger dug into the skin of his chest.

"Kehehe," Balrog chuckled.

- Save the pity show for TV, dickhead. Stop being a bother and fuck off.

Balrog went back to his first meeting with his king. He recalled his blunt manner of speech and his eyes. His king had given his life new meaning. He was granted a new desire and a new king to serve.

"Victory..."

Balrog closed his eyes and stuck his hand deeper into his chest.

Ba-dump, ba-dump.

He wrapped his fingers around his beating heart.

"... To my king."

Crush.

Chapter 512 - Forward, Forward (3)

"...Huh?" Oh Kang-Woo heard the chilling and hideous sound of something getting crushed.

"Bal...rog...?"

Kang-Woo called his subordinate as he was falling apart.

Tssssssss!!

The black armor absorbed all the blood pouring from Balrog's crushed heart and enormous amounts of steam poured out of its gaps.

"Grrrrrrr," Balrog growled ferociously.

The black armor was absorbing every drop of his endlessly pouring blood.

'This is...'

It was the only way he had as one without Deific Essence to face one who did possess it.

"Kehehe! Nice!" Balrog burst into laughter.

He could feel immense power flowing into him from the Overlord Armor, which absorbed massive amounts of his blood. He felt it was on par with Deific Essence— no, possibly even stronger than it. The fire in his eyes blazed fiercely at the cost of his life.

Tsssssssssss!

The white steam pouring out from the armor turned black.

"Heh, what's this?" Bael stared at Balrog with great interest. He couldn't help but laugh after Balrog crushed his own heart. He shook his head in disappointment and remarked, "Do you seriously think that will change anything? The result won't change no matter how many times you sacrifice that worthless life of yours."

Bael cackled. He stuck out his tongue and slowly walked toward Balrog as he licked his lips.

He commanded with his eyes full of madness, "Move."

"Kehehe," Balrog chuckled and continued to stand in Bael's way.

Bael frowned fiercely. "Do you seriously think the likes of you can defeat me?"

That pathetic being was not the star of this stage. Only those chosen by the Demon God to achieve the power of the Primordial had the right to be here.

"No, I'm sure I will lose," answered Balrog with a smile.

Even if Balrog ingested Behemoth's horn powder and powered up as much as he could at the cost of his life, he was still no match for that demon.

"But..." Balrog clenched his fists. "Just a bit is enough."

As long as he could be his king's shield, his king's armor... As long as he could die in his king's place...

"I'll stand here as many times as it takes."

Balrog stood tall as he stood in Bael's way. His massive frame with black armor over it made him look like a massive wall blocking Bael.

"So annoying." Bael glared at Balrog coldly. "Annoying, annoying, ANNOYING!!!"

He gritted his teeth and spread out his arms. Black mucus shot at Balrog.

"Fuuu," Balrog took a deep breath and lowered his stance.

Boom!

"GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

Balrog charged as he roared, burning away his life force. A mere demon without Deific Essence ran toward the demon with the Demon God inside him.

Tssssssss!!

The black steam pouring out of the armor pushed away the mucus. Balrog clasped his hands together to pierce through the mucus and arrived in front of Bael in a flash.

Slam!

He put his entire weight on his shoulder and slammed it into Bael's head. Bael's head exploded, but the black mucus gurgled and his head regenerated in an instant.

"You pathetic worm..."

Bash!

Balrog twisted his body and punched Bael's head, causing it to explode again.

Crunch, crunch.

"Kurgh."

Balrog grimaced. He looked down at his fist that blew Bael's head away and saw that it was covered in black mucus with countless sharp teeth over it. The teeth ground away the Overlord Armor.

Balrog stared at Bael's head, which instantly regenerated again, in silence. This was an unfair battle; no matter how many times he attacked, Bael would regenerate in a flash. No, Bael wasn't just regenerating. Balrog was the one who would continuously get injured just by attacking.

"Kehehehe," Balrog chuckled. "Very nice!!"

He was smiling even as sharp teeth were grinding apart his armor and biting off his skin under it.

"I get to train with an indestructible dummy!"

Balrog continued to swing his fists ferociously as he laughed heartily. There was no refined technique or feints to fool the opponent; he was just pouring stupidly pure violence like rainfall.

Bash! Smash! Crush!!

Bael turned into mush as he went through a cycle of destruction and instant regeneration.

"You bastard, enough of—"

Bash!

Balrog destroyed Bael's head again.

"Huup!" balrog grabbed Bael's leg. "Hiyaaaah!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He smashed Bael down on the ground repeatedly. However, Bael would not receive damage from colliding against the ground due to his Deific Essence barrier.

Bash—!

Balrog let go of Bael's leg and kicked him with all his might, sending Bael flying like a football and causing him to tumble across the ground.

Wriggle.

Bael's mangled body regenerated in a flash again.

"You..." Bael slurred in irritation. He shouted, "HOW DARE YOU, PATHETIC WORM!!!"

Wriggle!

Bael fiercely swung his arm, and black mucus surged at Balrog like a wave along the path of Bael's swing.

"Kuh!"

Balrog quickly jumped to the side to dodge, but...

Crunch—!

"Gaaahh!"

The black mucus devoured his left arm from the shoulder down. The Overlord Armor soaked in blood was nothing but scrap metal before Bael's teeth. Blood poured from his torn left arm.

"Kehehehe," Balrog chuckled. "Yeah, the more blood, the better."

The black armor absorbed the blood pouring from his left arm.

Tsssssssss!!

Black steam burst from the Overlord Armor.

"Raaaaaaaaahhh!"

Balrog stomped his foot with all his might. The black steam pouring from the armor gathered into a single point, and Balrog placed his right hand on it.

Rumble—!!

The black steam stormed around his right arm.

Balrog smiled and said, "Right then, I'll do as much as I can while I still have an arm."

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The ground shook with each step Balrog took. He, who had drawn out power far past his limits, charged at Bael.

"Sky..."

He twisted his torso, lowered his stance, and pulled back his right arm as far as he could.

Wham!

He smashed his foot on the ground, causing it to cave in. He swung his fist at the boundless sea with all his might.

"BREAKER!!"

BOOOOOOOOOM!

Bael quickly stretched out his arms and protected himself with black mucus, but Balrog's arm, which was wrapped in a storm of black steam, pierced through the mucus and smashed right into Bael.

Smash!

Bael's limbs were ripped into pieces, and he was blown away several hundred meters.

Crunch.

"Gaaaaaaaaahhh!"

However, the black mucus devoured Balrog's right arm, leaving him with no arms.

"Kehe... he," he chuckled as he staggered toward where Bael was blown away.

"A-Arggh," Bael groaned.

Wriggle.

His broken body began to regenerate but not as perfectly as before. His limbs were positioned abnormally as if pieces of a puzzle were forced into the wrong positions.

"SHIT, SHIT, SHIT, SHIT, SHIT!!!" Bael yelled angrily as he glared at Balrog, who was walking toward him with no arms. "What's with you...? WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU?!"

A pathetic, insignificant insect was interfering with the time he had with the Demon King, which he had dreamed of for so long.

"Kehehe. You're so noisy for a damn brat."

Balrog was still smiling leisurely despite missing both of his arms. Bael frowned angrily and charged at Balrog, closing a distance of several hundred meters in an instant, and swung at him with his fist.

Slam!

Balrog raised his right leg to block Bael's punch.

Tssssssssss!

The black steam pouring out of his back lifted him. He twirled in the air and kicked Bael's head.

"Kurgh!" Bael tumbled across the ground disgracefully. "Son of a bitch!"

Bael spread out his arms widely as he roared, forming a giant mouth that could easily swallow Balrog whole. Sharp teeth sunk into Balrog's flank and bit the entire area off.

Crunch!

"Kurgh!"

The black armor shattered. A third of Balrog's upper body was gone, blood and intestines pouring out from the torn area. He collapsed.

"Fuuu, why is a nobody like you even getting in my way?"

Bael frowned and clicked his tongue. He walked past Balrog on the ground and toward Kang-Woo.

"Where... do you think... you're going?"

Balrog stood up as black blood and intestines poured out of him. He smiled widely and glared at Bael with blazing eyes.

"I'm still... standing here."

"Hah," Bael chuckled.

The insect, having lost both of his arms, almost half of his upper body, and no heart, was still in his way.

"Fine. If you wanna die so badly," muttered Bael as he turned from Kang-Woo to Balrog and glared at him. "I'll kill you."

Bael gritted his teeth and charged at Balrog. The nobody was already so injured that it was a miracle he was still alive. It would be a piece of cake to extinguish the tiny ember of life that was keeping him alive.

"Heh... Hehe," Balrog chuckled.

He lowered his stance and infused all of his demonic energy into the black armor soaked in his blood.

"Bring it."

He opened his eyes wide and stared right at death charging at him.

Tsssssssss!!

Black steam burst out of him.

Clank, clank.

Balrog could hear the sound of cogs interlocking inside the armor. The Overlord Armor, being infused with power far past its limits, swelled like a balloon.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!

A giant explosion swept away everything in the surroundings. The black armor shattered into fragments and flew all over the place.

"ARRRGGGHHH!"

Bael was blown away, getting swept into the explosion. His upper body was burnt to a crisp and was hideously deformed.

"A-Arghhh." Bael embraced himself and trembled. "It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, IT HUUUUURTS!"

Any injuries he suffered were supposed to regenerate in a flash but these injuries weren't. Bael screamed and writhed in pain. Pus was oozing from his hideous wounds.

Wriggle.

His injuries were slowly regenerating, but the speed was far slower than normal.

"Kehehe. At least..." Balrog looked down at the screaming Bael and fell to his knees. "I managed to... give him a good one."

He smiled and collapsed on his back. He could see a clear blue sky unlike in Hell. He turned his head.

"My king..."

He could see Kang-Woo crawling his way. Balrog's vision grew blurry and he closed his eyes.

"Balrog, you motherfucker..."

The demonic energy pouring from the Demonic Sea was still tearing him apart, but he managed to prevent his sanity from getting devoured after quelling the demonic energy to an extent while Bael was busy fighting Balrog.

"Haaa, haaa. Balrog." Kang-Woo placed his hand on Balrog as he panted heavily. "Answer me." He shook Balrog. "ANSWER ME, DAMMIT!!"

"Kehehe. I'm not... dead yet, my king."

Balrog slowly opened his eyes and looked up at his king. Kang-Woo's expression filled with relief.

"Haaa, haaa. Just you... wait, dammit. You're fucking in for it once this is over."

Kang-Woo bit open his finger as he cursed, black blood pouring out of it.

Balrog looked at Kang-Woo regretfully. "My king."

"It's not too late."

"It is, my king."

"NO, IT'S FUCKING NOT!!!"

Boom!

Kang-Woo slammed his fist on the ground. Balrog smiled faintly as he stared at Kang-Woo.

"What the fuck... are you smiling for?" Kang-Woo's shoulders shook. "Fuck... It's not too late."

Tears flowed down his cheeks and gathered on his chin.

"You can... still live. Hey... this isn't the first time something like this has happened. Remember? You were in just as bad a state when you fought against Lucifer. Don't you remember me saving you back then?"

"..."

"I can save you. I can, so..."

Kang-Woo moved his trembling hand and poured blood into his mouth. He suppressed his raging demonic energy and activated the Authority of Regeneration, but...

"My... king."

"Wh-What the fuck? Why aren't your injuries healing? Gimme a second. I'll try again..."

Crunch. He bit open another finger— no, he bit off his entire hand this time and made a fountain of black blood.

"Drink. Hurry up and drink."

"My king."

"JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP AND DRINK THE DAMN THING!!!" Kang-Woo screamed as if begging. "Haaa, haaa."

Kang-Woo panted heavily and lowered his head.

He said faintly, "Don't die. Please don't fucking die..."

Balrog remained silent.

Kang-Woo could see the light in Balrog's eyes disappearing.

"I don't know." Kang-Woo wept as he watched the light fading from Balrog's eyes. "I don't fucking know what I'm supposed to do anymore..."

The demonic energy from the Demonic Sea was destroying his body even at this moment. He was in extreme pain just from using the Authority of Regeneration. Kang-Woo had become pathetically weak after becoming unable to use the Demonic Sea.

