

After Ten Millennia in Hell

Chapter 9 - Demonic Energy Accumulation Project (1)

"Here is your re-issued identification card."

"..."

Oh Kang-Woo was visiting the nearby district office before going to the Player Management Office. Currently, he was looking at the receptionist in slight disappointment.

'I can't believe no one reported that I was missing.'

He had been thinking about how to explain the five years that he had been missing when the receptionist suddenly gave him his new identification card.

Although Kang-Woo had disappeared from Earth for five years, no one had reported him missing.

'Did no one notice that I disappeared?'

Maybe it was simply that no one had cared about him.

Kang-Woo looked at his new identification card bitterly. He realized he'd lived a really lonely life in the past.

'But it's going to be different now.'

He had no intention of living the same way as his past self, especially after having spent ten millennia in Hell.

Kang-Woo grabbed the identification card and went to where he had promised to meet up with Han Seol-Ah.

"Oh, welcome back, Kang-Woo."

"Thank you."

"Fufu, then let's go."

The pair set off with Seol-Ah leading the way.

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[The next station is Seoul Station, Seoul Station.]

"Kang-Woo, we're here," Seol-Ah said.

Lost for words, Kang-Woo didn't reply to her.

"Woah!" Kang-Woo then exclaimed in surprise.

He excitedly looked at the huge crowd walking around the station.

'Now, this is what you call a city!'

The area where Seol-Ah lived was a little lackluster to call a city, but this place really felt like one.

After following Seol-Ah out of the station, Kang-Woo was once again surprised.

Vroom!

There were car exhaust fumes, high-rise buildings, asphalt roads, and people who were walking busily to their destinations.

"I'm really back," Kang-Woo muttered to himself.

It was only after seeing this familiar scene that it finally hit him that he had truly returned to Earth.

"Kang-Woo, that place is the Seoul Player Management Office."

"Oh, okay."

Kang-Woo turned toward where Seol-Ah was pointing to, and he couldn't believe what his eyes were seeing.

'Incheon Airport?'

The building that Seol-Ah had pointed at was so big that it reminded him of the Incheon Airport. Kang-Woo couldn't believe that they had built such a massive building in the middle of Seoul. It had probably cost a ridiculous amount of money to build.

'This just shows how important Players have become for society, I guess.'

The situation was understandable since Players were the ones protecting Earth from its demise.

"Then I'll go and enroll in the basic training course. I think the first lesson is a theory one, so I will probably get home late," Seol-Ah said.

"Then I'll see you at home."

"Okay, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah waved goodbye to Kang-Woo and left to enroll in the basic training course.

Meanwhile, Kang-Woo walked toward the place in charge of registering new players. The process didn't take long.

After checking Kang-Woo's identification card a few times, the receptionist said in a robotic tone, "Then please move to the test room."

"Okay, thank you." Kang-Woo grabbed the ticket from the receptionist and turned around.

Many people were sitting excitedly in front of the test room.

"Hello? Mom? Oh, I'm in front of the test room. Yeah. I'm gonna take the basic training course once I get the license. Hehe, just you wait. I'll make it big and get tons of offers from large guilds."

"Excuse me, what rank Trait did you get on your First Awakening?"

"I got D-rank."

"Whoa, that's pretty high. Maybe you'll get a B-rank one on your Second Awakening."

"Haha, but that'll still be nothing compared to Players like Baek Kang-Hyun or Cha Yeon-Joo."

"Come on. Those people apparently got S-rank Traits with their First Awakening. We can't compare ourselves to them."

"Have you heard about Nam Ki-Tae?"

"The person who was immediately scouted by the Hanul[1] Guild after getting an S-rank Trait with their Fifth Awakening?"

"Yes. I was so envious of him. I honestly don't expect to get such a rank with my First or Second Awakening, but if I could get one later on..."

"Then your life would take a 180-degree turn."

Kang-Woo sat down and silently eavesdropped on what other people were saying.

'I guess Trait ranks truly are important.'

Players unlocked a different Trait every ten levels. To them, Trait ranks practically decided the hierarchy, so the ranks of the Traits that a Player obtained at lower levels were especially important. The reason was that Players with low-rank Traits struggled to level up and were very unlikely to be able to have more Awakenings. The chances of getting a higher-ranked Trait increased as a Player achieved more Awakenings, but Players starting with low-rank Traits wouldn't even be able to get that chance.

"Hmm..." Kang-Woo opened his status window and checked the Trait he acquired with his First Awakening.

"???-rank Trait. Huh?"

The rank of his Trait, Authority of Predation, was unknown.

'Is it because it's beyond the norm?'

Kang-Woo had a rough idea of why this might be the case. He didn't know how strong S, SS, or even SSS-rank Traits were, but he was sure they couldn't be compared to his Authority of Predation.

