

With The Gods 431

Chapter 431

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Step-.

Vishnu entered without a sound.

In fact, it wasn't necessary to look to know it.

It was instinct.

"It's been ten thousand years, hasn't it?"

"I don't know. I don't even remember."

"Is time important?"

The three felt the same.

An instinct they wanted to become one. A strange sensation of mutual attraction, like magnets.

Ten thousand years had passed.

They were just trying to return to normal, but for some, it seemed frightening.

However...

"The situation isn't good."

Shiva took out his Player Kit from his pocket and showed a message to the two who hesitated for a moment.

"We should hurry."

[Kubera: Asmodeus has been defeated]

The battle had started not long ago, but a High-Ranker serving as the axis of the Demon Kings had been defeated.

There wasn't much time.

To the fate that Vishnu had seen.

Shiva looked at YuWon.

Vishnu and Brahma. The two seemed to have no particular interest in him.

Had they prepared in advance or something?

'It would be good if we could get rid of him together...'

But it didn't seem like the two would move alongside him.

So there was no other choice. As YuWon had said, if he lost his strength by confronting him for no reason, it could go wrong.

Had there ever been so many conflicts in such a short period?

Events that deviated from the initial plan. And the feeling that YuWon knew something about the three.

He thought that he couldn't continue like this.

But...

"It's not the time to worry about that guy."

Shiva decided to move forward despite the concern.

Yes.

What Brahma had said made sense.

Anyway, once they became one again, that guy would be insignificant.

"Well, then..."

Ssssch-.

Shiva stood up from his seat.

In that moment when the eyes of the three met.

"Let's become one again."

Swish-.

The magic of the three, which had been separated for a while, began to fill the meeting room.

'It has begun.'

The magic began to naturally blend as if they had always been one from the beginning.

YuWon stood up from his seat and walked slowly towards them.

Clearly, the meeting room was not so large. However, YuWon had already taken dozens of steps.

It was in a space created by Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma.

'What is this?'

It was a place shrouded in thick fog, so dense that you couldn't see beyond a step. Perhaps he couldn't see anything because he wasn't allowed to, probably a landscape he wasn't allowed to see himself.

'If that's the case...'

Fireee-.

YuWon's eyes turned red.

By now, YuWon had become quite skilled at using the Golden Cinder Eyes.

His eyes illuminated the fog.

[Golden Cinder Eyes illuminate the unknown space]

The fog that had been in front of him dissipated. Although it didn't change completely to a blinding brightness, he could see what was hidden within.

'Vishnu?'

Beyond the dispersed fog.

In a dark cave where all sides, including the ceiling, were sealed, there was a relatively flat, upright rock that Vishnu used as a chair.

No.

It wasn't Vishnu.

He had Vishnu's face, but his gaze, hair, and atmosphere were completely different from what YuWon knew as Vishnu.

It wasn't Vishnu.

This was a story from a long time ago.

Ten thousand years.

No, much further in the past.

"...Boring."

Vishnu.

No.

The ancient God, whose name was now forgotten, muttered.

"This is boring and monotonous."

Words repeated countless times.

Among the smoke surrounding him.

Vishnu's thoughts were reflected under the tranquil moon.

"Should I just die?"

He didn't know how long he had been pondering the same thing.

Whenever he wanted, he could vanish. He had the power to destroy anything, and taking his own life wouldn't be an issue.

But...

'...Then it would be even more boring.'

No.

He wasn't bored.

"I was alone."

That was the story Vishnu told YuWon.

"I was alone for a long time. I was trapped under the roof for a long time, but I never thought of leaving during that long period."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because, to me, that place was the whole world. I didn't know there was a place outside of that narrow cave."

He said it as if it were pathetic.

Vishnu shook his head as he spoke.

It was a comical situation.

The one who was considered the greatest existence in this Tower didn't know anything about how vast the world was.

Curiously, this story came up as an answer to the question, "Why did you become three?"

"So I decided to become three. It was my way of dealing with the loneliness a little."

"It doesn't seem like a very grand reason."

"Everyone has different important values. At that time, loneliness was my greatest pain."

YuWon remembered the conversation from that time as he looked at Vishnu in front of him.

One who became three because of loneliness.

But the process of becoming one again after becoming three was not as simple.

"I thought that when I became one again, it would be like before. But the result was very different from what I thought."

"Even if it's stupid."

Despite aging, he was still a child in many ways.

Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, the three divided into one, had different ideals and powers.

And Vishnu was the center of all of them.

For a long time, he lived without control over himself.

An outstretched hand in front of him wiped away the cave landscape along with Vishnu who appeared before his eyes.

Anyway, everything that was hidden in this fog was false. The other party had hidden more lies within lies to prevent YuWon from interfering.

And beyond that divided space...

Huuuuaah...

YuWon saw the truth that was hidden.

Vishnu and Brahma fallen on the ground.

And Shiva, who watched them from above.

He sent a warning look to YuWon.

"You've finally come."

It was as if he knew he would come.

"What are you doing?"

"Haven't you seen it too?"

There was greed in Shiva's eyes as he looked at the two who had fallen.

"I'm taking back what originally belonged to me."

Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva.

The names of the three people who were divided into one.

Although they didn't say it out loud, it was the common thought that the three shared.

And that was precisely why Vishnu had yearned so much to become one again.

"I am the real one."

Under the sky where the battle against Shub-Niggurath began...

Boom!

Grrrrr...

As the ground began to sink, the surrounding Rankers began to move away one by one to avoid it.

"Don't get close."

"Take cover from a distance."

"Covering, my ass. Come on, quickly, over here!"

There were only a few combinations.

Odin's fist caused the sturdy ground that held the castle to collapse and changed the shape of the battlefield.

Up to now, Odin had been fighting while ensuring the safety of his close companions.

Shub-Niggurath was not an opponent he could afford to fight in a relaxed manner.

Rumble, rumble, rumble...

Dozens of intricate magic circles condensed into Odin's fist.

Boom...

Puuuuuuf!

Odin's fist struck Shub-Niggurath in the chest.

Not only was he skilled with the spear and magic, but Odin had also been known as the best fighter in the Tower before learning magic from Mimir.

Shub-Niggurath's body was thrown backward.

And finally, the surrounding Rankers regained hope.

"We did it!"

"Odin the King, as expected..."

Asmodeus, the High-Ranker among the Demon Kings, couldn't even touch Shub-Niggurath.

But Odin was different.

His fist not only reached Shub-Niggurath but also threw her several tens of meters away.

In terms of strength, Odin seemed to be a step above.

Thump...

Odin took a step closer to Shub-Niggurath.

"Do you see me as one of your sheep/goat?"

Toc, toc...

Shub-Niggurath shook the chest that had been hit by Odin's fist.

Her body was covered in dust.

Despite receiving a punch reinforced by dozens of magic circles, it seemed she hadn't suffered significant damage.

"I'm thinking about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I want to make you a little more special."

Shub-Niggurath looked at Odin with an interested gaze. In the face of this unpleasant look, Odin frowned and clenched his fist once more.

"Why have you come here?"

"Don't ask about something you can't handle. Now, even I alone am enough to completely despair you."

"If that were at that time, you would be right. But you, in your current state, don't seem so terrifying. Why are you in that form?"

The Shub-Niggurath they had seen on the first floor had the appearance of a massive billy goat.

Due to that appearance, YuWon had named her: The "Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young."

"Why don't you throw that spear, then?" Shub-Niggurath asked.

Shub-Niggurath remembered the spear Odin had thrown at that time, the spear that had caused her injuries to her original form.

The reason Shub-Niggurath remembered Odin so clearly was the Gungnir spear.

"It's not the right time to use it. Be patient. You don't know when my spear will pierce through your head."

Odin had not yet thrown Gungnir. The reason was that he had not yet determined if the Shub-Niggurath in front of him was the real one or not.

The situation was favorable for Shub-Niggurath anyway.

"Well, in any case."

She smiled as if she were enjoying the situation and looked around, beyond Odin, where numerous Rankers filled the sky.

Diablo and Susanoo, Agni and Kubera, Brunhilde...

Each of them was a Ranker who had reached the pinnacle.

"Fortunately, it seems there are enough useful ingredients here."

It didn't matter if she lost her sheep here. With so many ingredients to create new sheep, what was there to fear?

Under Shub-Niggurath's feet, strands of purple hair wriggled restlessly.

Tangled, tangled~

Beeeeh...

The herds of sheep rose from the hair-covered ground.

Odin looked at the sheep.

The first sheep that Asmodeus had transformed into blended with the more than a thousand sheep, making it difficult to identify which one it was.

"It shouldn't be such a difficult problem."

As soon as he heard those words...

Wooong...

Odin did not hesitate to cast a spell on his fists and leaped into the midst of the sheep.

Kwaaang...

The neck of a sheep twisted and broke. Another punch exploded in the body of another sheep, while another sheep bit Odin's shoulder from behind.

Crack...

Odin grabbed the neck of the sheep biting his shoulder with his fist.

Shriek...

The sheep's neck snapped. Holding the sheep, Odin shook it to get rid of the other approaching sheep.

It was as if there were a fierce predator within the flock of sheep.

And following that predator...

"Help King Odin!"

"Eliminate the sheep!"

"Anyone with healing abilities..."

The Rankers who had been watching the battle began to move frantically.

And amid that intense battle...

"Come on, push their limits."

Shub-Niggurath crossed her arms and watched their antics.

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After the fight began, Odin's goal had been singular from the very beginning until now.

Boom!

He struck the goat blocking his path with his fist. Another goat bit his calf, and he raised his leg, slamming it into the ground.

Gruuu!

Thud!

The solid ground sank deeply as the goats running towards him were thrown in all directions. Odin lunged at Shub-Niggurath.

But...

Beeeeeh...

Suddenly, another group of goats blocked his way.

"They're persistent."

Wuuu!

A massive magic circle appeared in front of his fist.

Just as Odin was about to unleash his magic...

Kwuuu!

Kaaw!

The goats blocking his path scattered and flew away from Odin.

A type of explosion magic that focused on bursting the surrounding magic. As far as Odin knew, there was only one High-Ranker who primarily used this type of magic.

"You've aged as well."

A small, elderly figure floated above Odin's head.

It was Mimir.

Beeeeeh...

The goats sensed the threat and bleated toward Mimir. Mimir frowned at the goats' reaction and snapped his fingers.

"Tsk, tsk."

Kwuuu!

Magic compressed around the goats.

"Running to their deaths unknowingly, they're no different from wild beasts."

Hwaaaaa!

Poow!

The high-density compressed magic was prone to igniting. The goats were tossed about by consecutive explosions.

"Now it looks cleaner."

Mimir rubbed his hands as if satisfied.

The Rankers who had been battling hard were stirred by the sight of Mimir, floating in the air and pushing the goats away in the blink of an eye.

"Who is that?"

"Does anyone know him?"

"It's the first time I've seen that face..."

"Mimir? Isn't that Mimir, friend of King Odin?"

Mimir's name was famous. Alongside Odin, he founded Asgard, and there was hardly any Ranker who didn't know that he was Odin's closest friend.

However, that didn't mean Mimir's face was widely recognized. He could only emerge from the Curse of Knowledge once a year, for a hundred years.

Furthermore, Mimir didn't even use that single year for external activities; he spent it with Odin.

In other words, he wasn't publicly known.

"I guess his Rank is much lower than King Odin's..."

"This fool! How do you expect to increase your Rank if you don't do any activities?"