"Kehehe. I guess after a millennium together... I get to see this kind of side to you," Balrog chuckled faintly. "You can just do as you have always done."

"What?"

"You told me... when we first met." Balrog smiled. "That you didn't give a fuck... about the demons of the Ninth Hell or the princes of Hell..."

It did not change what Kang-Woo had to do.

"Forward..."

Forward.

Thud.

Balrog's head fell to the side.

"Huh?" Kang-Woo's eyes widened. "Hey. Hey, Balrog."

He shook Balrog but there was no response.

"Hey, answer me." He turned Balrog's head toward him. "Answer... me."

His half-open eyes no longer carried any life in them.

"Please... Please, answer me."

Kang-Woo trembled.

"Ah..."

He slowly turned his head.

"Urgh... Finally done regenerating."

He saw Bael standing up with a frown.

"Hm? Is that son of a bitch finally dead?"

Kang-Woo stood up as his legs shook. "Balrog."

He looked down at Balrog's corpse with deeply sunken eyes and recalled his dying words.

"Okay."

Kang-Woo finally understood what it was he needed to do.

'Forward...'

To climb higher, to a place no one could ever reach.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo exhaled deeply.

He placed his shaking hand over his heart.

Chapter 513 - Open (1)

"Hihi, hihhi," Bael giggled as he stared at Oh Kang-Woo.

His scleras were black, his irises were yellow, and his pupils were stretched horizontally; they were characteristics that appeared when the Demon King, who usually looked human, was enraged.

"What? Are you angry? Hm? Are you angry because you lost your precious subordinate?"

Bael snickered as if he couldn't be more entertained. Seeing a side of the Demon King, which he did not show even after losing the Demon God and becoming unable to use the Demonic Sea, elated him more than ever before.

"I didn't think you treasured Balrog this much," said Bael as he licked his lips.

He knew that the Demon King treasured his subordinates but did not expect him to break down this much—he did not expect the Demon King to crawl on the ground as he wept like a baby.

"Hmm," Bael hummed regretfully. "If I knew you'd break down this much, I would've killed that human before I chased after you. Kim Si-Hun, was it?"

Bael was thrilled to no end just thinking about the Demon King's expression if he had done that.

Kang-Woo remained silent.

He looked down at Balrog's corpse. Boundless fury took control of him. His head was getting hot, and his vision was blurring. He wanted nothing more than to charge at Bael right this second.

"Hihihhi!! You're angry, aren't you? Hm? You can't hold back your rage, can you? But..." Bael smiled. "There's nothing you can do."

Bael was not afraid of a puppet without a puppeteer—a broken vessel, no matter how angry he got.

"Is that what you think?" asked Kang-Woo as he swayed. "Do you really think... there's nothing I can do?"

"Hm?" Bael tilted his head in confusion. The Demon King was far calmer than Bael had hoped.

"You're not angry? Hm?"

He thought the Demon King would be angry based on his black eyes; he thought the Demon King would lose his sanity and go on a crazed rampage.

"Why are you... so calm?"

Bael stared at Kang-Woo, unable to understand.

"I am angry," Kang-Woo answered calmly. "I'm so, so, so angry that I feel like I'll go insane at any second."

"But, you see," Kang-Woo stared at Bael coldly. "Life isn't a drama."

It wasn't a comic or a novel; going on a crazed rampage did not grant one illogical power that defied the law of causality.

"Reality isn't that forgiving."

No one powered up just by screaming in rage after losing their comrade. Kang-Woo had never won so easily and conveniently. He had abandoned everything and crawled pathetically and wretchedly to win; that was the only way he could win.

"Heh, so what are you gonna do?" asked Bael with a smile.

The battle was already won after the Demon God transferred to him. Kang-Woo couldn't control the Demonic Sea without the Demon God. He did not have anything close to the power needed to rebel against this despair.

"How are you planning to kill me?" asked Bael mockingly.

Kang-Woo looked down at his chest—the sea of demonic energy inside his heart, in silence. Waves of demonic energy were flooding into him through the two open Doors.

"Hihihi! If you don't close those Doors, you'll soon be devoured by the Demonic Sea!" Bael cackled. "Or why don't you just let yourself be devoured?" He stuck out his tongue and continued with shining eyes, "So you can kill your precious remaining subordinates with your own hands."

Bael cackled even more.

"Now, you should get to closing those Doors, huh?"

Kang-Woo stared at Bael coldly and answered, "I won't."

"Hm?"

"I won't close them."

Kang-Woo staggered as he thought about the thing he needed to do, which Balrog had allowed him to realize.

'I won't close them.'

There was no way to surpass Bael by desperately trying to close the two Doors and bringing the demonic energy to his control.

'If Bael is insane, the only way I can defeat him is to become even more insane.'

"What?" Bael's expression crumpled.

'He won't close the Doors?'

If Kang-Woo didn't close the Doors sealing the Demonic Sea, he would be devoured by the power of the Demonic Sea and be annihilated. His sanity would burn away, and his intelligence would vanish. There was no other way to stop the Demonic Sea's encroachment than to close the Doors.

'Despite that, he won't close them?'

"What are you trying to do?" asked Bael, a sense of uneasiness running down his back.

"You said I was a vessel to hold the Demonic Sea, didn't you?"

Kang-Woo smiled. As a vessel, he was broken after the Demon God left him and was breaking even more by the second.

"In that case."

Kang-Woo could no longer stay as a vessel to hold the Demonic Sea now that the Demon God, the one keeping the sea of demonic energy together, was gone.

"If being a vessel isn't good enough..."

If he couldn't climb to greater heights as a vessel, he would just destroy the vessel entirely.

"I'll just devour the Demonic Sea."

Kang-Woo snickered.

"What?" Bael's eyes shook.

Devouring the Demonic Sea? The boundless sea of demonic energy? The Primordial Darkness?

"What are you... talking about?" asked Bael, his voice trembling. "H-Hihi!! Are you saying nonsense like that because you still don't understand what you've been reduced to?"

Bael laughed in exasperation.

"YOU'RE...!!!" He gritted his teeth and shouted, "NOT SPECIAL ANYMORE!!!"

Now that the Demon God, the one who created and chose Kang-Woo, had transferred to Bael, Kang-Woo was no longer special. He was but a broken vessel who possessed the Demonic Sea.

"Haaa, haaa," Bael panted.

At least, that was supposed to be the case.

"What... the hell?"

'Why am I getting such a bad feeling?' Bael thought.

-Stop him.

Just then, the Demon God's voice, trembling as if he were terrified, echoed inside Bael's head.

"What?" Bael tilted his head in confusion.

- Stop that damn lunatic!

Bael frowned fiercely as the Demon God, whom he had been ignoring until now, screamed desperately.

"What the hell is so wrong?"

Bael couldn't understand why Bauli was acting this way just from the Demon King's bluff of devouring the Demonic Sea.

- H-He's thinking of unleashing the Abyss!

The place where the Demon God was imprisoned— the deepest point of the Demonic Sea where not even a Titan, a creator of worlds, could escape from.

"What do you mean?"

Bael had no idea what Bauli was talking about. The Demon God's anxious voice echoed inside his head.

- The Door... It's about to open.

"Door?"

- The Third Door is about to open!!

Bael turned to Kang-Woo.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and looked inside his consciousness.

Pour—!!

The sea of demonic energy was flooding out of the two open Doors. However, it was only the sea's *surface*; the deepest point of the Demonic Sea was not coming out of the two Doors as if it were *blocked* by something.

'Now.'

Kang-Woo walked along the raging sea of demonic energy. He looked down at the boundless darkness underneath.

'To devour this...'

He needed to pull out everything in the sea of demonic energy— he had no choice but to walk into the Abyss, where the Demon God was imprisoned, on his own.

Kang-Woo walked through the raging sea of demonic energy and saw the three Doors sealing the Demonic Sea. He focused on the third unopened Door.

'The Door that seals the deepest point of the Demonic Sea.'

Kang-Woo reached for the Door.

His hand suddenly stopped in its tracks. He had only ever opened two Doors of the Ten Thousand Demon Core. If he opened this Door, there was no turning back; he would never be able to close the Doors again. Once the Abyss began to flood through the Door, it would devour everything in its path.

Kang-Woo wondered if he could handle the Abyss, which even a Titan was powerless against. Would he be able to devour and bring it under his control?

Kang-Woo felt helpless; he was filled with hesitation as his hands were just a few centimeters from the handle. Opening the final Door in a situation like this was like pouring gasoline on oneself after they caught fire. If he failed and was devoured by the Abyss instead, he would lose everything.

His teeth clacked together. His fingers were trembling. He bit his lip and lowered his head.

'It's so heavy.'

The weight on Kang-Woo's shoulders... the eyes full of hope gazing at him... they were all too heavy for him to bear. He could barely take a step forward under all the weight.

- You can just do as you have always done.

Balrog's voice suddenly echoed inside his head.

- You told me... when we first met.

His faint dying words.

"Fucking hell."

Kang-Woo chuckled. His hands, which had been frozen, gripped the handle of the Third Door.

'Forward.'

Higher.

'Forward.'

To even greater heights.

'Forward.'

To a place no one can ever reach.

Creak.

Kang-Woo swung open the Door without hesitation.

[All conditions for Transcendent-rank Deific Essence have been fulfilled.]

[Breaking all level caps.]

Blue windows appeared in front of Kang-Woo. He closed his eyes. An incantation, the one filled with static that he saw before his battle against Bael, flowed into his mind.

'I see.'

This incantation was the key required to open the Third Door, which was why Kang-Woo, who did not have the heart to open the Third Door at the time, was unable to see it.

"Grrrk."

Slushy stretched and wrapped around Kang-Woo. The Key of the Demonic Sea on his right middle finger moved to Kang-Woo's chest and disappeared.

Clank, clank.

The sound of cogs interlocking echoed. The Key of the Demonic Sea entered the keyhole of the Third Door located at the center of the Ten Thousand Demon Core. The key slowly turned.

Kang-Woo slowly raised his head and stared at Bael.

"Stop!" shouted Bael as he ran toward Kang-Woo.

Fwoosh—!

"Kurgh!"

Gold and black flames blew Bael away. The flames around Kang-Woo spread and formed a black sun behind him.

"Ah..."

Bael's eyes widened. The black sun, formed by gold mixed with the darkness, looked like a giant *door*.

Kang-Woo walked as he swayed from side to side and stood in front of the *door* made of the Flames of Voracity.

"Ye who pass me," Kang-Woo chanted. "To the city of grief."

Fwoosh.

The Flames of Voracity wrapped around him.

"Ye who pass me." He slowly placed his right hand over his heart. "To eternal suffering."

Countless red eyes glinted from beyond the door blazing like a black sun.

"Ye who pass me, to the land of the dead."

The souls of boundless evil, which had been trapped in the Abyss, were unleashed.

"Malice dyes the sea black, creating me with endless desires.

"Only those eternal may precede me for I am eternal.

"Ye who pass through, abandon all hope."

Ten Thousand Demon Core...

All Doors, open.

Chapter 514 - Open (2)

Creak.

The Third Door, sealing the deepest point of the Demonic Sea, was opened.

"Huh?" Bael's eyes widened. He could see countless red eyes inside the black sun behind Oh Kang-Woo. He said tremblingly, "What the hell...?"

Chills ran down his back, and his teeth clacked together.

"What the hell are those...?" he asked the Demon God trapped inside his heart.

- N-No.

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

- Th-The Abyss has been unleashed.

The Door to the deepest point of the Demonic Sea— the link to the Primordial Darkness— was opened.

"D-Dammit! Do something!! You're the one who created it!" shouted Bael as he trembled.

The countless red eyes in the blazing black sun were staring at him. Bael's teeth clacked and he could barely breathe. He could only feel a void as if he was facing a horrible nightmare; he felt as if he were being sucked into an endless void.

- I-I can't.

"What?"

- I made the Third Door so that it couldn't be opened. From the moment I discovered the seed of the Demonic Sea and created the vessels to hold it...! I sealed the Third Door so that it could never be opened!!

However, the Door that was impossible to open was open in front of their very eyes.

"What are you... talking about? It's open right there!!!"

- Shit! I-I don't know either!

The Demon God had no idea how a mere vessel managed to open the Third Door but he was sure of one thing; once the Abyss was unleashed, no one could control the Demonic Sea.