'My Authority is seriously broken, after all.'

The best part of the Authority of Predation was that it allowed him to grow indefinitely. Thanks to that, Kang-Woo had reached a point no demon could reach.

'Although, I'm not at that point anymore.'

Nevertheless, he wasn't worried. His Authority of Predation had been sealed, but he still had ways of replenishing his demonic energy. Once he gathered more demonic energy, it should be possible for him to regain his old strength.

'No, if I use the power of this Player thing or whatever it is...'

He might even be able to surpass his old self.

"Mr. Oh Kang-Woo."

"Yes," Kang-Woo answered when his name was called.

Then he entered the test room. Inside the test room, there were many white testing orbs. Many nervous Players stood before the white orbs and placed their hands on top of them.

A woman wearing round glasses approached Kang-Woo and said, "Please place your hand here. Once you activate your power, the color of the orb will change based on your Trait rank."

"How does it change?"

"It's the same as Gates. The higher the rank, the darker the color will become."

Kang-Woo nodded at her words.

'I wonder how it will be represented?'

His Trait rank was outside the norm, so he was curious about what reaction the orb would show.

'Well, I guess it doesn't matter.'

After all, Kang-Woo wasn't the type to hide his strength to avoid receiving as little attention as possible. On the contrary, he was the type of person who stepped up when needed.

Without any hesitation, Kang-Woo placed his hand on the orb.

After checking that the color had barely changed, the woman stated with a dull voice while writing something, "It's an F-rank Trait."

'Huh?' Kang-Woo tilted his head at the unexpected result. 'Is it because its power is mostly sealed?'

There was no way for him to know. It was also possible that the power couldn't be measured because it was outside of the norm.

'Well, it can't be helped.'

There was no way to change the results.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. He would've preferred it if they had brought a monster for him to fight against.

"Players with a Trait lower than D-rank will receive an E-rank Player license. You can freely enter Gates of the same rank. As for Gates of higher rank, you'll need to apply for someone of higher rank to accompany you."

"What can I do to increase my Player rank?"

"If you take the basic training course, you'll immediately be promoted to D-rank. Beyond that, you'll need to sell more than a designated quota of mana stones."

"Okay."

"Then, please wait at the counter. I'll get you your license immediately. Oh, if you would like to take the basic training course, you'll have to apply for it separately at the counter."

"It's okay."

Kang-Woo had no intention of taking a basic training course. He could easily kill Goblins even with the insignificant amount of demonic energy that he currently had.

'It's just a waste of time.'

He had heard that they taught Players the basics they needed to know to fight, but that had no meaning to him. Kang-Woo had all the experience he had gained while fighting for ten millennia, so he did not intend to waste time and money by doing the basic education course.

Kang-Woo turned around and left the test room.

The woman with the round glasses sighed while watching Kang-Woo leave the test room.

'He's absurdly untalented,' she remarked inwardly.

Almost no one got an F-rank Trait, even at their First Awakening. The average was E-rank or sometimes D-rank.

'He's not even taking the basic training course.'

Just getting an F-rank was awful, but if a Player didn't receive the basic training course as well, the outcome was obvious.

'He's probably going to die as soon as he enters a Gate.'

No party would accept a Player with an F-rank Trait into their party.

If that happened, most people would try to reach the Second or even Third Awakening by hunting alone and end up dying in the process.

The woman sighed. 'He's better off not becoming a Player if he has an F-rank Trait.'

It was sad living while doing a desk job in a world that could end at any time, but it was still better than being a Player with an F-rank Trait whose death was almost assured.

"Hmm...?"

At that moment, she saw something in the crystal orb that had been used to test Kang-Woo.

"What's happening?"

The crystal orb started to darken.

From white to light gray and then to a darker gray before finally becoming... pitch black.

"Is it broken?"

The woman had never seen an orb's color change by itself. She looked at the crystal orb with a confused expression on her face.

Crack!

The surface of the pitch-black crystal orb began breaking and eventually shattered into pieces.

"Ugh... It's definitely broken."

As the woman gazed at the shattered crystal orb, she put on an expression that seemed to say "as expected."

'There's no way he could have gotten a black Trait rank.'

Even Baek Kang-Hyun, who had gotten an S-rank with his First Awakening, had only managed to turn the orb into a slightly intense gray.

Yet, this wasn't gray but pitch black. This was an occurrence that did not exist in the records.

She grabbed the broken crystal orb and yelled, "Urgh. Next person, please wait a moment!"

1. Hanul (한울) is a pure Korean word (one that is not derived from Chinese characters) that literally means 'big existence', but it's defined as the existence of the universe through one's own view of heaven. ☁