"Oh, really?"

"So who's the number one in the Ranking, then?"

"Why are you asking me that?"

"Anyway, Mimir is great!"

Mimir's appearance lifted the spirits of those on the battlefield.

A significant morale boost.

Mimir created a path between Odin and Shub-Niggurath.

"Now, do what you have to do."

As the goats blocking the path withdrew, Odin looked at Mimir.

"Yes."

How long had it been since Odin had fought alongside Mimir like this?

It felt good to have a reliable ally at his back after so long. Perhaps that was why Odin could fully concentrate on advancing.

Yiing...

A long spear formed in Odin's hand.

Gungnir.

Odin held it firmly and thrust it into the ground.

Boom!

The distance closed.

Shiiiiing!

Kwaack!

With a brilliant explosion of white light, the tip of Odin's spear seemed to pierce Shub-Niggurath's neck.

At that moment...

Swoosh...

Shub-Niggurath's hand reached forward.

Crack!

"...!"

Shub-Niggurath's hand grasped Gungnir.

No.

It wasn't a hand.

"A goat...?"

With no eyes or nose, just goat teeth with two small horns. Shub-Niggurath's hand had that shape.

Odin's head, which was looking at Shub-Niggurath's hand up close, tilted upward. At that moment, when Odin came face to face with Shub-Niggurath, he could see the shape of a massive goat behind her.

And at that moment...

A shiver ran down Odin's spine.

"You don't know me."

Shub-Niggurath's voice, with purple eyes.

That voice was completely different from the calm and beautiful voice of the woman Odin had heard a moment ago.

It had no highs and lows in its voice, and he couldn't even tell if it was a sound or a writing. Moreover, the moment he heard that voice, Odin could partially glimpse the true form of Shub-Niggurath.

Gugugugu...

An overwhelming pressure crushed Odin's body.

Ujik... Crack!

The ground collapsed, and Odin's veins burst in his body.

He lacked the strength to support himself with his body.

No, it wasn't simply a lack of strength.

It was the loss of will that crashed to the ground at that moment.

The otherworldly monster that had broken through the walls and entered the Tower.

Odin and Mimir had prepared the "Day of Reckoning" to stop it.

If they had scattered, they wouldn't have known what to do, but if they all joined forces to fight as they were doing now, they had a good chance of winning.

But...

"What I saw then..."

It seems he had thought wrong.

Deep underground with no end in sight.

As he fell, Odin looked at Shub-Niggurath, who was looking down at him.

"It wasn't all."

Odin realized that the gigantic male goat he had seen at that moment was not the only one.

Crack... Craack, craaack-le...

Black sparks flew between YuWon and Shiva.

The collision happened right after.

Flash... Kwaaang!

In the blink of an eye, YuWon and Shiva vanished from their positions and collided in the air. After a single clash, they separated from each other and drew their weapons.

Yuwon drew his usual sword.

And Shiva pulled out a long scythe similar to the one Hades wields.

Shiiiiing...

Jwaeeeeong!

The two weapons, imbued with dark magic, clashed. Shiva looked at YuWon with bright eyes as she wielded the same kind of magic.

"It's different from what I had heard."

"What's different?"

"The way you fight and the nature of your magic."

"I'm naturally quite versatile."

In the world, YuWon was primarily known as a lightning magic-type fighter. He was also famous as a summoner who controlled Susanoo.

Since he was an undead summoner, it was natural for him to use dark magic, but he had never shown such free control of it.

Shiik, shyaang...

Axes flying from two different directions.

YuWon's sword met one of them.

Jjeoeung...

Chik...

Shiva's axe barely grazed his cheek. Dark magic was corrosive. Blood ran down his cheek, and a sharp pang of pain shot across his face.

Swoosh...

YuWon wiped the blood from his cheek.

He was faster than he had heard. This level was comparable to Satan in his prime.

YuWon looked at the axe that Shiva was twirling in her hand.

From the beginning until now, Shiva had a triumphant expression on her face.

"I know you have skill, but this is my space."

"Did you steal the power of Brahma and Vishnu?"

"Weren't you expecting something like this?"

Kwong...

The axe she had been twirling stopped in Shiva's hand.

"And yet, you dared to enter here on your own?"

Kwaaat...

When the axe swung once, YuWon's body split in half.

For a brief moment, Shiva saw him like that.

However...

Swoosh...

YuWon's figure disappeared from the spot.

For a brief moment, Shiva's scythe followed YuWon gently.

Jjeojung, jjeojjung...

The two axes and swords clashed relentlessly. YuWon's eyes were always on Shiva's pupils, not on the axes.

Fireee~

Eyes burning with a red color.

Shiva realized how YuWon could avoid and block her axes, despite her notably slower speed.

"Is that what they call Golden Cinder Eyes?"

Despite his slower speed, YuWon seemed capable of blocking and evading her axes without too much effort.

But that was it.

In his current state, he could only defend himself. He couldn't win by rushing into the defense alone.

Furthermore, this was his space.

"The fight is already over."

Sshh...

The corner of the mouth twisted upward.

Kiiing...

With an unpleasant sound, Shiva's axe crossed in an X shape.

YuWon's eyes, burning intensely with red, flickered.

"This is a bit... dangerous."

Sometimes, knowing was not enough to deal with something.

What he needed now was one.

Craaack-le...

It was a much greater power than before.

['Uranus Heart' is activating]

[The 'Tartarus' gate is opening]

Woosh!

The Arcane Power of Tartarus emanated from the ring he wore on his hand.

That Arcane Power collided with Shiva's scythe.

Claaang!

When Shiva swung the scythe, a long X-shaped crack appeared.

In an instant, an attack meant to split YuWon's body into four parts.

But in the next moment, Shiva's pupils dilated as she swung her axe.

"Can you block this too?"

The power gradually returning from Vishnu and Brahma, strengthening her axe, was neutralized by YuWon's sword.

Until just a moment ago, she hadn't been so worried.

After all, Vishnu and Brahma had already been defeated, and their power was returning to her.

Although YuWon was a High-Ranker, he ultimately believed he was just an insect before him.

However...

"Isn't this enough?"

Although he couldn't kill him, this attack should have at least caused him injuries.

But despite that, he managed to block her axe tightly.

It meant his calculation was wrong.

What could be the reason?

He felt a little frustrated.

Crack...

He gritted his teeth at his wounded pride.

"You're doing unpleasant things."

Kwaaat!

Shiva's axe once again cut into YuWon's body.

Jjeoeung...

Again.

He managed to block the axe he thought he couldn't stop.

The amount of magic flowing from his ring was unusual. Shiva gritted her teeth as she pressed YuWon.

"Die."

Kwaaat!

Relentlessly, she kept pressing.

With his eyes wide open, Shiva gradually cornered YuWon.

"Die. Die."

Kwaaawwng!

Pit...

YuWon's body began accumulating wounds one after another.

It seemed that just a little more would be enough.

This time...

Kiiiiing!

The amount of magic flowing through the two axes was overwhelming. The increasingly intense attacks made YuWon's expression contort.

"It won't work."

Had he finally given up his strength?

It was at that moment that Shiva finally smiled.

"If you keep this up, you might die."

"What?"

What was he saying?

YuWon's voice sounded as if he had been looking down on him all along.

Shiva, who was about to swing her axe, stopped for a moment. It was only then that she realized YuWon hadn't taken a single step for a while.

"What has happened?"

He was sure he had given it his all.

Even if he was Kim YuWon, he couldn't afford to be so relaxed in front of him.

This made no sense.

"Hey, you two."

And at that moment, YuWon spoke unexpected words.

"Can you stop pretending to be asleep and help?"

Pretending to be asleep.

Shiva didn't understand what that meant and furrowed her brow for a moment.

And as she did...

"No way..."

Shiva's head turned following YuWon's gaze.

And there...

"It's so noisy; my head hurts."

"I wasn't pretending to sleep; I was actually sleeping."

Undoubtedly, Vishnu and Brahma, who should have been unconscious on the ground, were staggering as they stood up.

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In a dazed state, Shiva maintained an unmoving expression as if time had stopped.

He had no idea what was happening. He didn't understand how Vishnu and Brahma, who had clearly lost consciousness, were standing.

"What... what's happening?"

Shiva's jaw dropped as if it had fallen, unnaturally.

Vishnu and Brahma, who had awakened from their slumber, looked at him with the same expression in their eyes.

"We thought we were one."

"We thought we all had the same thought."

As if they were having a conversation, Brahma naturally followed Vishnu's words.

"But it turns out we didn't."

"Why do you think that was?"

The moment the three of them tried to become one,

Shiva's darkness swallowed Vishnu and Brahma. As if they had been preparing for a long time, Brahma and Vishnu's minds were absorbed into the depths of the darkness.

If they hadn't heard YuWon's words and regained their senses,

Because they trusted Shiva so much, they wouldn't have tried to resist.

At this moment, their minds might have been completely consumed by Shiva.

'I thought this was my space...'

Saaah-.

The hazy smoke hanging over a dark space disappeared.

The blue sky appeared over the place where they were standing, and a clear river flowed under their feet.

Shiva's world had changed.

In fact, from the moment the other two began to regain consciousness,

This world had become something that belonged to all three of them.

Kwaaahk-.

Shiva's hand holding the scythe was filled with power.

The thought of consuming the other two and becoming one faded away.

Vishnu and Brahma did not trust Shiva. Thanks to that mistrust, when Shiva's darkness caught them, they managed to resist and fully regain their minds.

The reason for their mistrust was obvious.

Shiva looked at YuWon.

'It's because of that guy.'

Planting suspicions about Shiva in the minds of Vishnu and Brahma.

And to prevent Shiva's darkness from forcibly absorbing the two, protect them here for a while.

It wasn't a difficult task.

"You can't trust the ranking after all, can you?"

YuWon's words made Shiva's pupils dilate, as if he was asking what the hell he was saying.

It was what Diablo, who had been in the same place with YuWon and Shiva until the day before, said.

"Without those two, you're nothing."

Three people who were one.

But the smallest part of all was Shiva.

YuWon's words disturbed the balance of Shiva.

Swiish-

In an instant, the space between YuWon and Shiva distorted. With a kind of mysterious technique, the distance between Shiva and YuWon shortened.

And at that moment...

"When the distance shortens..."

Ssssss

Shiva felt a sharp, burning sensation that pierced from his chest to his shoulder.

"How did you think you could win?"

Chaaak!

"!"

A long wound that extended from his chest to his shoulder.

Shiva raised his hand to touch his shoulder. He had no idea when he had been stabbed with a sword.

No, rather...

'How should I have reacted...?'

Shiva was looking at YuWon from behind without realizing it.

And when their eyes met that way...

'Golden...'

Shiva realized that YuWon didn't have Golden Cinder Eyes, but different eyes.

A golden gleam in his eyes. There was a deeper mystery in them than in Golden Cinder Eyes.

Eyes of Foreknowledge ().

Eyes that foresaw the desired future.

"When the distance shortens, it's the same for you and me."

If he didn't know, he wouldn't know, but if he knew of the existence of the ability, there was no reason for YuWon not to use his Eyes of Foreknowledge.

"I thought about when you would use that ability."

The day before.

YuWon had seen Shiva and Diablo clash.

To suppress Diablo, Shiva had used an ability that closed space using darkness, and YuWon had been able to see what kind of ability it was.

If he knew what kind of ability it was.

And if that ability was in the context of an ability that suddenly reduced the distance.