- A-At this rate... we will all be devoured by the Demonic Sea.

There would be no winners or losers; now that the Abyss was unleashed, no one could *have* the Demonic Sea. There was no way to contain the Demonic Sea with no vessel to hold it.

- E-Everything... will be devoured by the Demonic Sea...

The Triad, the satellite worlds around it, and the Nine Hells... all worlds would be engulfed by the power of the Demonic Sea. All lifeforms would be trapped within the Abyss, including the Demon God who created it.

- D-Dammit!

The Demon God cursed. He had not killed Kang-Woo in the world of his consciousness because he needed to prevent the vessel from breaking and the Demonic Sea from running out of control like it was now.

- That lunatic...!

However, the vessel made to hold the Demonic Sea had unleashed the Abyss. The vessel broke itself and caused the Demonic Sea to go out of control.

"Wh-What... what should we do?" Bael asked tremblingly.

He had resolved himself for death before battling the Demon King, but this was not the end he wanted; he did not want to die without proving anything or being acknowledged by anyone.

- Accept my power.

Bael's gaze wavered. If he accepted the Demon God's power, he would be handing his body to the Demon God; he would never be able to get his revenge against the Demon King.

"That's..."

- Shit! There is no time to hesitate!!

The Demon God's screams echoed inside his head.

- I swear on my Deific Essence that I will not tamper with your consciousness!

The Demon God even gave up on his resurrection. After all, his resurrection would be pointless if he left the Abyss to be fully unleashed.

- Hurry up and accept my power!!

Bael bit his lip anxiously. "Fine."

He closed his eyes and accepted the Demon God's power.

Rumble—!!

Unfathomable demonic energy surged from Bael.

"Haaa," Bael exhaled heatedly. "So this is... the power of a Titan."

A sense of omnipotence spread across him. He felt like everything was beneath him; they felt pathetic.

"H-Hihihi," Bael giggled. "Yeah, with this... I think I can do it."

He had a feeling that he could win even against the Abyss of the Demonic Sea with this power.

"Is that... so?" Kang-Woo asked as he stared at Bael with a smile.

Bael's eyes widened. "You... H-How are you still conscious...?"

Bael stared at Kang-Woo, whose ego was still intact even after opening the Third Door, in disbelief.

"Who knows...? I'm... not sure... either," Kang-Woo stammered as he swayed from side to side. "A- Arghhh."

Kang-Woo clenched his head and crouched. He could feel the sea of demonic energy pouring out of the three Doors, trying to devour his sanity.

'Not yet.'

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth. He couldn't lose consciousness yet. He still had something he needed to do.

- My... king.

Balrog's dying words and how the light slowly disappeared from his eyes were engraved in his mind.

"A-Aaaahh." His unfathomable rage resisted the Demonic Sea's takeover. He hummed, "Bael, Bael, Bael, Bael, Bael."

Only one desire was blazing within his collapsing consciousness.

"Yeah, yeah. I still have something I need to do. I have to..."

He needed to kill Bael, and then...

"Kehehe," Kang-Woo cackled.

He stood up as the black sea raged around him. He would likely not be able to maintain his sanity for long. The Abyss of the Demonic Sea was rapidly eating away at his sanity even at this moment.

"Balrog."

Kang-Woo clenched his jaw. His consciousness was collapsing. He could barely remember what he was trying to do, what he needed to do... or even who he was. However...

"I... I'll..."

Kang-Woo staggered forward and looked down at the corpse of Balrog, a demon who had always protected him by his side and fought alongside him. A subordinate, a comrade, and a friend.

"I'll remember you."

'I will never forget you. No matter what happens... even if I'm devoured by this black sea, even if I'm forever trapped inside the Abyss, I will do whatever it takes to remember at least you.'

"Haaa, haaa."

Kang-Woo held on to his fading consciousness for dear life. He raised his head and looked around.

"Hah," he couldn't help but chuckle.

Crack, crack.

Demons with red eyes were walking out from the door made from the black sun behind him.

'Oriax.'

He was the first demon whom he met on Earth.

'Phenex, Malphas, Halphas.'

They were Lucifer's subordinates who attacked Kim Si-Hun in South America.

'Mammon, Lucifer, Belphegor.'

They were the princes of Hell whom Kang-Woo devoured. Satan wasn't among them for some reason but Kang-Woo did not have the brain capacity at the moment to think about that.

'And...'

Kang-Woo slowly looked around at the immense number of demons who walked out from the Abyss of the Demonic Sea. Demons from the First Hell to the Ninth Hell, the Constellations of Evil, and even those with Deific Essence. The demons whom Kang-Woo devoured until now were walking out of the Abyss.

"I sure have... eaten a lot."

Kang-Woo cackled as he looked at the demons, who filled the skies of Seoul in an instant.

The demons who came out from the Abyss stared at Kang-Woo, their eyes as lifeless as a puppet as if they were waiting to be commanded. Kang-Woo smiled.

"I guess..." Kang-Woo could tell whose commands they were waiting for, even when he was being devoured by the Demonic Sea. "I'm still... the ruler."

He was about to lose his sanity at any second but he was still the *Ruler of the Demonic Sea*.

'In that case.'

Kang-Woo turned to look at the heavily panting Bael.

"H-Hihihi. Do you seriously believe these numbers have any meaning against me?" Bael asked as he gritted his teeth.

However, his voice was shaking anxiously unlike his expression filled with confidence. Kang-Woo walked toward him.

Boom.

Vibrations shook the entire city. Hundreds of thousands of demons who walked out of the Abyss stared at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo slowly raised his hand and commanded, "Tear him apart."

Rumble—!!

The demons of the Demonic Sea, who had been awaiting orders, simultaneously charged at Bael. Their numbers made them look like a tsunami.

Bael cackled and shouted, "Hihihhi! I told you! Numbers are meaningless against me!"

Enormous amounts of demonic energy infused with the Demon God's power surged from him.

Crack—!

Bael stretched out his right arm. The skin of his arm split open from the shoulder down and poured out of it a giant pillar of demonic energy, which then gradually took the shape of an arm several kilometers long. The colossal arm of a Titan wiped out the demons.

Crack! Crunch!

The sight was extraordinary to behold. The demons hit by the Demon God's arm were blown to bits. It did not matter whether they were from the First or Ninth Hell or if they were princes of Hell; they were equally squashed like insects.

"H-Hihi!" Bael laughed crazily. He fiercely swung the Demon God's arm as he shouted, "Hihihihihhi!! I told you! Numbers are meaningless against me!!"

Demons could defeat him, whether there were hundreds, thousands, or even millions of them.

"Ahhh! Yes! This is it!" said Bael as he relished in his omnipotence. "I can pull it off with this power!"

He could defeat the demons crawling out of the Abyss as well as the Demon King who had opened all three Doors.

"Kihihihihhi!!" Bael cackled as he swung the Demon God's arm all over the place.

The entire city was falling apart. Even Bael's army was getting caught in the destruction, but he did not care.

"I...!"

He no longer needed an army; numbers were pointless before the power of a Titan.

"... I HAVE BECOME SPECIAL!!" Bael screamed crazily.

"Haaa, haaa," he panted heavily after swinging the Demon God's arm some more. Using the power of a Titan consumed an extraordinary level of mental strength. "Now... you're all that's left."

Bael smiled as he stared at Kang-Woo. Every demon of the Abyss was wiped out by the power of a Titan. Only the Demon King remained.

"I'm all that's left... you say?" Kang-Woo chuckled even as his sanity was falling apart. "Why don't you take another look?"

Squelch.

Bael heard something sticky moving.

"Huh?"

Bael's expression froze. The demons of the Abyss, which Bael had wiped out with the Demon God's arm, were reforming as if time was rewinding. Black mucus bubbled as it gathered together to form the demons again.

"What... the hell?" Bael's teeth clacked together. "They're all... immortal?"

The hundreds of thousands of demons, enough to cover the entire sky above Seoul, were regenerating as if they had opened a Door of the Ten Thousand Demon Core.

"That's... bullshit. DONT MAKE ME LAUGH!!!"

There was no way to defeat an army of immortal demons numbering hundreds of thousands.

"Now, time for round two."

Gurgle.

The demons made of black mucus fully regenerated. The immortal army of the Abyss fiercely bared their teeth.

Kang-Woo staggered forward.

"I am..." he muttered as he hung on to his sanity and cackled. "The cavalry, motherfucker."

GRAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!

The immortal army charged at Bael once again.

Chapter 515 - Open (3)

Rumble—!

The earth shook as endless destruction ensued. Thousands of demons were obliterated with every swing from the right arm of a Titan sprouted from Bael's shoulder.

"Haaa, haaa."

However, no matter how many he killed...

"Fuck, fuck, fuck."

No matter how many he burst and mangled...

"FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!!"

It did not end. As if he were trapped in a nightmare he couldn't wake from, the demons of the Abyss continued to charge at him without knowing death.

"WHY, WHY, WHY, WHY!!!" Bael screamed as he restlessly swung his arm. "YOU... YOU'RE...!!!"

He gritted his teeth and glared at Oh Kang-Woo resentfully.

"NO LONGER... SPECIAL!"

Kang-Woo was abandoned by the Demon God, his creator. Hence, his life, desire, and existence were no longer *special*.

"SO WHY, WHY, WHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!"

He should have become the same as how Bael used to be. He should have felt that his wretched life of crawling from the First to Ninth Hell had been meaningless. He should no longer be special.

"Why aren't you... breaking?"

Kang-Woo had opened the Third Door. He unleashed the Abyss by destroying the vessel that was himself. It was only natural that he would break; it was only natural that his consciousness would burn to a crisp and be taken over by the Demonic Sea the moment he unleashed the Abyss.

"WHY ARE YOU STILL STANDING?!"

Kang-Woo stood tall despite swaying as if he would collapse at any second... just like Balrog had.

"H-Hihi! Didn't you see with your own eyes what happened to that muscle pig?"

Kang-Woo walked forward in silence. He staggered as if he would fall at any moment, but he did not stop— he did not back down. He took one step forward at a time.

"S-Stay away from me!"

Bael took a step back as he convulsed, but he couldn't even retreat due to the countless number of demons charging at him from all directions.

"SHIT, SHIT, SHIT!" he shouted as he swung the Titan's arm.

Countless demons were wiped out from just a swing. Bael stared at Kang-Woo again and raised the Titan's right arm.

"I told you... TO STAY AWAY!!"

The colossal arm, several kilometers long, swung at Kang-Woo.

Thump.

However, Kang-Woo slightly raised his hand and blocked the Titan's arm.

"Huh?"

Bael's eyes widened. He stepped backward in disbelief. He would have understood it if Kang-Woo had regenerated after bursting into pieces from getting smashed by the arm, but he stopped the power of the Demon God head-on.

"How... did you...?" muttered Bael tremblingly.

"I told... you."

The sight of a man the size of a human blocking with one hand, the arm of a Titan that looked several hundred thousand times heavier than him, was highly unnatural.

"Your existence... and your life that constantly requires validation... is nothing."

Boom!

Kang-Woo added more strength to his arm. He dug his feet into the ground and gripped the Titan's arm tightly.

"Huup!"

He then *lifted* the Titan's arm.

"Wh-What the—?!" Bael shouted in shock.

It was as if an ant had lifted a human's arm. It was a sight so unbelievable that it looked like a comedy.

"Bael..." Kang-Woo smiled as he lifted the Titan's right arm. "I'm not special... because I had the Demon God."

It was because he was a monster with the desires of a human. It was because he desired the Demonic Sea despite being a vessel. It was because he never stopped. It was because of those things that he was standing here today.

Split.

Kang-Woo opened his mouth. At the same time, the flames that were wrapped around him spread like a tent.

Fwoosh—!

The gold and black Flames of Voracity danced and gathered in one place, creating a mouth large enough to devour the Titan's arm whole.

"Authority of Predation."

The Authority that he had ever since he fell into Hell— no, from the moment he was created by the Demon God as a vessel to hold the Demonic Sea, mixed with the Flames of Voracity.

"Ah..." Bael groaned.

He raised his head and looked up at the ferociously blazing mouth. The open mouth made of gold and black flames, large enough to devour a Titan's arm, reminded him of...