It wouldn't be that difficult to use the shortened distance to his advantage.

Step~

Vishnu approached Shiva.

He addressed him with a calm voice, as always.

"Why did you do that?"

"..."

Blocking the flow of blood from his shoulder to his arm with his hand, Shiva looked into Vishnu's eyes.

Then...

Thwack!

Like a fern, a small hand struck the back of Shiva's neck. Brahma, who couldn't take it anymore, smacked Shiva's head.

"Do you think you did something right, you idiot?"

Crack!

Shiva raised his head again, sharpening his gaze. But instead of Brahma, who hit his head, he saw Vishnu, who hadn't done anything.

And then...

"Because."

"What?"

"Because... you are the real one."

He said it quietly, as if he was whispering.

"I've been thinking about it for a long time. Which of us is the real one. What we would be like if we were one."

Frustration mingled in Shiva's eyes.

"To find out, I searched the place where we used to be. Somewhere within this vast Tower, under a roof with no visible sky. That place."

"So... you found it?"

"Yes, I found it. I didn't really have high expectations. It was just curiosity and useless obsession."

Their true form when they became one.

Initially, he was just curious.

"That's when I understood. We were one, but we weren't one."

"What are you saying?"

"In reality, we're just separate fragments of you."

Vishnu's eyes shook.

The three of them had no memories of when they were one. They thought those memories would only return after they became one.

"Why is your ranking unusually high among the three? Haven't you at least wondered why once?"

Shiva's words made Brahma look at Vishnu.

Now that he thought about it, it was strange.

Even though they were originally one divided into three, their rankings were different.

Brahma, who didn't particularly excel in activity, had the lowest ranking, followed by Shiva.

But Vishnu's ranking was unusually high compared to the three.

3rd place.

Right after Odin.

Therefore, most of the Rankers said that Vishnu's ranking, which showed no notable activity or skills, was just a faade.

"But the Administration knew. They knew that we were separate fragments of you, Vishnu."

The truth was a little different.

Originally, they weren't one divided into three.

They were "two" derived from one.

"Do you understand now, Brahma?"

Shiva smiled maliciously and taunted Brahma.

"We're not becoming one. We're just being devoured by that bastard..."

"Damn, you talk too much."

Fupish

Brahma covered his ears.

It was as if he had heard something he shouldn't have heard.

The unexpected reaction made Shiva stare blankly for a moment with a dazed expression.

Then...

"Yes. Your cup has been filled with it for a long time."

Brahma denied what Shiva had thought for millennia.

"Both of us came from Vishnu, right? So what? Shouldn't you understand that at least?"

"Of course..."

"Of course, that's what you thought, right? You didn't want to disappear. So what about it? Do you feel it's unfair?"

Gurgling

Shiva's knees trembled.

The weight pressing on his body. The strength emanating from Brahma's small body overwhelmed him.

"What you're saying is that you tried to take something that wasn't yours in the first place."

Grk...

The blood in his mouth tasted bitter. Just as he was about to run towards Brahma in frustration, a sharp sword entered his throat.

"Stay still."

YuWon's sword.

When did the sword's tip reach here? Shiva's eyes shook.

Now he really thought it was the end.

The strength holding up his two legs was released, and Shiva knelt.

"Tsk."

YuWon looked at Shiva as if he were pathetic.

This guy was also a part of Vishnu.

"Well."

YuWon's gaze still directed towards Vishnu, who had a calm expression as if he had no emotions.

"Even the purest people have dark sides."

When Vishnu split, he wanted to create different friends and brothers among them.

"Brahma was like a pure friend, like a child. That's why he didn't grow."

When Vishnu became one, that was the story of his other side.

"Shiva was my shadow."

"Shadow?"

"Everyone has a bad side. I have it too. Shiva was that side."

"I don't understand."

"People don't show their bad side, not because they don't have it. Everyone has a dark side and a light side; the difference lies in which one is bigger, which determines how they manifest externally."

At that moment, it was hard to fully understand those words.

But now, seeing it with his own eyes, it made sense.

"He's the smallest and, to be honest, the least impressive compared to Vishnu and Brahma."

Shiva was smaller than Vishnu and Brahma. Not in terms of physical size but in terms of the presence he radiated.

Everyone has various sides, but not all sides are of the same size.

No one is perfectly square.

And of all those sides, Shiva was the smallest aspect of Vishnu.

"What are you planning to do now?"

YuWon shifted his gaze from Shiva to Vishnu and Brahma.

Now that the two of them had realized, there was no way Shiva could harm them. The darkness Shiva had been preparing was gone, and he was much smaller than the other two.

There was no room left for YuWon's intervention.

And the answers to YuWon's questions were already decided.

"Things got a little complicated, but..."

"We have to become one again."

Their opponent was Shub-Niggurath.

Originally, they were supposed to face him much later.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Shub-Niggurath had entered the Tower alone.

And to stop him, they needed the power of Vishnu, the greatest being in this Tower.

"Alright. Then, please hurry."

"And what about you? What do you plan to do now?"

"Are you going to fight right away?"

To Vishnu and Brahma's questions, YuWon nodded.

"Not immediately."

"Then, what?"

"There's something else I have to do."

With those words, YuWon withdrew the sword pointing at Shiva's neck.

"Let's talk about that later. When we're all alive, if we get to that."

YuWon's figure gradually faded, and Vishnu and Brahma nodded.

It was the right answer.

This wasn't the time for quiet chats and trivial conversations. Right now, outside of this place, the battle with Shub-Niggurath was in full swing.

YuWon looked at Shiva, whose expression seemed desperate, along with the three Devas.

'With this, we've fulfilled the first condition.'

One of the conditions to trap Shub-Niggurath.

The existence of Vishnu, who was now one.

With this, at least one of the conditions was met.

And now...

'Although I'm sorry for forcibly waking you...'

['The Egg' is silent]

The egg where Danpung was asleep.

YuWon, who had been patiently waiting for its hatching, began to gaze intently inside.

'Right now, we can only use all the advantages we have, even if you're in that state.'

Chapter 434

C434

Beeeeeeh-.

Beeh-.

The Rankers lost their heads to the roar of thousands of goats.

Odin fell into the hands of Shub-Niggurath. At the same time, the morale that was on the rise sank even further due to his fall.

And among those Rankers...

"Tsk-."

Diablo clicked his tongue and shook his head as if he were disgusted.

He stopped the punch he was about to throw and stood up.

He heard the cries from the battlefield.

"Aaaah!"

"My shoulder-!"

"Get away, get away...!"

"Uwaaaah-!"

The fight between the demoralized Rankers and the goats was one-sided.

No.

No one would call this a "fight."

This was a "hunt."

"It's not fun at all."

He didn't like it.

The confrontation he had been eagerly waiting for was unfolding so unevenly.

Pak-.

A muscle on Diablo's forehead tensed.

The Deva Rankers, who were fleeing in terror from the goats, came into view.

The Valkyries, who at first were at least willing to fight to the death, seemed to shake and retreat even before the confrontation.

It was pathetic.

What he couldn't bear more than anything was...

Pweok-!

The Demons weren't any different.

"Kh!"

A Demon Ranker who had been hit in the arm by Diablo fell to the ground. A moment ago, he was trying to run to survive from the goats.

"Are you so afraid of dying?"

"D-D-Di-Diablo-nim..."

"Are you afraid?"

"N-No, no, no, I'm not!"

In response to Diablo's question, the Demon lowered his head and closed his eyes tightly.

He knew it was absurd even to think about it. What does it mean to flee instead of fighting while saying you're not afraid of dying?

It was like running into a tiger while fleeing from a fox.

'My reputation ends here...'

"That's right. It's natural to be afraid."

The Demon carefully opened the eyes he had been closing tightly.

"Is it?"

Diablo didn't reach out to him.

Instead, his gaze was directed at Shub-Niggurath, who was riding on the goats' back.

"Because if you die, you won't be able to keep fighting."

Being afraid of not being able to keep fighting.

The Demons, even if they understood it in their heads, couldn't fully comprehend it.

Even though their race was obsessed with fighting, they hadn't overcome the fear of death.

But the Diablo now was as if...

"So, I'm afraid too."

It was a display of how that fear was overcoming him.

He thought his head would explode at any moment, but Diablo turned his body and took a step toward the group of goats.

And over Diablo's head.

Ziiii-.

He saw the horns that protruded grow even longer.

"Could it be...?"

The Demons' eyes widened.

But that idea of "it can't be" lasted only for a moment.

In this situation, there was no way Diablo wouldn't reveal his true form.

Beeeh-!

A goat bared its teeth at Diablo, who was approaching its mother.

Chug-.

An abnormally large mouth. The goat opened its mouth wide as if it was about to swallow Diablo and ran towards him.

And at that moment...

Buuung-.

Chug-!

The red tail flying from behind Diablo hit the goat's body and threw it to the ground. Diablo raised the arm with scales that had grown much larger than before, leaving the staggering goat aside after the impact.

His size had increased at least twice from the beginning.

"Don't hide among the children; come here."

Duduk-.

As he waved his long red tail, Diablo's eyes, which had turned completely red, shone.

"Damn goat."

Plaf-!

Diablo's tail hit the ground.

The broken ground displayed the expression of Diablo's rising anger. Ignoring the goats, Diablo strode toward Shub-Niggurath.

And following Diablo's actions, Shub-Niggurath also bit into the goats surrounding him.

"The reaction of those who are terrified is usually similar. Drowning in fear, either by strangulation or fleeing."

Jeobeok-.

As he approached Diablo, Shub-Niggurath had an interesting expression.

"But your reaction is neither. Even though you know you're about to die..."

Diablo smiled.

"You're enjoying it."

Unbeknownst to anyone, Diablo had completely transformed into the form of a full-fledged Demon. He was covered in red scales and had eight horns protruding from his head, revealing the figure of the Demon Lord and the most powerful of Demons.

Diablo.

The supreme Demon and Lord of the Demon Realm.

He had revealed his true form.

Gugugugu-.

-Exactly.

Diablo, who had shown his true form, lifted his head.

The purple of the sky mixed with the red. The Demonic Energy emanating from Diablo covered the world.

Crack, crack-.

The ground beneath his feet cracked, and heat similar to that of lava rose from within.

His mouth opened slowly.

"It's fun. So much fun that I feel like I'm going mad."

Diablo wasn't consumed by fear.

Instead, he was enjoying this moment in which he didn't know when he would die.

Thousands of years ago.

Ba'al, who had come to visit Diablo, the Demon Lord, asked him:

"It must be boring."

It was a statement that had been carefully thought out.

But Diablo, who was bored yawning in his throne, responded as if he knew it all.

"Yes. It's boring."

"You must have seen enough blood on your way here. Isn't it enough yet?"

Diablo had shed a lot of blood on his way to becoming the Lord of the Demon Kings.

He had overcome more than half of the Demons who crossed his path, killing some by cutting their throats and tearing out their hearts. Then, Diablo had subdued the entire group by himself and stopped the flow of blood.

"I can't say it's not enough."

"What do you mean?"

"My thirst is unending. No matter how much I drink, it's never satisfied, so I've stopped trying to fill it."

Those were terrifying words.

It was because he was not trying to satisfy a thirst that could never be quenched from the beginning.

"Do you plan to endure it forever?"

"I have no choice. I can't kill all my comrades with my own hands."

"It must be difficult."

"Even so, I have expectations."

"Expectations?"

Diablo nodded.

His expression was more excited than ever at the following words.

"Someday, someone stronger than me will appear. We probably won't be able to avoid a fight."

Just by imagining it, he began to sweat. His voice became more passionate, and the seat on which he was leaning trembled.

"The only way to satisfy this thirst is for me to die. It took me too long to realize that."

Diablo said that and closed his eyes completely. He did so because he feared that otherwise, even Ba'al, who was in front of him at that moment, might be killed.

"So I'm willing to endure it, at least for the pleasure of that moment."

Diablo had been enduring for thousands of years.

And now...

He finally faced the opponent who would quench the thirst he had been holding back all this time.

Fwoosh!

Flames enveloped Shub-Niggurath's body.

Blazing red flames that obstructed the view. The goats bleated in response to the heat hotter than lava.

Shub-Niggurath gazed at the brilliant flames. Due to the flames that completely enveloped him, he couldn't see anything else.

Hwaaak-!

Within the flames, Diablo's figure materialized.

-I've been waiting for this day.

Kwang-.

The hand that shot out from the flames gripped Shub-Niggurath's neck.

--The day I die.

Sueeeuuuu-.

Diablo's figure drew near to Shub-Niggurath.

Facing the approaching face, Shub-Niggurath opened his mouth.

"There are many interesting people in this world."

Kwang-.

He gripped Diablo's arm that had his throat.

"It's a reward for your long wait."

Ziiiiing-.

Shub-Niggurath also started extending the horns on his head, gradually revealing his original form.

"I'll make you my allied goat so you can fight forever."

Fwoosh!

Flames erupted.

The place where Diablo stood had already disappeared as the ground had completely melted. The surroundings had transformed into a sea of flames, and the sky was dyed red.

It was Diablo's power revealing his true form.

"Get away from the flames! Hurry!"

Hwaaaaa-!

A strong wind swept away the flames spreading in all directions. Diablo's flames didn't discriminate, and to prevent them from spreading, Michael protected his allies from them.

Under Michael's command, demons and angels moved frantically.

And beyond this chaos...

"What's happening...?"

"The battlefield suddenly turned into Muspelheim."

"With such intense flames, could it be...?"

In the hearts of the rankers, the hope that Diablo's flames could make a difference ignited once more.

Look at these flames.

They were flames that didn't fall behind Surt, the King of Muspelheim, and Odin's rival. They wondered how many living beings could survive such flames.

It didn't have to be a massacre.

There were still many rankers and high-rankers in this place.

No matter how monstrous their opponents were, as long as they could inflict mortal wounds, they could change the course of the battle.

Even Diablo's true body, which had never been revealed in the Great Heaven Demon War, seemed to be enough to confront Shub-Niggurath.

However...

"...That fool."

Even Susanoo, who was fighting on the front lines alongside him, found Diablo's actions quite foolish.

"Doesn't he realize he's running to his death?"

Diablo's presence was a complete shock to Susanoo.

He too had sought the fight and death for himself as he traveled through the battlefield.

However, Diablo yearned for an even greater value than Susanoo.

Susanoo felt the desire for battle that Diablo had been repressing until now, now emanating from his true form.

A fight for life. Susanoo had already experienced such a battle, and as a result, he found death as he is now.

But the battle with Yamata-no-Orochi and the presence in front of him were of a different dimension from the beginning.

Above all...

If Diablo were to be defeated so overwhelmingly at this moment, the morale of the allies could collapse completely, and they might permanently lose the advantage.

"There's no other choice."

There was no time to hesitate.

He had to move before those flames went out.

Although he wasn't sure if Diablo could achieve anything, but if he joined...

Crackle-

But the moment Susanoo took a step forward...

Flash-!

A Golden Lightning Bolt shot from the ground to the sky.

Susanoo turned his head toward the wall of lightning blocking his path.

He nearly became a kebab by the Lightning Bolt. Only a ranker who could handle such a powerful Golden Lightning Bolt existed in the Tower.

"Don't do something foolish."

Even without looking at the voice's owner, it seemed like he knew who it was.

Susanoo turned his head.

Before he could identify the owner of the Lightning Bolt, the surrounding crowd was already in an uproar.

"Zeus!"

"Zeus has arrived!"

A high-ranker with an especially radiant appearance, even among all these rankers.

Referred to as the King who leads this Tower along with Odin.

"...The battlefield is in chaos."

Zeus, the God of the Sky.

He arrived on the battlefield along with Hercules.

Chapter 435

C435

Zeus, the God of the Sky.

And Hercules, the Giant Slayer.

Both were recognized High-Rankers in this Tower. There is no need to mention Zeus, the King of Olympus, and Hercules, the Hero of the Giant War.

Although they were just two individuals, their appearance was enough to change the atmosphere of the battlefield.

Step~

"Why are you here?"

It was Hercules' question to Susanoo.

A question about why YuWon was not here, and also a question about where YuWon was.

"The master sent me."

"The master?"

Hercules seemed surprised for a moment, wondering if that's how Susanoo referred to YuWon. No one could have imagined such a term coming from Susanoo's mouth, even in the relationship between a summoner and their summon.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing, just..."

"Why do you care about the treatment? It's not the time for that, right?"

His tone was sharp, as if he was making accusations.

In his heart, he wanted to take a little more risk and confront him, but it certainly wasn't the right time for that.

"That's true."

"They are having a pointless conversation."

Susanoo and Hercules both closed their mouths at the same time in response to Zeus' observation.

It wasn't an order from YuWon, and there was no need to listen to it, but Susanoo couldn't rebel against Zeus' words so easily. From Zeus, Susanoo could feel a certain majesty, just like with Odin.

"Now, first, we must deal with that fool."

As soon as Zeus' words fell...

Fireeee-!

Something was shot from the pillar of fire created by Diablo.

A red dot flying into the sky.

It quickly fell down.

Crash!

Gooooou-.

A circular crater formed on the ground where the dot fell. When Susanoo turned his head in the direction where the crater had formed, he saw Diablo lying on the ground, drawing the Chinese character "da" ().

"Tsk. He came back somehow."

"It doesn't seem like he's alright."

"Somehow, he's alive, that's what matters."

Crackle-

Scratching the ground with his long nails, Diablo staggered to his feet.

As soon as he stood up, he grabbed his head immediately. Diablo, vigorously shaking his head, muttered.

"What the hell happened?"

A tone of voice mixed with a lot of irritation.

Being interrupted in the middle of a fight was something that Diablo hated more than anything.

In Diablo's gaze when he turned his head, he saw an old man with deep wrinkles around his eyes.

"Individual actions are prohibited."

The reason why Diablo was blown away.

It was because of Mimir's magic.

Diablo, who opened his eyes and looked at Mimir, staggered a bit when getting up from where he had fallen.

What the hell happened?

"Take a moment to recover. Your body and mind are a mess right now."

"What?"

Diablo, who staggered briefly, searched his memories.

He was definitely fighting Shub-Niggurath amidst the flames.

But in fact, he had no enthusiasm for that fight. He had no memories of the fight, so it was natural.

There was really nothing left in his head.

"Curse."

Crackle-

The sound of sharp teeth grinding. Mimir looked at Diablo contemptuously, as if he were pathetic.

"If losing makes you so angry, don't force yourself..."

"It's not fun if you do this."

"What?"

Mimir's strange tone.

Although he had lived for a long time and knew many things, it was the first time he had seen someone so insane.

Mimir's judgment of Diablo, whose eyes were obsessed with the fight, was one thing.

'Not even the Curse of Knowledge can understand it.'

Such a crazy guy in the world.

Still, it seemed that Mimir knew something about who Diablo was. That's why Mimir could find a way to control him when Diablo was about to go crazy again.

"Will you listen to me?"

Words.

"Allow me to give you the opportunity to have the most exciting fight of your life."

Diablo's eyes lit up.

As crazy as he was about the fight, he knew the other party was Mimir.

If he had a plan in his mind, he could surely trust him.

Whirr-.

The place where Diablo was expelled.

The view that was hidden behind the flames covering Shub-Niggurath was revealed again as the flames cleared.

Mimir looked at Shub-Niggurath. Over her face, which appeared somewhat angry in places, there were slightly scratched marks.

"It wasn't a complete waste, it seems."

Diablo, who was eyeing her warily, still burned with overflowing Demonic Energy and flames.

Seeing him like this, Mimir raised his head.

"The result that Diablo obtained by risking his life was just that."

As soon as that thought crossed his mind.

"She's a monster."

Diablo, who struggled to get up, spoke while supporting his body.

"You and Odin saw the real body of that woman on the first floor, didn't you?"

"That's right."

"Although it's only a hunch for now... it's probably not all."

It's probably not all...

"What do you mean?"

It was clearly not a very long period.

However, during that time, Diablo seemed to sense many things in his fight with Shub-Niggurath.

"She has no intention of fighting right now."

Sometimes, actions and looks spoke louder than words. Diablo was especially prone to feeling this way during fights.

When their fists clashed up close and they locked eyes, he could understand.

This battle was exclusively theirs at that moment. But surprisingly, Shub-Niggurath, who was his opponent, didn't show much interest in this fight.

She was waiting now.

"She's waiting for something. Someone who is not here."

Until that person arrived, Shub-Niggurath was fully enjoying the situation.

"There was an intruder."

Despite being interrupted in the same way in the fight, the reactions of Shub-Niggurath and Diablo were completely different.

While Diablo was filled with rage, she simply clenched and unclenched her fists with a disappointed expression.

"I almost had him in my hands."

Bee-eeh-.

Bee-eeh-.

The surroundings resonated with the bleating of the sheep in response to Shub-Niggurath's disappointment.

And among them, there was one sheep in particular that bleated loudly.

Bee-eeh-!

Shub-Niggurath's gaze especially turned to the sheep that bleated loudly.

She didn't remember the names of all the sheep she led, but she remembered this sheep's name.

She had no choice.

It was her new offspring that she had just acquired.

"Do you want that guy too, Asmodeus?"

Bee-eeh-.

The sheep responded.

Asmodeus was the sheep that knew Diablo best. And his memories and emotions flowed clearly to Shub-Niggurath.

Diablo.

The Lord of Demons.

Asmodeus bowed his head to him in an attempt to survive the humiliation.

Asmodeus deeply desired it.

He hoped that Diablo would end up in the same situation as him.

"Just wait a little longer."

Swish-.

While stroking Asmodeus' fur, Shub-Niggurath calmly whispered.

"He hasn't arrived yet..."

Crash!

Then, a Golden Bolt fell from the sky. The body of the sheep Shub-Niggurath was caressing was instantly charred black by the Golden Bolt that filled the world with gold.

Craaack, craaack-le.

Like well-cooked meat, smoke emanated from the body of the sheep that had momentarily staggered before falling to the ground.

"What a pity."

Swish-.

Shub-Niggurath shook her hands from the lingering stinging sensation at her fingertips.

"It's a pity."

Swish-.

When Shub-Niggurath turned her head, she saw a man with golden hair approaching her from a distance, the owner of the Lightning Bolt.

And probably the most threatening opponent on the battlefield.

Shub-Niggurath's gaze widened as she looked at him.

"So, you've come as well."

"My name is Zeus."

Craaack, craack-.

Zeus was the first to reveal his name.

She wondered what he was doing exactly. Did he want to make some sort of declaration amidst this?

Nevertheless, Shub-Niggurath, thinking it didn't matter, revealed her own name.

"Shb-Nr*th."

"It's an incomprehensible word."

"Naturally, it won't sound familiar to you. It's not a name allowed for you."