"A black... sun."

- A-Aaaahh.

Bael heard the Demon God's groans inside his head.

- I-It was never me.

The Demon God looked up at the black sun in terror.

- The Demon of Prophecy... the master of the Demonic Sea...

It had never been him, but the vessel he had created. It had been the pathetic puppet that should have been nothing.

Crunch—!!

The black sun ate Bael whole. The Titan of myths and the demon who accepted his power were devoured by the boundless Abyss.

The demons freed from the Abyss stopped moving once Bael was dead. An abnormal sense of silence fell on the battlefield that had been filled with screams and destruction. Kang-Woo staggered.

"Kang-Woo!!!"

Just then, he heard a woman's voice— it was a woman with twelve bright wings on her back.

"Ah..." Kang-Woo slowly turned to the woman.

"A-Are you alright, Kang-Woo?!" yelled Han Seol-Ah as she approached the staggering Kang-Woo.

It was obvious from one look that he wasn't fine.

"Hey! O-Oh Kang-Woo! You're not dead, are you?!"

Cha Yeon-Joo was running to him as well behind Seol-Ah.

She supported the staggering Kang-Woo and asked, "That aside, what are these demons...?"

It was an army of evil so massive that it killed one's spirits just by seeing them. Yeon-Joo could tell that the demons were summoned by Kang-Woo from the fact that they weren't moving, but she felt like she was suffocating from the pressure nonetheless.

"These are... the demons that Master Kang-Woo has devoured until now," answered Lilith as she looked around. She did not recognize all of them, but she could see a few familiar faces. She smiled faintly and continued in relief, "I'm not sure what exactly happened, but... you won."

Lilith was well aware that this war would be decided by who between Bael and Kang-Woo would emerge victorious. Kang-Woo had defeated Bael, so it was no exaggeration to say that the war was over.

'At last...'

The long and desperate war had come to an end; it had lasted over ten millennia in Kang-Woo's perspective.

"Wait."

Just then, Yeon-Joo, who had been supporting Kang-Woo, saw someone collapsed on the ground. It was the corpse of a demon with bulging red muscles.

"Ah..." Yeon-Joo expressed grief.

Seol-Ah and Lilith looked in the direction that Yeon-Joo was looking at, and their expressions turned somber.

"Kang-Woo..." Seol-Ah muttered as she teared up.

Although she didn't know everything that Kang-Woo went through in Hell, she knew what Balrog meant to Kang-Woo just from their interactions.

Silence fell again. It was only natural after finding out one of their precious comrades died in the war.

"Kang-Woo..." Yeon-Joo slightly pulled away from Kang-Woo and grabbed his arms. She asked, "Are you okay?"

"A-Arggh." Kang-Woo slowly raised his head and looked around with blank eyes. He tilted his head in wonder and asked, "Who... are you all?"

"What?" Yeon-Joo's eyes shook.

"A-Arggh."

Kang-Woo pulled his hair and stepped backward. He could feel his consciousness burning away. He was getting taken over by the Abyss pouring out of the Door.

'Who...'

His vision was blurring. He was so dizzy that he felt like vomiting.

'Am I...?'

He looked around and only saw unfamiliar faces. People whom he had never met before were shouting things at him but he couldn't hear what they were saying. It did not feel real, as if he were looking through a screen.

"Bal...rog."

One name was clear in his mind as his consciousness was fading.

'Why?'

He did not remember why he could remember the name *Balrog*. He swayed and fell to his knees.

"M-Mr. Balrog is..." the woman with white wings on her back stammered.

Kang-Woo paid no attention to her.

"Ah."

He saw a corpse on the ground. It was the corpse of a demon covered in red muscles. The lifeless gaze of the corpse with no arms pointed at him.

"A-Aaaahh."

Tears flowed down Kang-Woo's cheeks but he did not understand why he was crying. Everything felt unfamiliar to him.

'I... I... I...'

He did not remember who or what he was. He felt like he was melting away.

"Kang-Woo!!"

"Hey! Oh Kang-Woo! Get a hold of yourself!!"

He could hear the women yelling at him, but he did not know who this *Oh Kang-Woo* they were yelling for, was.

Wriggle.

He was sinking into the deep darkness... toward the bottom of the endless Abyss.

'Ah...'

He reached upward to get out, but he did not know why he was reaching his arms out.

'I have to get out of here.'

He paddled his feet and twisted his body with everything he had. He did not know why but he had a feeling that he shouldn't melt away.

'I still have... something I need to...'

His consciousness was melting away. His vision flickered, his sense of reason was vaporized, and his intelligence was burning away.

'What did I need to do again?'

He did not remember.

'Balrog.'

That name was the only thing he could remember. Then, his consciousness vanished.

Grrrrrrrk—!!

"K-Kang-Woo!!"

"Run, Seol-Ah!" Lilith shouted as she quickly grabbed Seol-Ah's shoulder.

"L-Let go! K-Kang-Woo is...!!"

"We have to get out of here first! Hurry!"

Lilith looked around in pallor. The millions of demons that seemed to have been summoned by Kang-Woo melted down and turned into black mucus. Black mucus poured out of the burning black sun above the sky.

"Ngh..."

It looked as if a hole was made in the sky, and a black waterfall was pouring out of it. Lilith bit her lip as chills ran down her spine.

"Master Kang-Woo..."

She raised her head anxiously. Black mucus flowed out from Kang-Woo's eyes as he stood blankly. No, it was not just the eyes. Black mucus poured out of his mouth, nose, and ears like blood. He was then completely immersed in the black mucus and disappeared... as if he had been devoured.

"N-No..."

Seol-Ah extended her arm in pallor. Lilith shut her eyes tightly and pulled Seol-Ah toward her. Her long black hair floated in the air as if they were alive.

"We have to run away."

"A-Aaaahh."

"Now!"

Lilith wrapped the blank-faced Yeon-Joo and Seol-Ah with her black hair and ran.

Grrrrrrrk—!!

A wave of black mucus then began to engulf everything in its path like a tsunami.

Chapter 516 - Miracle (1)

Grrrrrrrrrk—!!

A tsunami of black mucus spread and voraciously devoured everything in its path. The black sea grew larger at an extraordinary rate as if it were trying to devour the entire world.

"A-All forces, evacuate!!" shouted Layla, who was commanding Guardians in Kim Si-Hun's place. A black tsunami suddenly appeared as they were in the middle of a fierce battle against Bael's army. It did not take long for Layla to judge that they needed to stop the battle and run from the calamity that looked as if it would devour everything in its path.

"What in the world is that...?"

Layla stared at the black tsunami in shock. Black mucus was endlessly pouring out from a black sun made of gold and black flames that had risen above Seoul.

'Those flames...'

Those flames were the unique color scheme of one of Oh Kang-Woo's main techniques.

Layla bit her lip anxiously. An inexplicable sense of uneasiness ran down her back.

"Please..." Layla prayed with her hands clasped together.

'Let there be a miracle to stop the Apocalypse.'

"P-Please wait, Lilith!" Han Seol-Ah shouted hastily as she was getting pulled by Lilith, who was running away from the range of the black tsunami, with her hair.

Lilith firmly replied, "There is no time to dawdle."

She could tell just from the black tsunami devouring everything in its path that Kang-Woo was not in a normal state.

'At this rate...'

Kang-Woo would end up killing his loved ones with his own hands.

Lilith bit her lip.

- If anything were to happen to you...

She recalled what she had said to Kang-Woo in the past.

- I'll stop you, my king.

Lilith shut her eyes tightly. She realized how arrogant the words she had spouted were.

"What should I..."

Lilith's voice shook. She couldn't even begin to figure out how to stop Kang-Woo in that state.

'My king.'

Lilith turned around and looked at the black tsunami quickly devouring everything in its path. Inside that tsunami was her king— her love. There was Kang-Woo, who was screaming in pain and agony.

She recalled Kang-Woo; she recalled his gentle hands and his warmth. Tears welled around her eyes.

'Yes.' Lilith clenched her fists as if she had come to a resolution. *'I made a promise.'*

She had promised that she would stop Kang-Woo if anything were to happen to him.

'In that case.'

There was only one thing she could do. She stopped in her tracks.

"Lilith...?"

"Wh-What's wrong?"

Lilith put down Seol-Ah and Yeon-Joo, and said, "Both of you, go on ahead."

"Wh-What the hell are you talking ab—"

"There is... something I must do."

Lilith looked back at the black sun, her eyes filled with conviction. Yeon-Joo frowned.

"What are you gonna do? Do you know a way to bring Kang-Woo back?" She clenched her fists and continued, "If you do, I'll help. No, let me do it."

Lilith bit her lip. "You can't do it."

"I can't?"

"Yes. This is... something only I can do."

"What the hell is it, then?!" Yeon-Joo shouted in frustration.

Lilith's lips quivered, hesitating to answer. She thought for a moment and then looked at Yeon-Joo as if she had no plans of backing down and said, "I'm going to try... shock treatment."

"What?"

"Master Kang-Woo is in a state of unconsciousness. If he experiences a large enough psychological shock... he might come back to his senses."

There was no logic or evidence to back up her claims; it was but a guess filled with desire and hope.

"I'm sure... he will."

However, there was no other way but to grab hold of an uncertain hope in such a crisis.

"How are you going to shock him?" asked Yeon-Joo as she narrowed her eyes, a faint sense of uneasiness running down her back.

Silence fell again.

Yeon-Joo grabbed Lilith's arm and asked again fiercely, "How exactly are you going to psychologically shock Kang-Woo?"

"That's..."

"Tell me now."

Lilith averted her gaze from Yeon-Joo and whispered, "... then he might come back."

"What?"

"I said, he might come back to his senses if I jump into that wave of black mucus."

Kang-Woo cared for the ones he loved a great deal. If he were to be put in a situation where he would kill one of them with his own hands, he might instinctively try to avoid it. Even in the worst-case scenario where Lilith was devoured, it would at least serve as a huge psychological shock to him.

"Hah." Yeon-Joo stared at Lilith dumbfoundedly. "You want to jump into that mucus? Are you crazy?"

"What are you gonna do if you die?"

"Even if I do, that in itself will serve as enough psychological shock."

"Don't bullshit me!!" Yeon-Joo shouted in rage. "Do you even know what Kang-Woo is like? Do you seriously think he would power up and miraculously come to his senses after he gets shocked from killing you?!"

Lilith flinched as her eyes shook.

"Let's say that he does come back to his senses. How do you think that son of a bitch would feel? Huh? Do you think he'll thank you for sacrificing yourself?"

"That's a problem for later."

"It's not a problem to be put off!"

If Kang-Woo found out he killed Lilith with his own hands, he would never be able to live with himself for it.

"THEN WHAT?!" Lilith clenched her fists and lowered her head. "WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST WE DO?!"

Kang-Woo was devoured by the Demonic Sea and lost consciousness. The Demonic Sea was flooding out of control now that all three Doors were open and devouring everything in its path. At this rate, every world would be engulfed by the Abyss of the Demonic Sea.

"DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER IDEAS?!"

They needed a way to turn around this endless nightmare for the better.

"That's..." Yeon-Joo slurred.

"Right? You don't... There is no other choice... I... I..."

Lilith knew that it was nonsense. It was illogical and completely groundless. It was a nearly hopeless plan. However, there was something that broke her heart more than the extremely low success rate of this plan.

"I don't want to... say goodbye to my king either."

Tears flowed down Lilith's cheeks. If Kang-Woo came back to his senses through her death, she would no longer be able to meet him. She would forever be unable to embrace him and feel his warmth.

"But no matter how sad and pained I am... I made a promise."

Lilith promised that she would stop Kang-Woo if something were to happen to him.

"Lilith." Yeon-Joo stared with shaking eyes at the sobbing Lilith. Her usual seductive and calm demeanor was nowhere to be seen. She grabbed Lilith's hand and said, "I'll go with you."

"Pardon?"

"We need to give him a psychological shock, don't we? Wouldn't you say two people would be more effective than one?"

It was embarrassing for Yeon-Joo to say but Kang-Woo once said that she was precious to him. Hence, she would also be enough to provide Kang-Woo with a psychological shock.

"N-No," said Lilith.

"Why is it okay for you and not for me?"