That's why she hadn't been willing to reveal her name in the first place.

Still, for some reason, she found it interesting. The aura she felt from Zeus in front of her surpassed anyone else on the battlefield.

"However, if it's you, perhaps you deserve to hear another name."

"Another name?"

"The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young."

Zeus's eyes narrowed slightly.

That was a name he had heard before.

"It's the 'Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young.'"

That's what YuWon had said when one of the sheep led by Shub-Niggurath first appeared on the First Floor.

"It's one of my names. Engrave it in your mind."

Yuwon knew the name of that monster.

"The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young..."

"That's right."

"I understand."

Swish-.

Zeus's hand extended forward at that moment.

And in that instant...

Flash-!

Craaaaaash-!

With a light that completely filled Shub-Niggurath's sight, the bodies of the sheep surrounding her were instantly burned black.

Craaack, craaack-le-.

"How many more are left?"

"..."

"It seems you should change your name," Zeus muttered.

Shub-Niggurath's eyebrows arched slightly.

Such a swift attack that couldn't even be seen. The amount of Arcane Power emanating just from extending his palm was considerable.

Craaack, craaack-le-.

The amount of energy emanating from Zeus while launching Bolts was not normal.

And with Zeus at the forefront...

Boom-.

A threatening fist descended onto Shub-Niggurath's body.

Thuuuud!

The earth flipped over and rose toward the sky. A sheep's body exploded, and Shub-Niggurath, who had momentarily disappeared, reappeared among the heaps of sheep's wool.

Sssshh-.

The upturned earth rose.

Looking at the man's figure who had caused this spectacle with a single blow, Shub-Niggurath felt a real threat for the first time.

"This is... a bit dangerous."

The man's fist barely contained Arcane Power. However, the man's fist had enough power to threaten Shub-Niggurath's body.

Hercules, the Giant Slayer.

He had come with Zeus to challenge Shub-Niggurath head-on.

And furthermore...

Weeeeeeng-.

Another.

There was a presence that also represented a threat to Shub-Niggurath.

Kwa-aaa-ang!

A pillar of white light pierced Shub-Niggurath's body and rose to the sky, illuminating the purple sky with blue.

A pillar of light rising to the sky.

The appearance of this pillar made Susanoo mutter.

"As expected. This guy won't die easily."

Speaking as if he knew.

Purple...

The pillar of light challenging Shub-Niggurath's energy.

And the giant spear that created that pillar.

There were only two people in this entire world who could throw a spear with such power in this tower.

One of them was her master, YuWon, and the other was...

-Odin.

The King of Asgard.

It was Odin.

Kwa-aaaaa-.

Within the pillar of light created by Gungnir...

Within that pillar, which turned white and lost its color, gradually revealed the face of something that was not human.

"...Alright, I had forgotten you for a moment."

A gigantic goat. The Fertility Goddess who carried a thousand sheep.

-Odin.

Shub-Niggurath's face.

Chapter 436

C436

The commander on the battlefield was Michael.

It wasn't decided from the beginning that it would be so, but there simply wasn't a suitable candidate to lead the Rankers, so he was swept along.

"Form teams with at least ten people in each position! Those who arrive late will fill the empty spaces!"

"Do not distinguish between Demons and Angels. We are all allies now."

"Do not be greedy. Focus on maintaining formation if you're on the front line."

"High-Rankers will form separate teams..."

Without rest, he swung his sword and supervised the battlefield continuously. Unbeknownst to him, the battlefield was moving according to Michael's orders. It was a moment when Michael's leadership abilities, honed through many wars in the Great Heaven Demon War, shone.

But...

"I can't handle this on my own."

Even if he tried himself, he couldn't strategically use so many Rankers in proper places.

Moreover, if they fought individually when their combined efforts weren't enough, they'd end up becoming food for the sheep.

With only one mouth and two eyes, he had limitations in leading this battlefield.

In reality as well...

"The formation is falling apart."

As the battle continued, it was clear that the sheep were pushing them back little by little.

"Advance with all your might!"

It was at that moment...

Shuk, shuk-.

Rankers and Players, all clad in solid armor, joined the battlefield with coordinated movements.

"This battle is not only for the Celestial Realm. Therefore, in this battle, we will prioritize protecting our allies over destroying the enemy."

A resonating voice that covered the entire battlefield.

It was a voice that, as a commander, Michael couldn't ignore.

"Lee Rangjin-gun?"

Lee Rangjin.

The highest-ranking Rangker who led the Celestial Realm alongside Ne Zha.

He was a supreme leader who commanded the forces of the Celestial Realm on the front lines and also served as the commander-in-chief.

Shuk-.

Lee Rangjin, leading the troops of the Celestial Realm, approached Michael.

With a long scimitar lightly resting on one shoulder, he praised Michael's efforts.

"You've taken on great responsibility."

"You too. We needed a well-trained force like the Celestial Realm at this time."

The problem on the battlefield was that there were many mixed Guilds.

Additionally, the Devas, who were more akin to a religion than a Guild, didn't have a command structure like the Celestial Realm.

Because of that, the situation on the battlefield was chaos.

But thanks to Lee Rangjin's arrival, the battlefield began to take shape.

Lee Rangjin didn't rush.

He gathered the troops of the Celestial Realm to form a single army instead of various Guilds.

Although this delayed things a bit, in the current situation, it was an excellent choice.

"The other side is a complete mess."

Where the battle with Shub-Niggurath was at its peak.

Odin, Zeus, Hercules, and Diablo were fighting together as a team. Although Lee Rangjin was a high-ranking Rangker who had experienced countless battlefields, he had never imagined seeing such a scene in his life.

"Yes, we cannot intervene in a disorganized manner."

"That is your task. Don't forget that you are the commander of our allies."

"Understood."

Michael nodded at Lee Rangjin's words.

Although their ranks might be similar, Lee Rangjin had lived many times longer than Michael. It was only natural to respect him as a veteran companion.

Pssh-.

Michael, along with a gust of wind, disappeared from the spot. Although he had managed to catch his breath thanks to Lee Rangjin's help, he still had much work to do.

Shuk-.

Lee Rangjin couldn't just stand idly by either.

Although the command system was established, they still needed a high-ranking Ranker to deal with those damn giant sheep.

And in this chaotic battlefield...

"It would be great to have that Monkey at times like this..."

The face of a person came to Lee Rangjin's mind.

Crack-.

Hercules grabbed the horns of Shub-Niggurath.

The horns that now extended to his waist were easier to grip due to their increased size.

However...

"It must be quite heavy."

Even with Hercules' strength, Shub-Niggurath's body didn't lift easily.

Why did it feel so heavy for its small size?

"No matter."

Kuk, kukduk-.

Veins bulged, and strength filled Hercules' arms.

["Gigantification" is activated]

["Giant Slayer" is activated]

["Gigantification" is reinforced]

Gigantification.

And Hercules' title: Giant Slayer.

In addition to these two abilities...

["End of Gigantomachy" is activated]

Booom-!

Shub-Niggurath's body, held by Hercules, lifted into the air.

"Huuaaah-!"

Like when he lifted the Hydra and slammed it into the ground, Hercules threw Shub-Niggurath's body to the ground.

Kwaaang-!

Shub-Niggurath got stuck in the ground, creating a massive hole.

And inside that hole...

"Step aside."

Craaaack-!

A lightning bolt struck from the cloudy sky.

Crack, crack, craaaaack-!

Craaaaack-le-!

The lightning bolt that fell into the hole created a column of golden light that soared into the sky. As the lightning bolt descended to the ground, Odin, bending his body, appeared.

"Stay out of the way."

Pajik, pajjik-.

Gungnir began to charge.

If they made a mistake, they would be easily swept away.

If they persisted a little longer, even Zeus might be swept along with Gungnir.

Bam-!

With a thunderous sound, Gungnir charged once again.

This was already the second charge.

Gungnir's white lance covered the column of golden light.

Kwuuuuu-!

Beyond that, an unfathomable column of light formed.

A sum that had been promised in advance.

Avoiding the range of Gungnir, Hercules, who had already rushed away, looked up and confirmed it.

"They say Odin's Gungnir can pierce the Tower."

Hercules had absolute confidence in his strength and agility.

Especially after experiencing the End of Gigantomachy in this Trial and gaining Divinity according to mythology, his strength had increased even further.

However...

Juaaark!

Pzzzzz!

Still, Shub-Niggurath didn't die.

Hercules had anticipated this.

If his opponent had been so weak as to die from this, not even Odin and Zeus would have bothered.

Flash-.

Hercules barely managed to stop the massive black horn approaching him...

"A horn...?"

It was a horn.

It was similar to the horn that had been on Shub-Niggurath's head, but it was much longer and had considerable strength, as if Hercules' block had been slightly weaker; it would have pierced his shoulder.

Hercules looked at the horns that emerged from the hole where Gungnir had fallen.

And above the clouds where Odin and Zeus stood...

Crack, crack-.

Zeus extended his hand and created a shield of lightning. The horn, which had almost reached his nose, stopped just short of piercing Zeus's head.

Odin's way of blocking the horn wasn't much different from what Hercules did.

He used magic to strengthen his grip and then blocked the horn with all his strength.

And in front of these two...

-They did very well.

Zzziik-.

At the end of the horn that stopped before Zeus...

Above it, Shub-Niggurath revealed itself once again.

"You three. Even if the cooperation wasn't excellent, each of you has shown impressive skill."

Shub-Niggurath's voice resonated in their minds.

Odin covered his head with one hand. Because he had activated Gungnir twice in a short period, his Arcane Power was rapidly depleting.

"One of you still relies too much on weapons, but that's understandable."

Shub-Niggurath's broken face, with no eyes or nose, was a harrowing sight. And it wasn't just her face; there was no trace of sanctity anywhere. One arm had been completely torn off, and the other looked torn.

Still, Zeus was amazed.

Because she had not yet revealed her true form.

"So it seems we can set that part aside for now."

Ssss-.

Around Shub-Niggurath, a black background unfolded.

"Perhaps I should contain you a bit."

Everything around them changed. The landscape, the air, and even the Arcane Power that composed the world.

Zeus explored the new space he was in.

A black sky and earth. And a forest made up of burnt trees, as if they had been struck by lightning.

"With a Thousand Young...."

Beeeeeeh...

Walking through the forest, Zeus remembered another name for Shub-Niggurath.

"The Black Goat of the Woods."

Somehow, it seemed that this place was the "Black Woods."

Why had he come here in the first place?

Hmm...

His mind spun. Feeling as if the thread holding his consciousness was about to break, Zeus quickened his steps.

Beeeeeeh...

Beeeeeeh...

Beeeeeeh...

The bleating of the goats echoed in the Black Woods.

Hearing that sound, Zeus remembered the goats that had been turned to ashes in his hand.

"They were created here."

Shub-Niggurath had a thousand goats with her.

And this forest was like a home for those goats. Shub-Niggurath had invited Zeus to the Black Woods.

"She wants to trap me here."

Crack, crack-le...

A golden stream flowed from Zeus's body, illuminating the dark forest.

The goats' bleating grew louder. The sudden glow in the forest, unlike anything they had seen before, was an unknown threat to them.

But Zeus paid them no mind.

"If that's the case, you chose the wrong place."

Crack, crack-le...

Misfortune loomed over the sky of the Black Woods.

"You invited me to your home."

Lightning began to strike the cloud-covered sky. Following Zeus's gesture, the lightning twisted in the clouds and took the form of a Thunder Dragon.