"That's..."

"Hmph, don't pretend like you're the only tragic heroine." Yeon-Joo snorted and turned her head away. She twirled her red hair with her fingers and continued, "I mean... it's not like I have feelings for that virgin. I'm just... paying him back for all the times he saved my life. Yeah, I can't deny that he helped me many times, and—"

"Pfft!"

"Wh-What the hell?! Why are you laughing?!"

Lilith, who had been crying, giggled with her hand over her mouth. She couldn't help but laugh even in such a despairing situation.

"Really... I understand why the king loves teasing you." Lilith caressed Yeon-Joo's cheek and smiled. "It can't be helped, then. You can come with—"

"Wait, Lilith." Seol-Ah, who had been listening in silence, approached them.

Lilith's expression hardened. "No. You are the only one I absolutely can't allow to—"

"No, that's not what I meant." Seol-Ah shook her head.

"Pardon?"

Lilith's eyes widened.

Seol-Ah pointed at something and said, "Look over there."

She was pointing at the corpse of a demon covered in red muscles; it was Balrog.

"Huh?"

Lilith's eyes widened as she stared at the corpse. The tsunami of black mucus was flowing in a way that avoided only the area around Balrog's corpse... as if there was an invisible barrier around him.

"Wh-What the hell? What's going on?"

Yeon-Joo also stared dumbfoundedly at Balrog's corpse.

Seol-Ah and Lilith's gazes met. "It's proof that Kang-Woo is hesitant to attack Mr. Balrog even when he's unconscious."

"But Balrog is already..."

"It... might not be too late," said Seol-Ah as she bit her lip.

Kang-Woo would most definitely have tried to heal Balrog with all his might.

'But he likely failed.'

That had caused Kang-Woo to end up that way.

"At the very least... I'm confident that I'm better than Kang-Woo in healing."

But of course, not even Seol-Ah could do something as absurd as bringing the dead back to life.

'But even just a little bit...'

If Balrog was breathing just a tiny bit— no, even if he wasn't breathing but could still be brought back to life...

'I can save him.'

A person could still be brought back to life a few minutes after their heart stopped.

Lilith remained silent.

It was uncertain whether or not Balrog could be saved or if Kang-Woo would even come back to his senses after saving Balrog. The chances were so low that Lilith even thought her initial plan had a higher chance of success. However...

"Let's do it."

There was no point in hesitating just because of low chances. After all, they had no choice but to cling to even the tiniest amount of hope in a situation as despairing as this.

"Fuuu, alright." Yeon-Joo nodded.

There was no time to dawdle now that they had decided to do it.

Clatter.

Red chains poured out of her bracelets.

"Both of you, grab on to the chains!"

Lilith and Seol-Ah grabbed the chains.

"Here we go!"

Yeon-Joo raised her arms high and quickly swung them down.

Bang!

The chains smashed into the ground and flung the three women into the air. They were aiming for the area where Balrog's corpse was— the only location protected from the black tsunami that was devouring everything.

Grrrrrrrk!

"Ngh!"

Black mucus shot at them as soon as Yeon-Joo flew into the air. She twisted in midair and spread her arms widely.

"Red Lotus, Eighth Form."

Clatter—!

Hundreds of chains slithered as if they were alive.

"Red Lotus Kaleidoscope!"

The chains expanded like a net and protected the three women.

Crack! Crunch!

The black mucus began to devour Yeon-Joo's chains.

"Now!"

Yeon-Joo used the short amount of time that the black mucus was blocked by the chains to link herself with chains to the area around Balrog.

Clatter!

The chains shortened, shooting the three women to the area around Balrog.

Boom!

Once the three of them arrived next to Balrog, the black mucus stopped chasing them. No to be more precise, it was not charging at them; the black mucus surrounding Balrog was slowly reducing its radius.

"Shit... it's slowly getting closer to us. Seol-Ah! Treat Balrog as I keep the mucus at bay!"

"I will assist."

Yeon-Joo and Lilith stood on either side of Seol-Ah to protect her. Seol-Ah nodded and placed her hand on Balrog's corpse.

'Please... Let there be just a sliver of hope. Let me save him.'

Whoooooom!!

Blinding light poured out of the twelve wings on Seo-Ah's back.

'Mr. Balrog.'

Seol-Ah bit her lip and focused all of her sacred power on both hands. White light flowed into Balrog, regenerating his severed arms and the horrible injuries all over his body.

'It worked!'

Seol-Ah's eyes filled with hope. However...

"Mr... Balrog?"

No matter how much sacred power she poured, even after healing all of his injuries, Balrog was not breathing. He did not open his eyes.

"Ah..."

Tears welled around Seol-Ah's eyes. She realized that Balrog was dead and that no hope of him breathing again existed.

"I'm sorry." Tears flowed down Seol-Ah's cheeks. "I'm so sorry... Kang-Woo."

It was impossible to bring Balrog, Kang-Woo's precious friend, back to life... unless a miracle were to occur.

Riiing.

Just then, Seol-Ah heard the chime of a bell.

"Huh?"

The crying Seol-Ah raised her head.

[The activation condition of 'Miracle' has been fulfilled.]

Translucent light particles poured out of Seol-Ah and lit up the earth covered in black mucus.

Chapter 517 - Miracle (2)

"Wh-What the hell?"

Cha Yeon-Joo, who was stopping the black mucus from approaching them, turned around in surprise. Translucent light containing inexplicable power was pouring out from Han Seol-Ah and lighting up the earth covered in the tsunami of black mucus.

"What the hell is happening?!" entreated Yeon-Joo.

She had no idea why such power was pouring out from Seol-Ah.

'It's different from usual.'

The soul of Celestial Goddess Seraph was inside Seol-Ah, so most of her magic spells were powered by sacred power.

'But this is...'

Yeon-Joo narrowed her eyes. She had felt this power from somewhere before.

'That rogue brat?'

She recalled the rogue Player who had appeared like a supernova and defeated Kim Si-Hun with an overpowered item he happened to find in a dungeon. Yeon-Joo was sure that the translucent light coming out of Seol-Ah was the same as the light flowing out from Kim Tae-Hyun's necklace during his duel against Si-Hun.

"What's going on...?"

She couldn't understand why that light was suddenly coming out of Seo-Ah.

'Not just that...'

It was overwhelmingly brighter than the light the necklace used to pour out.

Grrrrrk!

"Urgh!"

The black mucus reached a hair's breadth away from her while she was distracted. Yeon-Joo quickly stepped back to widen the distance from the mucus that was slowly closing the distance.

"Yeon-Joo! Focus!" yelled Lilith.

"But Seol-Ah is—"

"We don't have the leeway to worry about that!"

Yeon-Joo anxiously bit her lip and nodded.

Clatter—!

Even more red chains poured out of her bracelets.

"Okay," she answered. It was not the time to worry about what was happening to Seol-Ah or whose power that was. "Fuuu."

She took a deep breath, lowered her stance, and spread the chains like a net. The only thing she could do was to protect Seol-Ah until she was finished healing Balrog. They could only struggle to keep their hold on the sliver of hope,

"Red Lotus, Third Form."

Whirl—!

The red chains surged like a tornado.

"Red Petal Obstruction."

A red lotus bloomed and the petals made of red chains surrounded the area like a dome.

Grrrrrrrk!

"Kuh..."

The red lotus blocked the tsunami of black mucus. Yeon-Joo's arms trembled from the immense pressure on the chains. She panted heavily and her legs shook like crazy; she could tell she wouldn't be able to hold it much longer.

"Seol-Ah."

Yeon-Joo looked back at Seol-Ah, her expression mixed with worry and hope.

Whoooooom!

Beautiful light particles that looked like crystal fragments were still coming out of Seol-Ah.

"A-Aaaahh," Seol-Ah groaned as immense power boiled inside her.

'It's so hot.'

It felt like she was burning from the inside. She bit her lip. She could pass out at any second from the raging current of power inside her, but she couldn't afford to lose herself right now.

"What was..."

Seol-Ah gazed at the blue message window that appeared in front of her. It said that the activation condition for *Miracle* had been fulfilled, along with additional information underneath.

[The skill 'Miracle' can only be used once.]

[All power granted by 'Nostrian' will vanish once used.]

'Nostrian?' Seol-Ah had heard that name somewhere before. *'Lilith was looking for them, if I remember correctly.'*

She was not exactly sure what the beings known as Titans were.

'They're... something like the creators of the universe.'

At least, that was how Oh Kang-Woo described them. They were likely not completely almighty, considering there were multiple of them, but it did not change the fact that they were extraordinary beings.

'In that case.'

Seol-Ah pointed her hands at Balrog's corpse.

"Please..."

'Let there be a miracle that lives up to their name.'

Seol-Ah closed her eyes. She had no idea why such a power entered her and who the being known as Nostrian was— no, she didn't even know whether or not this *Miracle* skill could bring Balrog back to life.

'But...'

Whoooooom!!

Translucent light burst. Seol-Ah placed her hands on Balrog's chest and prayed on the sliver of hope she was holding on to.

"Ngh..." Seol-Ah grimaced.

Her hands trembled as she barely held on, currents of power rampaging inside her like river rapids.

"How much longer, Seol-Ah?!" shouted Yeon-Joo as she kept the black mucus at bay.

Over half of the red lotus surrounding the area had been devoured by the mucus. The massive black wave would soon engulf the red lotus and the three women whole.

"More." Seol-Ah bit her lip and continued, "Just... Just a little more, Yeon-Joo."

Whoooooom!!

The translucent light particles coming out of her gathered around her hand.

"Miracle."

The translucent light flowed into Balrog.

Crack! Crunch—!

The flesh on Balrog's chest ripped open and exposed his crushed heart. His two arms disappeared and covered him in black blood.

"Wh-What the hell?" Yeon-Joo's eyes shook as she saw what was happening. She bit her lip as the injuries Seol-Ah had healed came back. "Did it... fail?"

The three women could feel the sliver of hope they were holding on to for dear life, disappearing.

"Wait." Lilith, who was staring at Balrog covered in blood, widened her eyes. She smiled brightly and said, "It... didn't fail."

"What? His injuries are getting worse again! Wh-What are you ta—"

"No. They're not getting worse."

Lilith shook her head and stared at Balrog with no arms and horrible injuries all over him.

"Time is... getting rewound."

It was what Balrog looked like when they first saw him.

He was walking within the darkness... the boundless Abyss. His consciousness had long since burnt to a crisp. He no longer had any sense of reason or intelligence left. He couldn't remember who he was or what he was doing.

Step.

He simply walked.

Step.

He walked forward, through endless darkness, without even knowing why he was walking.

'Why...' he thought. *'Why am I walking?'*

He could not see the end of the road— no, an end did not even exist. There was nothing more pointless than continuing down a road with no end without rest.

'There's no need to keep walking.'

He knew there was no end. He knew his walk would never end. He was tired. His shoulders were heavy and his legs were shaking.

'I'll stop.'

It was pointless. He should stop here. Stopping here, lying down in the darkness, and waiting to disappear was a far smarter decision.

'It's not a bad idea.'

The darkness was comfortable. It was endless and vast. He felt like he would have no regrets even if he were to melt into it.

'I'll stop.'

There was no meaning or purpose in his walk. He did not even know why he was walking forward. There was no reason at all he should keep walking.

Step.

However...

Step.

However... However... However...

"A-Arghh."

He kept walking. He moved his right leg and then his left to keep moving forward. He didn't know why; he might never know why.

"For...ward. For...ward."

However, he did not stop. Even if the weight on his shoulders was crushing him and he could barely breathe...

"I..."

He needed to keep moving forward. He continued to walk through the endless Abyss.

[My king.]

Just then, a demon covered in red muscles appeared in front of him. He remembered seeing the demon before he entered the Abyss.

"Balrog."

He remembered that one name. He did not remember what his own name was, but...

"Balrog, Balrog, Balrog..."

He knew that the name of the demon in front of him was Balrog. That was all he remembered.

[Yes, my king.] Balrog smiled faintly and nodded. He approached the man and placed his hand on his shoulder. [You have done so well until now, my king.]

"I have?"

[Yes. You have... pushed through and came all this way with so much on your shoulders.]

"I don't... remember."

[Even if your memories have disappeared, everything you have done until now is right here.]

Balrog raised his hand and snapped his finger. Countless demons appeared before them, so many that they could fill the endless Abyss.

[You have defeated every single one of these beings.]

He remained silent. He did not remember anything about them.

[My king,] Balrog called. The man could feel the warmth from Balrog's hand on his shoulder. [You can... rest now.]

[You don't have to... continue that wretched battle anymore.]

Sweet whispers entered the man's ears. His legs were just about to break anyway. His shoulders were about to be crushed anyway. There would be no better place to rest than here if he were to stop.

[You have really...] Tears welled around Balrog's eyes. He got on one knee and bowed. [Done so well, my king.]

The man stared at Balrog in silence. "Did you say... I can rest?"

He felt something was wrong.

"I did well until now?"

He couldn't explain it, but it felt like a piece of a puzzle did not match.

"No."

[Pardon?]

"You're... not Balrog," the man said as he fiercely glared at Balrog.

- You can just do as you have always done.

The man heard a voice. It was the same voice as the Balrog in front of him but they were different.

The man stepped forward and reached out.

[My king...]

"Don't fuck with me."

He grabbed Balrog by the neck. He bared his teeth and clenched harder.

"I..."

Crush.

The red demon's head exploded.

"Will not stop."

He had never stopped.

Wriggle—!

The Abyss sloshed and collapsed as it tore apart.

"Ah..."

The man's vision came back. He could see light beyond the collapsing Abyss.

"Kang-Woo!"

"Darling?"

Kang-Woo saw Seol-Ah. Next to her were Yeon-Joo and Lilith.

"Wh-What the hell... happened to you...?" Yeon-Joo was staring at him in pallor.

Kang-Woo looked down at himself.

Only his face was out of the black mucus; it was no wonder why Yeon-Joo was horrified.

"I..."

Kang-Woo could feel his consciousness burning away. His memories flickered and his vision blurred.

Grrrrrk.

The black mucus began to devour him again. Just then...

"Didn't you say I would be in for it once this was over?"

Kang-Woo heard a voice.

"Huh?"

"I don't think you'll be able to keep that promise with the state you're in."

A hearty laughter echoed throughout the area. Kang-Woo slowly turned his head.

"Bal...rog?"

He saw a demon covered in red muscles smiling brightly at him.

Chapter 518 - I Am Satan

"How...?"

Oh Kang-Woo stared at Balrog in disbelief. The stupid demon covered in red muscles, who crushed his own heart to protect his king, was somehow alive.

"It's thanks to Seol-Ah," Lilith answered in Balrog's place.

"What?"

Kang-Woo stared at Han Seol-Ah, unable to understand. He knew her extraordinary healing abilities and how they far surpassed his Authority of Regeneration. However...

"You brought a dead person... back to life?"

The power of resurrection was on a whole other level than healing. It was impossible to bring the dead back to life even if she possessed the soul of Seraph. After all, even Celestial Goddess Seraph was but a *god*.

"How in the world..."

Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah, his eyes shaking anxiously. The miracle she had pulled off was impossible with just her powers. His current self was the perfect example of what happens if one uses powers beyond their capability.

"It was... the power of Nostrian," Seol-Ah answered.

"Nostrian?"

Nostrian, the Titan of time. Kang-Woo's expression was dyed in confusion after the name that he thought had become irrelevant after Kim Tae-Hyun's necklace broke was mentioned again.

"My king. Let us leave the questioning for later," said Lilith as she approached him. As she had mentioned, there was no time to wonder in detail about Nostrian. "We have to get you out of th—"

Lilith approached Kang-Woo to pull Kang-Woo, whose head was the only part of his body exposed, out of the black mucus.

"Stay back," commanded Kang-Woo as she glared at her.

Lilith flinched. Kang-Woo's eyes were filled with sorrow.

"If you come here... you'll die too."

Even now, he felt like his consciousness would be burned away at any second. The desire to eat was about to take over him.

"My king..." Lilith muttered as she shed tears.

"Kehehe. How unlike you, my king," Balrog snickered as he walked toward Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo's expression filled with shock as he hastily yelled, "You fucking muscle pig! Do you wanna die again that badly after you were brought back to life?"

However, Balrog did not stop.

"I have already died once." He smiled and continued, "I guess it wouldn't be so bad to die for my king again."

"Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled. "Fucking hell, stop trying to act like a badass."

He couldn't help but snicker.

Balrog smiled and said, "I could say the same for you, my king."

"What?"

"Ye who pass me... to the city of grief."

Kang-Woo's eyes widened. "Y-You fucking..."

"Hehehe. It was a rather magnificent incantation."

"Y-You son of a bitch! You were listening?! No wait, you were dead at the time!!"

Balrog tilted his head in wonder and answered, "Hmm. Come to think of it, I was. But I have memories after the fact for some reason."

"Balrog."

"Yes, my king."

"You should just die again."

"Hehehe. I will set my life ablaze as many times as it takes for you, my king."

Balrog got on one knee and bowed his head.

Silence fell.

"Pfft." Kang-Woo burst into laughter unbeknownst to himself. "Bwahahahahaha!!"

His consciousness was fading, his sense of reason and intelligence were being eaten away by desire, and he was in so much pain that he could go insane at any second, but...

"Hahahahaha!!"

Kang-Woo couldn't stop laughing. He found the stupidly joyous situation and the happy ending mixed with coincidence and fate all too precious to him.

"My king," Balrog called quietly. His mischievous expression from earlier was nowhere to be seen. He stared at Kang-Woo, who was covered in black mucus, and asked, "Will you... be able to endure it?"

He had once seen Kang-Woo in this state; at the climax of the thousand-year war during his battle against Bael. During that battle, the Demon King opened the Second Door of the Ten Thousand Demon Core and destroyed everything around him, his sense of reason completely gone. It was no

exaggeration to say that Kang-Woo's survival after that battle was no less of a miracle than Balrog's resurrection.

'But...'

The situation was different; he had opened not two but all three Doors. He destroyed himself as the vessel and allowed the Demonic Sea to run out of control. Even if the same miracle were to occur, Kang-Woo would not be the same as before. There was only one way.

'The king has to... devour the Demonic Sea.'

Kang-Woo needed to beat the Demonic Sea into submission and gain complete control over its power—no, he needed to become the Demonic Sea itself.

It would be a battle against a sea of demonic energy, which had devoured millions of demons, and one person. It couldn't even be called a battle, just like how a person couldn't *fight* a sea.

'But...'

There was no other way for Kang-Woo to come back. If he couldn't resist the encroachment of the Demonic Sea and devour it, he would not be able to stay as *Oh Kang-Woo*.

"You're asking if I'll be able to endure it?" Kang-Woo asked.

The battle to devour the Demonic Sea would be nearly endless. He would be engaged in a hopeless battle for almost an eternity.

"What's wrong with you, Balrog?" Kang-Woo smiled. He then said as if the answer was obvious, "You know who I am."

"Kehehehehe!" Balrog chuckled.

"I want to see Si-Hun and the others before I go, but..."

Wriggle.

Kang-Woo's face began to be sucked into the mucus again. He couldn't stay here for much longer.

"Well, it can't be helped." Kang-Woo looked at Seol-Ah, Lilith, and Cha Yeon-Joo to say, "Wait for me."

"Hey! O-Oh Kang-Woo!"

"Kang-Woo!"

Kang-Woo snickered and said, "I'll be back after I win."

Grrrrrk.

Kang-Woo's face was sucked into the mucus.

Balrog lowered his head, still on one knee in front of the area where Kang-Woo vanished from.

"Hah, there really is no stopping him." Lilith approached as her black hair fluttered and glared at Balrog. "That aside, why are you sticking so close to the king like you're a heroine?"

"Heroine? What does that mean?"

"Hmph, I don't know."

Lilith snorted in dissatisfaction.

Rumble—!!

Just then, the black mucus pouring out of the black sun above Seoul stopped. The black tsunami, which had been devouring everything in its path as if to engulf the entire city, was sucked back into the black sun at breakneck speed.

"Wh-What? What's happening?" Yeon-Joo asked as she looked around at the black mucus that was suddenly disappearing.

"The battle has begun," Lilith answered as she turned to her and smiled.

"Battle?"

"Yes." Lilith looked up at the black sun and continued, "The battle between the Demonic Sea... and our king."

It would be an absurdly illogical battle. Lilith stood next to Balrog and also got on one knee. She looked into the black sun and thought of her king, who was likely fighting inside.

"Victory..." Lilith lowered her head and brought her hands together as if praying. "... To my king."

Radiant sword energy split space itself.

Slash!

"Kurgh!" The hunchback demon stepped backward and clenched his chest. "Urgh..."

Amon glared fiercely at Si-Hun.

'This is... a human?'

He was unbelievably powerful— almost on par with Tai Wuji, the leader of the Constellations of Evil.

"Move," said Si-Hun as he gritted his teeth and raised his sword.

He did not have time to waste fighting this hunchback demon.

'Hyung-nim.'

Si-Hun anxiously gripped his sword tightly.

"Kekeke. It's too late, human swordsman," Amon cackled. He had lost the battle but succeeded in keeping the human swordsman at bay. "About now..."

Bael should have had more than enough time to devour the Demon King and get his hands on the Demonic Sea.

"Kehe, kahahahahaha!!" Amon burst into laughter as he pounded his staff on the ground repeatedly.

"Kuh." Si-Hun grimaced.

He needed to kill Amon and go to Kang-Woo as soon as possible.

"Heavenly Dragon—"

"Kekeke," Amon cackled as if to cut Si-Hun off and took something out from his pocket. It was a black crystal orb filled with impure demonic energy. "Tsk. I wanted to use it a little later, but I have no choice."

Amon clenched the black orb and chanted, his voice like nails on a chalkboard.

"O Prince of Wrath."

Demonic energy surged from the black orb.

"Open your ey—"

RUMBLE—!!

Just then, a black sun rose in the skies of Seoul.

"Huh?"

Countless demons poured out from the sun.

"Th-This is..."

Amon looked up at the black sun and the demons pouring out from it, in pallor. He roughly understood what it meant.

"Th-The Abyss..."

The Third Door of the Demonic Sea had opened.

"N-NO!!!" Amon screamed at the black sun.

No one was capable of holding the Demonic Sea now that the Abyss had been unleashed.

"That crazy son of a bitch!!!" Amon shouted.

"Those demons..."

Si-Hun stared at the demons pouring out of the black sun, his expression frozen. He then gripped his sword tightly.

"This isn't the time to be distracted."

He needed to go to Kang-Woo as soon as possible.

"Shit, shit, SHIIIIIIIT!!!" screamed Amon as he pulled his gray hair. He could tell that everything had failed and that Bael had lost. "How..."

Amon staggered.

"Huup!" Si-Hun took advantage of that opening and pounced like a beast.

Stab!

"Kurgh!"

Si-Hun's sword pierced Amon's stomach.

"How... How did the Third Door..." Amon continued to stare at the black sun even with a sword piercing him. He mumbled, "At this rate, the Primordial Knowledge... the Titan..."

Amon trembled.

"DAMMIT!"

He smashed his staff in two.

Rumble—!!

Enormous amounts of demonic energy stormed as soon as the staff broke.

"Kuh!" Si-Hun grunted as he quickly jumped backward.

Amon, who was staring up at the sky with blank eyes, was slowly sucked into the black storm.

"It was... almost in my grasp." Amon frowned fiercely and shouted, "IT WAS JUST ONE STEP AWAY!!"

His voice was filled with desire. He continued to curse as he disappeared into the black storm.

"Ngh."

Si-Hun was about to swing his sword at Amon as he disappeared into the storm but shook his head.

'I have to get to hyung-nim.'

He did not have any more time to waste. He turned around and leaped forward, speeding to where the black sun appeared.

Grrrrrk!

"This is..."

However, black mucus began to pour out of the black sun and prevented him from advancing any further.

"Shit!"

He quickly raised his sword and swung it at the tsunami of black mucus.

Slash! Slash!

However, the black mucus regenerated instantly after each slash, no matter how many times he swung his sword.

"Shit, shit!!" Tears flowed down Si-Hun's cheeks. "Kang-Woo... hyung!"

He bit his lip and continued to slash the black mucus. He advanced little by little as he wished for his will to reach Kang-Woo.