"Burn everything."

Fzzz..."

There was only one way out of this forest.

It was to burn the entire forest completely and force Shub-Niggurath to get him out of here on her own.

And Zeus had enough power to do it.

Krrrr...

Just as Zeus was about to unleash the Thunder Dragon on the Black Woods.

Beeh...

Someone was seen walking among the trees of the Black Woods.

Fzit, fzz...

Zeus's Arcane Power surged.

Naturally, he tried to ignore the being, thinking it was a goat, but he couldn't help but look at the being when he saw his face.

He, looking at Zeus, asked:

"Why are you here?"

It was the question Zeus most wanted to ask.

Why are you coming out of here?

"...Kim YuWon?"

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C437

"Why are you here?"

Zeus asked the same question. Both had the same question in mind: why was the other here?

"I've lost my son."

"Your son?"

"Yes. So I was looking for him a bit."

Despite hearing the reason, Zeus had difficulty understanding. He frowned, wondering what was going on.

"And you, why are you here?"

"That goat woman brought me here."

"Shu-Ni-a?"

"It seems you know her name."

"I suppose."

Asking how he knew that didn't seem to lead to an answer.

Almost no one knew anything about YuWon. Odin might have had a clue, but getting Odin to talk was complicated.

Furthermore, YuWon and Zeus were not yet friends or colleagues. Initially, they were enemies who had faced each other in a fight to the death.

"Anyway, I was about to burn down this whole forest."

"Not a bad idea. But wait a bit longer."

"Why?"

"There's a better way."

"Is there a way?"

"It's not easy. But if we succeed, you could also hit that goat woman."

Firee~

YuWon's eyes turned red.

"The problem is what's outside..."

Beyond the forest, where Zeus had arrived.

The fight with Shub-Niggurath still continued. Although Shub-Niggurath had not revealed her true form, losing too much power here was not an option.

Fortunately...

"Everything will work out there somehow."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because we have Hercules."

"...?"

YuWon made a surprised expression, wondering what he was talking about.

Hercules.

Certainly, he was impressive. He was the most respected High-Ranker by YuWon along with Son OhGong and Odin.

However, this time the situation was not favorable. The fight with Shub-Niggurath was not something that Hercules could handle alone.

Zeus was also aware of that.

Zeus's explanation continued with YuWon's puzzled expression.

"Hercules is a son of mine who comes very close to what I had planned."

"I know. Thanks to that, he... in the Gigantification..."

"No. You don't know."

Zeus shook his head firmly.

"Because, until now, that boy is not fully developed."

It was a statement mixed with significant laughter. Even YuWon, who thought he knew everything about Hercules, could not understand all of this.

Hercules was not fully developed.

Was there something more after achieving Divinity?

However, as if getting back at YuWon, who always gave vague explanations, Zeus only piqued his curiosity and gave no further explanation.

"Anyway, you don't need to worry too much about that side. It's probably fine for a while."

"So... what should we do here?"

Craack, craack-le...

As if he was about to unleash a Lightning Bolt at any moment, Zeus gathered his Arcane Power.

However...

"Danpung!"

Suddenly, YuWon shouted with surprise.

"Beeee-eeeh."

Beeee-eeeh.

What returned was only the sound of bleating sheep.

Craaack~

Zeus, who moments ago was confidently preparing to unleash his Lightning Bolt, now looked at YuWon with bewilderment on his face.

And once again, YuWon shouted, "Danpung!" and looked at Zeus.

"What are you doing? Don't follow me."

"What the hell is happening now...?"

"Danpung!"

YuWon's voice echoed like an echo.

In this way, YuWon walked into the dark forest in search of Danpung.

And behind YuWon, Zeus muttered with effort.

"Da..."

With force in his forehead, Zeus finally managed to articulate words.

"Danpung!"

Buuuummm...

Clang-!

Hercules's fist struck Shub-Niggurath's body.

Shub-Niggurath's body stumbled a bit under the power that could shatter even mountains. Hercules, not stopping, holding a club in his other hand, asked:

"Where did you send it?"

-You worry a lot, don't you?

"Answer!"

Crash-!

The club made of Yggdrasil struck Shub-Niggurath's head.

It seemed like it was going to be completely destroyed, but Shub-Niggurath's head split in half.

"Father and son. A tragic relationship, isn't it? On the outside, they pretend to be strong, but they have deep wounds in their hearts. Like fragile children, isn't it?"

Two goats with demon horns and purple eyes stared at Hercules from both sides.

A chilling fear. Hercules shook it off and released the power of the End of Gigantification.

"Shut up!"

Mmm, mmm, mmm...

"I told you to answer!"

Crash-!

The club struck both goats. The explosive power that momentarily accumulated not only affected Shub-Niggurath but also destroyed the ground beneath Hercules.

And in the next moment...

"Protect Hercules!"

"Deal with the main body!"

The Rankers who had pushed their way through the sheep followed Hercules. Leading this group of Rankers was Behemoth, a High-Ranker who led the Demon King Guild on behalf of Diablo.

The Rankers rushed in a frenzy.

It was strange.

They were definitely not opponents who would be easily pushed back, and yet, they had already managed to drive away the sheep and receive support from their allies.

Goo, goo, goo...

Shub-Niggurath began to tremble on the ground where it was embedded.

-This is excellent.

Shub-Niggurath's voice ominously resounded. It was an eerie omen. Hercules's eyes turned towards the allied Rankers who began to gather from behind.

"...No."

Apparently still unaware of anything, they approached Hercules.

And in the next instant...

Kwadak, kwaddak...

Black horns sprouted from the ground.

Puk, puk, puk...

The horns violently rose as if piercing the body.

[The power of a Giant resides in your arms]

The Arcane Power imbued in Hercules's arms crossed. He crossed his arms to protect his side from the incoming horns.

He didn't need a shield.

Hercules's body was more solid than any item in this Tower.

Puek, puek...

Puek, puek...

However, Hercules couldn't fully block the horns sprouting from the ground. Some of the horns pierced his solid body, and Hercules flew straight into the sky.

"Ugh...!"

He felt pain in his body. Although they didn't pierce through his body completely, the horns that reached him made his entire body feel like it had been bruised.

Hercules's vision was filled with black horns.

A forest of black horns stretched out on the battlefield. And that forest didn't just cover Hercules.

'What about the others?'

Hercules's gaze turned to the Rankers who were running at full speed.

Hercules's eyes shook violently.

"Curse!"

A battlefield turned into chaos.

Rankers' bodies scattered around Hercules. This time, more than a thousand Rankers had died with a single blow.

And the few Rankers who survived...

"Kugh..."

"I almost died..."

"This... is on a completely different level, isn't it?"

The Rankers who had rushed into the fight without thinking, and Behemoth, the High-Ranker on the Demon King's side who led them, were pale and hesitant.

"M-M-Monster..."

Some Rankers had seen this fight as an opportunity to improve their Ranking. If they could elevate their position by fighting the sheep and, especially, Shub-Niggurath, they would surely get a Ranking boost.

But now they finally understood.

Thud...

Shub-Niggurath emerged from the forest of black horns.

She was a completely different existence from them.

-Half of them survived.

Shub-Niggurath looked at the Rankers who had taken refuge in the magic circle.

It was Odin and Mimir who had saved them. It was an incredible achievement to gather so many in such a short time, and Shub-Niggurath wished to applaud.

"Ugh, ugh..."

Odin, who had fought Shub-Niggurath head-on and thrown two Gungnirs, was visibly exhausted among his group.

He would probably need a good rest before he could fight like before.

The real issue was on the other side.

Thud...

Hercules appeared once again in front of Shub-Niggurath. His determination hadn't wavered at all despite the bruises and bloodstains on his body.

"You're persistent."

Shub-Niggurath's eyes shifted.

"Even after seeing something like this."

The corpses of the Rankers who had died instantly were reflected in her eyes. Hercules also understood what Shub-Niggurath meant and nodded. His grip on the club tightened.

"That's right. And thanks to that, I've made a decision."

"A decision?"

Shub-Niggurath, who was half-human and half-goat, tilted her head as if asking what he was talking about.

And at that reaction from Shub-Niggurath, Hercules realized that she couldn't completely see inside Hercules.

"I haven't hesitated from the beginning."

Swish...

Hercules turned his head.

The battlefield was in total chaos. Rankers still fighting sheep and those who had already died.
From the beginning, Shub-Niggurath was not an opponent they could fight in this way.

Grr, grr

[The power of a Giant resides in your arms]

[The power of the 'Giant Slayer' dwells within your body]

[The power of the 'Twelve Labors' resides in your arms]

[The power of the 'End of Gigantification' dwells within your body]

Hercules's body expanded as Arcane Power, Titles, and Divine Power intertwined within him.

-Indeed...

Shub-Niggurath admired greatly.

-In terms of status, you could match my father.

Greed sparkled in Shub-Niggurath's eyes.

It was a kind of look similar to when you see someone of the opposite gender as attractive. She felt the energy radiating from Hercules's body and imagined turning him into her sheep.

-It's magnificent.

A pure admiration.

But Hercules wasn't interested in Shub-Niggurath's admiration.

Craaack...

A Golden Lightning Bolt erupted from Hercules's fist.

It was a type of power completely different from the other energies that focused on strengthening his body.

At first, it seemed somewhat uncomfortable.

After all, Hercules had never dealt with this kind of attribute-related magic before.

However...

Craack, craack-le...

The Golden Lightning Bolt that started flowing from Hercules's fist gradually acquired a uniform concentration and began to take shape.

-This is...

Shub-Niggurath showed curiosity about the magic that began to emanate from Hercules's body.

Though still insufficient, that power was undeniably...

-The power of that guy.

The one who had been trapped in the Black Woods.

Zeus.

The power of Lightning he wielded could also be felt from Hercules's body.

Kwaak...

Hercules clenched his fist. He looked up at the sky, raising his head. Somewhere far away, above the clouds, he felt a gaze watching him.

It took some time to make a decision, but...

Bam-!

[The power of 'Lightning' resides in your arms]

Finally, the Hero had been completed.

Chapter 438

C438

Above the purple-tinted clouds.

Blink~

Hargan's eyelids slowly opened, revealing his golden eyes.

"I see you've finally made a decision."

Blink~

Arcane Power began to move on its own, independently of his will.

It was a sensation he had never experienced in his life. It was as if someone else was using the Arcane Power residing in his body.

And at the center of it all.

['Lightning Bolt' is activated]

The power of Lightning Bolt that had surged from Zeus.

And the power of Lightning Bolt that had been inside him since his birth.

Under his golden eyes.

He saw the chaos on the battlefield.

And at the center of it all were Shub-Niggurath and Hercules.

"It took you so long."

Although he said it took him so long, the feeling was entirely different.

It seemed to him that time had flown by. The tension had lasted so long that time had passed unnoticed.

"Remember this."

Zeus's voice passed fleetingly through his mind.

"The moment you get distracted while moving the seed, your life will be in danger."

Tsss, tsss.

Hargan looked at his own body. He experienced an explosion of electricity he had never felt before coursing through his entire body.

At that moment...

Hargan had only one thought.

"It doesn't hurt as much as I thought."

[The power of 'Lightning Bolt' resides in your arms]

Baaam, thud!

Hercules looked at his arm wrapped in Golden Lightning Bolt and thought to himself.

"Originally, they were one."

That was Zeus's assertion, who had called Hercules and Hargan together.