Split.

A crack formed on the black crystal on the ground.

Shatter!

The orb broke, and black demonic energy surged out of it.

"Gaaaaahh..."

Demonic energy gathered and took the form of a demon with black scleras, yellow irises, and horizontal pupils.

"I am..."

The demon extended his arm enveloped in thick demonic energy.

He said chillingly, "Death. I am... the end. I am the father of all wrath, and I am wrath itself. I am... Satan."

The Prince of Wrath, who had been defeated by the Demon King and devoured by him, manifested once again.

"K-Kehehe."

Satan looked down at himself. Immense power, far more than when he lost to the Demon King, was coursing through him.

"KAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!" He spread his arms wide and burst into crazed laughter. "FINALLY, FINALLY, FINALLY!!!"

He gritted his teeth.

"I... I have returned, Demon King!! To fulfill my rage! My hatred! My wrath will devour you!"

Satan recalled everything the Demon King had done to him— all the humiliating memories.

"I will tear apart everything you have with my wrath!!!" shouted Satan, the Prince of Wrath.

Grrrrrrrk!

"Hm?"

Just then, a tsunami of black mucus engulfed him as he was in the middle of laughing madly.

"H-Huhhh?" Satan expressed confusion. "Wh-What is this?! W-Wait! G-Get off of me!! A-Aaaaahh!"

He was sucked into the black mucus after making contact with it even a little.

"N-NO!! I've... I've only just been revived! NOOOOOO!! Wh-What the hell is this s-sticky substance?! WHAT THE HELLLLLLLLL!!!"

Grrrrrk.

He had been sharpening his blade all this time as he imagined his revenge, but he ended up disappearing into the black mucus.

"D-Dammit. Why is this happening to me? S-Stop... Why the fuck are you doing this to me...?"

Urghhhhhh.

Chapter 519 - King of the Demonic Sea

Oh Kang-Woo walked through the darkness where direction was nonexistent. He was simply stepping forward within the endless Abyss.

"My... name is..."

He carefully said his name and wrapped his arms around his head. His consciousness was fortunately more vivid compared to when he first entered the Abyss, but it was still only to the point that his name was all he could remember.

"This is... enough," Kang-Woo stammered and smiled.

It was more than enough. He continued to walk through the darkness.

[Grrrrrr.]

Kang-Woo heard a low growl. He turned to see a black dog large enough to easily swallow a human whole.

'A Hellhound.'

Kang-Woo recalled the monster; it was the first demonic beast he encountered when he fell into the First Hell.

"I have to start over from the beginning, is it?"

Kang-Woo chuckled and approached the Hellhound, who was baring its fangs at him ferociously, without hesitation. He had run away like a coward when he first fell into Hell, but he no longer had a reason to. After all, he was the one and only predator.

[GRAAAAAAAAAAHHH!]

The Hellhound roared and charged at Kang-Woo. Its sharp fangs were still gleaming within the darkness.

"Hup!"

Kang-Woo also moved in response. He could not use his hundreds of Authorities inside the Abyss of the Demonic Sea— a space made by his consciousness. He did not have his Transcendent-rank Deific Essence or the Flames of Voracity that burned with Chaos as its fuel either. There was only one thing left to him.

Kang-Woo dodged the Hellhound, grabbed its neck fur, and got on top of the demonic beast.

Crunch!

[Whine!]

He opened his mouth wide and took a bite out of the Hellhound.

[Grrrrr!]

However, the injury was only the size of his mouth; it was but a scratch for a three-meter-tall Hellhound.

Crunch, crunch, crunch.

[Whine!]

Kang-Woo stuck to the Hellhound and continued to take bites out of it. He activated the Authority of Predation, and the demonic energy flowing in the Hellhound was absorbed into Kang-Woo. To be more exact, it was not the Hellhound's demonic energy but the demonic energy of the Demonic Sea itself.

"Haaa," Kang-Woo exhaled.

He stepped on the Hellhound's corpse, which had become mush, and looked up at the endless darkness. All he had left at the moment was the Authority of Predation.

"Well, I guess it's better than the first time I fell into Hell."

Kang-Woo chuckled. He could feel his consciousness becoming more vivid after devouring one Hellhound. He looked down at himself. He could feel the demonic energy of the Demonic Sea, which he could only store inside the Ten Thousand Demon Core in the past, permeating throughout his body.

'I can absorb it.'

Kang-Woo could make the boundless Demonic Sea his own.

"Now, then."

Kang-Woo smiled and raised his head as he turned around.

[Grrrrrrrr.]

In front of him was an endless crowd of demonic beasts and demons he had devoured until now. It was the army of the Abyss that had appeared from the black sun the moment Kang-Woo opened the Third Door. They had followed Kang-Woo's commands and attacked Bael before, but now they were lined up to tear apart his consciousness.

"Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled because he saw a familiar face among the army of the Abyss. "Bael."

[A-Aaaahh. O-Oh Kang-Woo...] The half-melted Bael crawled on the ground as he glared at Kang-Woo from below. He muttered as if cursing him, [I-I'll... kill you...]

Kang-Woo smiled brightly. "What a relief. I thought it was a bit of a shame that I killed you in such an anticlimactic way."

Kang-Woo walked toward the army of evil numbering millions without hesitation.

[Y-You...] Bael glared at Kang-Woo resentfully. [You will never... escape from... here.]

Kang-Woo had opened the Third Door—he destroyed himself as a vessel and unleashed the Abyss. One who stepped foot in the Abyss could never escape.

[Y-You will be... stuck with me... in this Abyss...] Bael smiled. [And slowly... break.]

There was no such thing as *death* in a world made of one's consciousness. The fight would never end until the consciousness of the entity known as *Oh Kang-Woo* melted into the Abyss and disappeared. There was no other end for Kang-Woo other than to slowly break down in this perpetual Hell for all of time.

"I wonder about that?" mentioned Kang-Woo. He did not falter even when he was faced with despair. He said leisurely, "I'd rather not hang out with a brat like you."

Bael stared blankly at Kang-Woo, unable to understand. [How can you... be like that?]

Even under such despair and facing inevitable demise.

[How can you... never stop?] Bael asked, slightly fearful.

Kang-Woo shrugged and stepped forward slowly, one foot at a time. He could see Bael gritting his teeth anxiously.

[It's pointless... no matter how much you resist.]

Bael had only realized after being devoured by the Abyss how absurd his notion of getting his hands on the Demonic Sea— the Primordial Darkness.

[You will... fail. This battle... will never end.]

"No." Kang-Woo shook his head. "This isn't a battle."

He was not about to engage in a desperate and heroic battle against these millions of demonic beasts and demons.

"You don't call devouring prey a battle, do you?"

There was a perfect term to describe this situation.

"Now then, it's time for a feast."

Kang-Woo opened his arms wide and charged at the army of the Abyss.

Crunch, crunch.

Sharp teeth bit into flesh. Muscles were torn apart, and bones were crushed.

Crunch, crunch.

Kang-Woo couldn't remember how long he had been in this boundless darkness, shoving every single demon he devoured into his stomach. He gave up on keeping time after fifteen years had passed. An immensely long time passed since he gave up; it might have been a century— no, a millennium.

'No.'

It could have even been ten millennia. More time than what it took for him to become the Demon King after falling into Hell could have passed.

'I guess I should be thankful... this is a space made by my consciousness.'

If he was stuck in a place where the flow of time was not different from reality, the Earth that he knew would no longer be there even if he managed to get out of this darkness.

Crunch, crunch.

Time continued to pass. His legs shook with each step he took, and so did his jaws as he bit into flesh.

Even after more time that felt like an eternity passed, darkness was all that surrounded Kang-Woo.

"Haaa, haaa," he panted heavily.

The willpower that Kang-Woo thought would never waver was reaching its limit. He wondered if it would ever end, or if there was even an end.

"A-Argghh."

No matter how much he ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, ate, and ate again, darkness remained. The sea of demonic energy did not disappear.

'This is insane.'

It was as if he were trying to drink all the seawater that existed on Earth. Bael was right— it did not matter how much he resisted. He would never be able to escape from the endless darkness.

Kang-Woo swayed and fell to his knees.

[Grrrrr!]

The army of the Abyss charged at him.

He had no strength or willpower left to devour them.

'Let's just give up. I've lasted long enough. A millennium? No, more like over ten millennia. I can't... go on anymore.'

He was stupid to think he could devour the boundless sea of darkness and make it his own.

"I..."

He lost all strength as he stared at the army of evil charging at him.

Crunch!

He could feel sharp teeth and claws tearing him apart.

'Yeah. Just like that...'

He would just...

Give up...

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth.

- Wait for me.

He recalled the words he said in the past that he couldn't even remember anymore before he plunged himself into the Abyss.

- I'll be back after I win.

Those words engraved themselves into his soul.

"Fuck..." Kang-Woo cursed.

Crunch!

He grabbed the horns of one of the demons biting him and ripped them out. He opened his mouth wide and bit into the demon.

'Not yet.'

He could still move.

'Not yet.'

He could still stand.

'Not yet.'

He could still advance.

"I am..."

He was the king of demons, the predator of predators.

"The Demon King."

He was the king of the Demonic Sea.

Rumble—!!

The Abyss shook.

[A-Aaaahh.]

[S-Save... u-us.]

Something changed. The army of the Abyss that had been charging at him began to feel fear— no, it could be that the Demonic Sea itself was afraid of him.

"Now then... let's start again."

Kang-Woo stood up and smiled. He bared his teeth and slowly walked toward the army of the Abyss. And with that, perpetual time resumed.

Fwoosh.

A black sun was blazing above a desolate land with not even a blade of grass in sight.

A gentle-looking woman with dark purple hair was staring blankly at the black sun. Three years ago, Seoul was leveled during the war against Bael and his army. The citizens of Seoul who returned to Earth after being evacuated to Aernor either moved to other cities of Korea or immigrated to other countries with the full support of Guardians.

It was not just citizens of Seoul, who lost their homes, who moved to southern regions of Korea. It was not just because Busan became the new capital of South Korea.

"Kang-Woo," Han Seol-Ah, the woman with dark purple hair, called in sorrow.

It was mainly because of the black sun blazing above Seoul. Countless people moved to the south to get away from the ominous sun but the woman still lived near the desolate land, waiting for a certain someone to return.

"You're here again," said a red-haired woman as she approached Seol-Ah, who was looking up blankly at the black sun.

"Oh, Yeon-Joo. You're back."

"Yeah. I was in Busan for a few days because of business with my guild," remarked Cha Yeon-Joo as she held up a plastic bag. "I bought some beer."

"I'm fine."

"Fine, my ass. You've been coming here every day for the past three years. I know you've been barely eating."

Seol-Ah smiled bitterly. "I don't even need to eat anymore."

Her body had become closer to that of an angel; the need for sustenance had vanished.

"But you still have a sense of taste," Yeon-Joo said.

"That's true, but—"

"Then drink. I bought some fried chicken too." Yeon-Joo sat next to Seol-Ah. Her hair, which had grown to her waist level, fluttered in the wind. She looked up at the black sun and asked, "Anything new?"

Seol-Ah did not even need to ask who Yeon-Joo was referring to.

Seol-Ah shook her head with a heavy expression.

Nothing about the black sun blazing above Seoul had changed since Kang-Woo was sucked into it three years ago.

"Haaa. I've just about reached my limit stopping that son of a bitch Kim Si-Hun from jumping in there..."

Yeon-Joo sighed deeply and shook her head.

Fwoosh!

"Huh?" Yeon-Joo's eyes widened. She pointed at the black sun and said, "Didn't that... shrink a little?"

"It... shrunk?"

Seol-Ah quickly looked up at the black sun. As Yeon-Joo said, the black sun was slowly shrinking in size.

"Huh...? H-Huh?!"

Even now, it was shrinking at extraordinary speed.

"Wh-What the hell?! What's happening?!" Yeon-Joo looked around in confusion.

"Ah..." Seol-Ah trembled as he stared at the black sun.

She could see someone coming out of the shrinking black sun. No, that wasn't the right word to use; the black sun was being absorbed into someone.

"Kang-Woo..."

Tears welled up around Seol-Ah's eyes. She clasped her hands together and looked up at the man at the center of the black sun.

Fwoosh—!

The black sun was fully absorbed and disappeared, and the man whom she had longed for all this time walked out.

"You've... come back," said Seol-Ah as tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Yeah. I'm back." Kang-Woo nodded as he stared at Seol-Ah. "Let's get married."

"Three kids sounds good." Kang-Woo smiled as he extended his hand toward Seol-Ah.

"Okay." Seol-Ah embraced Kang-Woo as she cried.

Yeon-Joo stared at them in silence. "Get a fucking room, dammit."

She spat on the ground and raised her middle finger at the couple.

Chapter 520 - Epilogue

Bang—!!

A thunderous noise echoed inside the Hall of Protection, the fortress considered to be the Guardians' base of operations. A door swung open so hard that it could have ripped off its hinges, and a man who could be mistaken for a sculpture ran into the room. Tears flowed down his cheeks the moment he saw who was on the bed.

"H-Hyung-nim..."

"Oh, Si-H—"

"HYUNG-NIIIIIIIIIM!!"

"Kurgh!!"

Kim Si-Hun ran at the speed of light and hugged Oh Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo struggled in Si-Hun's arms and yelled, "Th-That hurts, dammit!!"

"Oh, I-I'm sorry. I was just so happy that I..." Si-Hun smiled awkwardly and let go of Kang-Woo.

"Hm?"

As he was stepping backward, a thought crossed his mind.

"It... hurts?"

Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes. He had indeed used too much strength because he was so happy, but simply using too much strength would not be enough to hurt Kang-Woo.

"Hyung... nim?" Si-Hun anxiously looked down at Kang-Woo and realized something he had not noticed until now. "Huh...? Were you always this small?"

He tilted his head in confusion. He had always been taller than Kang-Woo, but the height difference was never significant.

Si-Hun's mouth was left agape as he saw Kang-Woo, who had shrunk to the point that he barely reached Si-Hun's chest. Now that he took a closer look, Kang-Woo had also become very slender. Although Kang-Woo was never covered in swollen muscles like Balrog, he was fairly muscular. Now, he looked extremely frail.

"Wh-What in the world...?"

Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo in shock. It was more accurate to say that he had become smaller than younger.

"Haaa." Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and shook his head. "The Demonic Sea I absorbed hasn't fully settled in my body yet."

"Shit, I was completely fine when I first arrived..." Kang-Woo mumbled in dissatisfaction.

"Wh-What does that mean, hyung-nim?"

"Well, it's temporary, so don't worry."

Kang-Woo chuckled. He had successfully devoured the Abyss of the Demonic Sea and managed to dominate it after nearly an eternity of battle.

'No, dominate isn't the right word to use.'

To be more exact, his physical form had become one with the Demonic Sea.

"It's... temporary?" Si-Hun asked.

"Yeah. It's only like this for now because my body is being reconstructed using the Demonic Sea."

Once the Demonic Sea completely replaced his physical form, his former power and form would return to normal.

'Well, I guess it wouldn't be the same.'

Kang-Woo smiled. Once his body was fully reconstructed and became the Demonic Sea itself, it would be no different from having the Third Door open at all times.

'I wonder if I could devour even a Titan now?'

Based on what happened with Bauli, Kang-Woo doubted even a Titan would be a match for him.

'I guess it's too hasty to say that's the case since they created the universe.'

The only Titans Kang-Woo knew were Bauli and Nostrian; among those two, he only knew the extent of Bauli's strength. He had no idea how powerful the other Titans were.

"H-How long will you be like that for?" Si-Hun asked, staring at Kang-Woo in worry.

Kang-Woo had not just become smaller; he had no access to his powers while his body was being reconstructed. Based on the energy Si-Hun could feel from Kang-Woo, he was only as strong as a slightly above-average Player. Considering how powerful Kang-Woo used to be, he had practically lost everything. It would be weirder if Si-Hun wasn't worried.

"Who knows? I have no idea."

Kang-Woo shrugged and shook his head. He could instinctively tell that his body was in the middle of reconstruction, but not even he knew how long the process would be.

Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo passionately and clenched the hilt of the sword on his waist. "Until your powers return... I will stick to you twenty-four-seven and keep you safe."

"Screw that."

'Please. I don't wanna be stuck with a dude every hour of the day.'

"B-But...!"

"Don't worry, Si-Hun," said Han Seol-Ah, who had been listening in silence, and gently hugged Kang-Woo. Her eyes lit up as she continued, "I will keep Kang-Woo safe."

"Ngh..."

Si-Hun flinched and glared at Seol-Ah, his eyes filled with jealousy. Kang-Woo frowned.

'The hell? Why are you getting jealous?'

"I can take care of mys—"

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Just then, noises echoed throughout the hallway. An entity covered in red muscles squeezed through the doorframe.

"M-MY KIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!!!"

"Kurgh! Gaaaahh!!!"

Kang-Woo felt like he was being squeezed by a hydraulic press the moment Balrog embraced him. Not just that, he reeked of sweat, probably because he had been in the middle of training.

"F-Fuck!! S-Stop!"

'I'm gonna die...!'

"M-My king? Wh-What happened to you?"

"*Huff, huff.*"

"Why have you gotten so squashed?"

"What?"

'Squashed? Is that something you should be saying to your king?'

"I'll explain, so get off of me, damn muscle p—"

Slam!

"KANG-WOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

"Kurgh!"

"Hm! Hm! K-Kang-Woo!! I missed you!! I missed you so much, Kang-Woo!!!"

"S-Save m—"

"*Sniff...!* You told me you would never leave me alone! You said we'd be together forever!! *Sniff!* But... But... *Waaaaaaaaaaaaahh!!!*"

"Ah..."

'I'm dying. Forget reconstruction, I'm gonna die before that.'

"Haaa. Everyone, calm down," a bewitching voice echoed throughout the room.

Lilith, Layla, Iris, Halcyon, and Vaal Zahak were standing side by side in front of the door, likely having been contacted by Seol-Ah and Cha Yeon-Joo.

"*Waaaahh!* M-Master Kang-Woo!" Halcyon clasped his hands together as he burst into tears. "*Sniff,* I-I missed y— *Sniff!* You."

"M-Me too!" shouted Iris as she raised her arm. She wiped her tears and continued, "I can't believe I got to see you again... It was worth putting off all my work in the empire to stay on Earth."

"No, you shouldn't have put them off."

'Is the Arnan Empire even running at this point?'

"It has been a while, Master." Vaal Zahak bowed courteously. "I have been keeping your room spick and span so that it would be ready for you when you returned."

Clatter.

Vaal Zahak raised his arm and cleaning tools poured out from who knows where.

"Uhh... I see."

Kang-Woo nodded reluctantly as he stared at the skeleton, the light in his eye sockets shining brightly and with a duster in his hand.

"That aside..." Lilith walked through the room that was no different from a busy market street, looked down at the small Kang-Woo, and asked in worry, "How did your body... become like this?"

Kang-Woo sighed.

'I should've waited to explain until everyone arrived.'

He was too lazy to repeat himself; it was not like he had a macro for it.

"You see..."

Kang-Woo concisely explained what was happening to him.

"Ah...!" Layla's eyes widened after hearing the explanation. "I-I get it now!!"

"What do you get...?"

"You're saying it's *that* kind of situation, aren't you?" Layla snorted in excitement and grabbed Kang-Woo's hands. "Oneshota[1]!!"

"Pardon?"

'What the hell is that?'

"I knew you were an M!!"

'What the hell are you talking about, woman?'

"Ahhh. I-I can see it. Seol-Ah... Lilith... and Yeon-Joo, who is always on the side of getting teased..."

'What the hell are you seeing?'

"I feel like I've already seen three volumes of an ero manga!"

'You're not even trying to hide it anymore, are you? You used to try so hard to hide it. You used to be a frail and delicate character.'

"Urgh! Ah, I-I'm getting a nosebleed..."

Kang-Woo grabbed his forehead as if he were getting a headache. The moving emotions everyone was feeling from reuniting with Kang-Woo after three years were fading.

"Hmm, I'm not sure what Layla is talking about, but..." Lilith approached Kang-Woo as her eyes shone. Her hair moved as if it were alive and turned into green tentacles. "You're wanting... something like this, right?"

The tentacles slowly wrapped around Kang-Woo.

"F-Fuck!"

Kang-Woo turned in shock to get away, but the tentacles lifted him before he could escape.

"Ahhh, how long I've waited to be reunited with you, Master Kang-Woo..."

"S-Save me, Balrog!" Kang-Woo desperately called.

"That's enough Lilith," Balrog said in a low tone and released Kang-Woo from the tentacles by force. "The king dislikes it."

"B-Balrog..."

'You goddamn muscle pig son of a bitch... I fucking knew I could count on you!'

Wham!

"The king has been severely weakened! It is in times like this I should protect him by his side at all times!"

Balrog hugged Kang-Woo with one hand, his terrible stench of sweat attacking Kang-Woo's nose.

"Kurgh! F-Fuck..."

"Aaaahh! My king! There no nothing for you to worry about!"

"S-Stop..."

"I will not let you go until your powers return!!"

"Please stop..."

'Save... me.'

"What are you talking about, Balrog?! I will be the one to protect hyung-nim!"

"Hm! Me too! Me too!"

'Ahhh.'

"Damn muscle pig! How dare you get in the way of my lovey-dovey time with Master Kang-Woo?! Do you have any idea how long I've waited for this day?!"

"S-Sniff... Wh-Why am I the only one you don't greet, Master Kang-Woo? I-Is it because I'm ugly?"

'Fuck.'

Kang-Woo twisted and turned as he pulled on his hair. His sense of smell was getting attacked by Balrog's stench of sweat, and Lilith's tentacles were entering through the openings of his clothes. His limbs were being pulled in all directions as if he were getting tortured.

"Fuck... my life... *Hurgh*."

Tears flowed down Kang-Woo's cheeks.

"Haaa." Kang-Woo barely managed to chase his comrades out of the house after the chaos on par with the Abyss of the Demonic Sea died down. "I can finally take a break."

He laid on the bed and sighed in relief. He didn't mind greeting them, but he had been drained of his energy after they greeted him so hard that his bones broke.

He looked at his palm. He couldn't help but smile despite not doing anything.

'I'm back.'

He had returned after overcoming the near-eternal battle.

'I still have some more things left to do, though.'

Kang-Woo looked through his faint memories. He had received a proposal from the System through a message when he had almost fully devoured the Demonic Sea. He recalled the message in his mind.

[Proposing to nominate Player Oh Kang-Woo as a 'guardian deity' to replace the broken Gaia System.]

"Guardian deity, huh...?"

It was an entity that protected the Triad from otherworldly invasions, Gaia's former position.

'Well, I have no reason to refuse.'

The otherworldly invasions were not over yet. Earth's protection had been broken beyond repair due to Bael, so the otherworldly invasions would continue.

"Let them come."

Kang-Woo smiled. Since the protective barrier around Earth was gone, he just needed to take its place and devour all those daring to invade the Triad.

"That aside, how long will my body reconstruction take—"

Someone knocked on his door as he was mumbling.

"Umm... May I enter, Kang-Woo?"

"Darling?"

Kang-Woo's eyes widened, and he got up from the bed. Seol-Ah entered the room with a large pot in her hands.

"Th-That's..."

"Hoho. I made some because I had a feeling you would like some."

Kang-Woo stared fixedly at the kimchi stew that Seol-Ah brought. Saliva poured down from the corners of his mouth.

"As I thought... you're the only one for me, Darling!"

Kang-Woo kissed Seol-Ah on the cheek and reached for the spoon, but Seol-Ah grabbed his hand.

"Hm?"

"You're still unwell. I'll feed you," Seol-Ah remarked.

"I can still eat on my own, you know."

Seol-Ah placed the empty pot outside the room.

"So..."

"Umm... Darling?"

"Now... I don't have to hold it in anymore, right?"

"Huh?"

"Kang-Woo..."

Seol-Ah approached Kang-Woo, her eyes in a haze.

"W-Wait a seco— Mmrp!"

Seol-Ah shoved her tongue inside Kang-Woo's mouth before he had a chance to finish his sentence. She reached for the door with one hand.

Click.

The sound of the door being locked echoed throughout the house.