"No, rather, they were meant to be one."

"Planning to create a child, aren't you ashamed of that?"

"Indeed, it's not something to be proud of. But I didn't call you here to discuss the details."

"So, what does it mean that we were one?"

"I wanted a perfect successor who could surpass me. Someone who would elevate Olympus to a higher place, an ideal presence that would rise to the top of the Tower."

Zeus alternately looked at Hercules and Hargan before asking:

"What do you think? Do you want to be kings?"

"No."

"Yes."

Hercules and Hargan's responses were different.

And in the face of these divergent answers, Zeus closed his eyes with a pensive expression.

"... I see."

"Now, please continue speaking."

"Yes, of course."

It was difficult to continue the conversation.

"Seeing my children, I realized I had to give up my ambition."

"Ambition?"

"If the vessel is too strong, the seed can't grow, and if the vessel is weak, the seed grows too much but can't use its strength."

"What do you mean...?"

Kwack!

It was at that moment when Hercules grabbed Zeus's neck.

With fiery, angry eyes, he stared at Zeus and asked in a tone he rarely used, with a hoarse voice.

"Both of us?! Are you talking about the vessel?!"

"... Eh?"

Hargan finally understood what Zeus meant by "vessel" and "seed."

The vessel that would host the seed, Hercules.

And the vessel that would grow with the seed, Hargan.

That was the function of the two.

"That's right."

"How can you say that so easily?"

"We must speak, whether it's easy or difficult. Especially in a situation like this."

Toc~

Hercules released the hand he was gripping forcefully. Zeus adjusted his disheveled appearance and continued to speak.

"The seed has grown enough. The power of Lightning Bolt inside Hargan is ripe. Now is the time to transfer the seed."

"Are you telling me to take my brother's power away?"

"That's right. That's what I mean."

"... You haven't changed at all."

Zeus raised his head in the face of Hercules's sharp words.

The sky was purple.

Under the sky of Shub-Niggurath, he spoke.

"What was destined has happened."

His voice lacked the usual confidence.

This was a side of Zeus that Hercules had never seen before. With a single word, Zeus had deepened the sense of despair surrounding the situation.

Hercules sighed and asked:

"Is there no other way?"

Zeus nodded in response to Hercules's question.

"At least not for me."

"I understand."

When Hercules looked at Hargan beside him, the latter nodded and made a decision.

Crack, crack-le.

Hercules released his fist, which was full of Lightning Bolt power.

He had discovered the truth only a few hours ago.

That he was originally created as the vessel for Lightning Bolt.

Although he hadn't really felt it until now.

But...

"Now I understand why you said that."

Because of this incident, the distance that had been shortened a little between Zeus and him seemed distant once again.

"It seems you've finally become complete."

Kwaaang, thud.

Under the stream of Lightning Bolt flowing from Hercules's hand, Shub-Niggurath spoke:

"Truly tempting..."

"I don't feel it completely yet."

Crack, crack-le.

Hercules appeared behind Shub-Niggurath.

"What do you mean by I'm complete?"

He thrust his fist into Shub-Niggurath's back.

Boom!

The fist collided with the Golden Lightning Bolt, enveloping Shub-Niggurath. Shub-Niggurath staggered under the intense electrical discharge that accompanied the punch.

Within the undying golden glow...

Pshh!

Hercules, who had sent Shub-Niggurath flying, followed and swung his fist once more.

Kwong!

The sound of Lightning Bolt striking the ground echoed from below. The attribute-imbued punch had several times the power of a simple strength-charged punch.

Shub-Niggurath's body tore apart and exploded into pieces.

Hercules's sudden transformation.

"...What's going on with that guy?"

Watching from a distance, Mimir opened his mouth in surprise.

Even under the Curse of Knowledge, Hercules's current appearance was difficult to understand even for him.

Naturally, Mimir had to turn his gaze to Odin.

During the hundreds of years he had been asleep, what had happened to Hercules?

"...It's very different from what I had heard."

Odin also found it difficult to give an explanation.

Hercules was undoubtedly a great High-Ranker. He was the Hero of the Gigantomachy and one of the sons raised by Zeus, the best among them.

But still, this was too much.

From his first appearance, he had not seemed ordinary. He, who wasn't even in the top 10, was confronting Shub-Niggurath head-on with his strength alone.

That was something even Odin didn't find easy.

However, now he was going beyond, handling Lightning Bolt like Zeus and fiercely attacking Shub-Niggurath.

Odin extended the palm of his hand.

Somehow, the wrinkles in the palm of his hand seemed more pronounced today.

"It's been a long time."

Being at the top for so long. Ruling the world under the name of King couldn't last forever.

It probably began when the young man named Zeus first proclaimed himself King while ruling Olympus.

Over time, he realized that his time would come to an end.

And as he saw the panorama unfolding before him and thought about that other equally monstrous young friend, Odin finally convinced himself.

'The times have changed.'

"Danpung!"

"Danpung... Ah!"

The trembling, feeble voice made YuWon turn his head.

Zeus, who was following him, occasionally sighed and nodded his head.

"Why are you doing this now?"

"It hasn't even been ten minutes."

"It's been ten minutes."

As YuWon desperately searched for the lost Danpung, it was only natural for Zeus to find her impatient.

But then, what?

"If you can't stand it, you can do it yourself."

"Danpung!"

And once again, YuWon ventured into the forest in search of Danpung.

The muscle on Zeus's forehead tensed. With an unusual expression of irritation, Zeus approached YuWon.

"Where the hell do you think you are? Why are you being so relaxed? Weren't you worried about the outside just a moment ago?"

"That's right."

"So why?"

Yuwon, who was taking steps, suddenly stopped.

Had he found something?

After a brief silence, YuWon responded with a slight delay.

"It's quite close."

"What?"

Zeus turned his head.

The Black Woods.

Shub-Niggurath's Black Woods seemed to grow even darker as they ventured deeper inside.

What the hell was in here?

"Where are you referring to?"

"Just follow me."

Yuwon took a determined step.

It was a different movement from what they had been doing until now, where they simply moved in any direction.

Steps that seemed purposeful somewhere.

Step by step.

Zeus followed YuWon. If they had found the target they were looking for, they should hurry. He thought as they advanced.

How much farther did they walk?

Beeeeeeh.

The bleating of a goat was heard.

"...We're close."

Beeeeeeh.

Beeeeeeh.

Beeeeh.

The bleating of the goats was not from a single goat.

Zeus had already encountered Shub-Niggurath's goats on two occasions, so he couldn't simply ignore them. Furthermore, the sound of the bleating was getting louder from where YuWon was leading.

Craaack...

Zeus gradually increased his power.

At this distance, the goats could attack them at any moment.

"Are we going in the right direction?"

It was a natural question.

Even if they rushed to escape, it seemed that they had now gotten themselves in the midst of enemies.

And besides, why was that guy Danpung in the middle of those goats?

"That's right."

"It seems it's not because of the sound."

"No."

YuWon shook his head.

"The sound makes it even safer."

"What are you talking about?"

A series of incomprehensible words.

Anyway, Zeus had no choice but to follow YuWon at this moment.

So they moved forward.

Beeeeeeh.

Beeeeeh.

Dozens, no, hundreds of goats had gathered in a row.

"...As expected."

Crack, craaack...

Zeus created a Lightning Bolt in his hand as if he knew it, preparing to sweep the goats in one fell swoop since they were grouped that way.

But...

"Stop."

"Don't you realize this is an opportunity?"

Zeus frowned at YuWon as if telling him not to bother him. If those goats scattered everywhere, it would surely be a problem.

But...

"Look over there."

YuWon pointed in the midst of the goats. Zeus looked in the direction YuWon was pointing, not letting go of the Lightning Bolt in his hand.

And at that moment...

"...Is that what you've been looking for?"

Zeus once again doubted the existence of "Danpung," which YuWon had been searching for all along.

In the midst of the group of goats...

Crack, craaack...

Wooong...

As if it were about to break at any moment, an extremely cracked Egg trembled precariously.

Chapter 439

C439

Beeeh-.

Beeeeeeh-.

Beeeeeeeeh-.

The goats were bleating loudly.

Even though YuWon and Zeus had clearly approached the place, the goats didn't even turn their heads.

The gaze of the goats was always fixed on the Egg, as if they were waiting for its hatching.

"Did you mean that Egg for Danpung to eat?"

It was a taunt from Zeus, asking why YuWon went through so much trouble to find something like that.

But instead of responding to Zeus's reaction, YuWon looked at him with concern.

"Watch your words."

"What are you talking about?"

"If that guy heard it, he might get pretty mad."

"Angry at an Egg with me...?"

Zeus's eyebrows twitched irregularly for a moment as he continued to speak.

At first glance, it seemed insignificant, so he overlooked it, but it was undoubtedly the Egg that YuWon had been searching for so diligently.

YuWon knew more about Shub-Niggurath than anyone.

If YuWon had invested so much valuable time in moving like this, there was definitely a reason.

'It's definitely strange.'

Zeus set aside his prejudice that obstructed his view and looked back at the scene in front of him.

'It doesn't seem like a special threat. They are surrounding it as if... as if they are protecting that Egg.'

There was no other word to describe that appearance.

'It looks like they are receiving that Egg as if it were a gift.'

If it had been Shub-Niggurath instead of the Egg, he would have felt no annoyance.

It seemed like it wasn't just an Egg. Perhaps the being that would hatch from this Egg could become the master key that would lead this fight to victory once it grew enough.

Of course, that would be a story for after the being emerging from the Egg had developed enough.

So Zeus's frustration was natural.

"So what? Are you saying we should just stay here and watch?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

Crack!

It was then that the sound of bones breaking and being crushed was heard.

Zeus's head, which had been talking to YuWon, turned.

Beeeh-.

Beeh-!

The goats were bleating. But their voices were different from before.

It wasn't hostility but respect. And also reverence. The goats that had gathered around the Egg with fear and treachery turned and fled amid fear and treachery.

Sssss-.

A violet smoke emerged from the Egg. It spread towards the nearby goats and bound them tightly.

Crack!

It was the sound they had heard a moment ago.

A sound of bones breaking and being crushed.

Zeus thought that sound had been caused by a powerful force.

But it wasn't.

Crack!

No, it wasn't.

"...I'm not sure what I'm seeing right now."

Woodeuk-.

In the moment the smoke coiled, the goats withered down to the bones, skin, and fur and dried up. Although their true nature had not yet been fully revealed, Zeus felt a threat coming from the Egg that hadn't even hatched.

What could it be trying to emerge from inside there?

'Is it like running into a tiger while trying to avoid a fox?'

Craack, craaaac-le-!

A Lightning Bolt leaped from Zeus's hand. As the goats fled far from the Egg, Zeus aimed the Lightning Bolt at the smoke.

However...

Ssuuuh-.

The smoke that had been devouring the goats suddenly changed its movement.

Until a moment ago, it seemed on the verge of devouring everything around it, but in an instant, it retracted and seeped back into the Egg.

And the moment was clear.

Zzbuk-.

It was when YuWon approached the Egg, passing through the goats.

"Are you still asleep?"

There was no response.

Zeus dissipated the Lightning Bolt he had created in his hand again.

At least, he confirmed that the Egg was friendly towards YuWon.

Zeus followed YuWon as he approached the Egg.

During that short period, the smoke that had escaped from the Egg had devoured hundreds of goats.

They passed by the dry corpses of the lambs.

"Is this the so-called Danpung?"

As they approached with YuWon, the Egg began to wriggle.

Instinctively, Zeus clenched his hand in response to the Egg's reaction.

Look at this right away.

The being sleeping inside the Egg was an entity that could devour creatures that even High-Rankers had difficulty dealing with in the blink of an eye.

It was a blessing that it could distinguish between friends and foes, but...

"Haven't you eaten enough?"

Chak-.

The Egg responded slowly to YuWon's response, as if it were hurrying to hatch.

Up to now, its hatching speed had been quite slow.

But not only Zeus was in a hurry.

"One-."

Crack, crack-.

The cracks increased rapidly.

"Two-."

Just up to three, let's count.

Skak-.

While YuWon thought this way, he drew his sword from his waist. His intention was to break the Egg if necessary to make it hatch.

And in response to YuWon's reaction...

Crack, craaack-.

The Egg, which had been preparing to hatch, began to shed its shell.

This way, the Egg hatched.

And from inside the Egg...

Chok, Chok-.

Small feet crawled out.

"Abba-."

"...Little one?"

His height was about up to the knees. His limbs were small, but his head was large.

He had such white skin that he looked like a doll. Zeus felt a slight irritation at his adorable and youthful appearance, as if he were a doll.

All this trouble for this little one?

"Abba. Abba-."

Danpung opened his arms wide in YuWon's direction.

He was still a young child, moving clumsily as he walked, but YuWon smiled at Danpung's figure.

"It seems like it was worth waiting for so long."

Danpung had finally grown and turned into an Egg. YuWon thought that over time, the Egg would naturally hatch.

But that wasn't what happened.

YuWon's gaze turned to the scattered sheep/goat carcasses in the area.

"Are you still hungry?"

Dead sheep.

Each of them had been drained of their strength and dried up like mummies. The Predator had devoured the Outers and increased Danpung's level and growth rate with its power.

Danpung, bloated from consuming them, had finally hatched in this way.

Following his wish, YuWon lifted Danpung and placed him on his shoulder.

His weight was quite solid. The little one that used to fit in the palm of a hand now looked quite large after hatching.

"Are you full?"

"Abba!"

Though his response was a bit hesitant, at least he answered correctly.

The child who used to whimper like a newborn now looked so big, and YuWon felt proud of him.

On the other hand...

"Is this the child you were looking for?"

Zeus seemed quite dissatisfied.

"Yes."

"You have wasted unnecessary time."

Even though he shouted "Danpung!" with all his might and searched for him, the little Danpung in front of him didn't seem to have any special powers.

"Really... I just wasted time."

The image of Shub-Niggurath came to Zeus's mind.

Not only the figure he had just fought, but also Shub-Niggurath's true form that appeared on the first floor.

Can that child fight against her?

No, maybe not.

He didn't know if it had any secrets, but Zeus didn't think of it that way.

However...

"You may think so."

Yuwon was different.

He saw something that Zeus couldn't see and felt something that Zeus couldn't feel.

He had confidence.

His choice was not wrong.

"Don't try to convince me anymore. If you want to explain his worth, show it to me with the results."

"So I will."

Kagagak-.

A sword was drawn from YuWon's waist.

"Then, first, let's get out of here."

"That's what I want to do."

It was then when the corner of Zeus's lips rose. The moment he raised his hand upwards without any further hesitation...

Craaaaaaack-le.

Without wasting any more time, as if there was no time to lose, Zeus started shooting Lightning Bolts into the Black Woods.

Kugugugu-.

There were only about three minutes left.

During that time, due to Hercules' madness, the battlefield had changed completely.

Countless craters and Golden Bolts illuminated the endless land. And in the midst of that, lay the shattered body of Shub-Niggurath.

"Uff, uff..."

Hercules, who boasted that no one could surpass him in terms of physical endurance, was exhausted after only three minutes.

Crack, crack-.

The Bolts continued to flow uncontrollably through his arms.

It was as if they were screaming to let him jump higher. The power of the Lightning, rooted in Hercules' body, was beyond his control.

[The power of 'Lightning' resides in your arms]

[The power of 'Lightning' cannot be controlled]

[The power of 'Lightning' cannot be...]

Repeating messages.

He felt his Arcane Power escaping from his body. The uncontrollable force of the Bolts emitted overwhelming power even when he tried to control it a bit and dispersed like grains of sand in the palm of his hand with just a hint of excitement.

So, Hercules released as many Bolts as he could.

Otherwise, it would have been difficult to inflict significant damage to Shub-Niggurath.

Kwak-.

For a moment, he sighed while squeezing and relaxing his fist, organizing his strength.

Even if he stood still and concentrated like this, the Bolts did not obediently follow Hercules' will.

'That's difficult. And there are so many.'

Hercules had been fighting all his life with just his bare body.

Fighting using magical powers and abilities was only used to strengthen his body with Arcane Power or use Gigantification. He had never used techniques that altered the nature of his Arcane Power.

That was because he had no talent in that regard.

It wasn't that he had no talent for Arcane Power, and as a Player, he had more than enough talent.

But that was why he was a "vessel to plant the Lightning."

"Why are you so distracted?"

Maybe thanks to that, he managed to catch his breath a little?

Odin approached Hercules. He held Gungnir in his hand and seemed to be preparing for his next move.

"It still feels strange, I admit."

"You must have gained a new power."

"Yes."

"It won't be easy to control, but if you can master it..."

Odin chuckled and spoke words that would surprise anyone else if they heard them.

"Perhaps this place might become yours."

Odin, the second-ranked in the Ranking, was considered the greatest being in this Tower after the first-ranked, who had not been active for over ten thousand years.

He was saying that even he might yield his place to someone else. That's how impressive Hercules' performance was.

However,

"Thanks to you, I can finally see his face properly."

The fight with Shub-Niggurath was not over yet.

"His face?"

"Now that you mention it, you probably never saw it."

"What are you saying?"

"I mean the guy I saw on the first floor."

Kwak-.

Odin's hand tightly gripped Gungnir.

"...It wasn't that easy."

Hercules looked at the landscape he had created himself.

The land was devastated to the point that it seemed like doomsday could be today. All of this was the turmoil he had caused.

But was it that easy?

And then, at that moment,

-Beeeh-.

Along with the sudden change of the sky to a purple color, a bleat was heard in this world.

Chapter 440

C440

An empty meeting room.

A space that used to be filled with activity and discussions was now completely silent, without a single sigh.

A strange air filled the room, and within this seemingly airless room, the sound of footsteps was heard at one moment.

Thump-.

Slow and heavy footsteps.

The black-haired man lying silently on the floor opened his eyes.

"...I'm feeling sleepy."

Michael, with black hair and green eyes.

His eyes blinked slowly, as if he was about to fall asleep.

He wanted to collapse into his tired body. The process of becoming one had brought great fatigue with it.

-Beeeh-.

The bleating was heard at that moment.

A bleating that penetrated to the heart of Valhalla. And within that bleating, a presence of unknown size.

Through the bleating, the form of a gigantic black goat appeared before Michael.

Even just by the sound of the bleat, one could guess what the creature was like.

Michael covered his ears.

The resonant noise that echoed in his head was not just that.

"...Understood. Understood."

Michael responded to the unknown voice irritably and began to move as if he were fed up.

Steps heading out of the meeting room.

As soon as he crossed the door, Michael's figure disappeared completely.

Flap-.

Flap, flap-.

The Rankers who were fighting the goats one by one began to faint one after another. They were those with little mental resistance or those who were exhausted from a long battle.

"Hey, hey! Get a hold of yourself... Hey...!"

"If you faint all of a sudden..."

"Curse it. Someone come here and take their positions!"

The battlefield changed dramatically with a single bleat.

With the addition of Lee Rangjin's army, the Rankers who had barely managed to push back the goats were shaken once again.

There was no obvious way to stop them at that moment.

Finally, it was Lee Rangjin who intervened.

Kwut!

He burst into the middle of the battlefield, wielding a heavy sword in one hand. The goats charged towards Lee Rangjin. Lee Rangjin swung his sword at the goats approaching from three different directions.

Kwagak!

The goats were cleaved into pieces and sent flying.

Beeeh...

However, in one direction, there was a goat he had not seen before.

"Should I let it pass?"

Kwak-.

Instead of dodging, Lee Rangjin reinforced his sword with power and struck the goat forcefully.

He preferred to rely on his sturdy armor and body rather than awkwardly dodging and risking an even stronger attack. That was his decision.

Lee Rangjin was about to take a step forward and strike with his sword when,

Swaaaah-.

A red slash appeared across the body of the goat running towards Lee Rangjin.

Puwhaaah-.

The goat's body was cut into dozens of pieces, leaving a small scratch on Lee Rangjin's cheek. The sharp sword strikes that pierced the goat's body even affected Lee Rangjin.

"This cut feels familiar..."

Hundreds of years may have passed, but no one in the Celestial Realm would forget this cut.

"Asura."

The spirit in front of him had challenged the Celestial Realm, knocking down the Heavenly Warriors one by one.

Thud, thud.

The torn pieces of goat flesh fell to the ground. Asura extended his four swords downward and looked around.

It seemed he wasn't very interested in Lee Rangjin's presence.

That meant there were powerful enemies on this battlefield.

"If you had made a mistake, my head could have rolled too."

"It's okay to say thank you."

"If that sounds like gratitude at this moment, it's a bit creepy."

"Whatever."

"Why did you arrive so late?"

"I had some enemies to defeat."

Lee Rangjin observed Asura's appearance.

There were traces of human blood on his body, probably from a fight somewhere.

'That temperamental guy is still the same.'

Asura made no distinctions between friends and enemies. He fought for his life against the strong and always sought to fight.

That generated grudges everywhere. Even among the Guilds that participated in this Meeting, several held grudges against Asura. If Lee Rangjin had not intervened when Asura invaded the Celestial Realm, they could have become mortal enemies.

"Although thanks to that, everything calmed down..."

-Beeeh-.

For a moment, Lee Rangjin considered that, thanks to Asura's help, he might fill the gaps left by the defeated Rankers.

But Lee Rangjin lowered his sword when he heard the bleating filling the air once again, and at the sight that extended before him, he exclaimed:

"What is that?"

Sshh, sshh...

The color of the earth changed.

The Rankers' bloodstained ground turned black. The seeds that fed on their blood grew, becoming small trees and then rapidly growing into giant trees.

A vast forest stretched before them. Inside it, the goats blinked repeatedly as they bleated.

-Beeeh-.

The bleat of Shub-Niggurath.

Hercules felt as if he were about to vomit when he heard it.

Hercules frowned.

"You look very tired."

Odin patted Hercules on the shoulder.

"Just rest a bit. You still need to adapt to that power."

"I can't afford to rest."

Hercules brushed off Odin's hand.

"Don't compare me to him."

With a sharp retort, Hercules began walking in the direction from which Shub-Niggurath's bleating came.

But soon.

Stumble~

As if he had lost his balance, Hercules stumbled.

"I told you to rest a bit."

"I'm fine."

"Tsk."

Odin clicked his tongue briefly and looked at the forest that stretched before him.

A Black Woods. It was the right place for Shub-Niggurath, known as "The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young."

In a short time, a vast forest had spread, enough to destroy an entire country in this short span. There was an eerie feeling emanating from the trees that covered the forest.

"They're trees..."

-Beeeh-.

Along with the continuing bleating.

Grrr-.

Cutting a path through the Black Woods, a gigantic male goat appeared.

Thud-.

It was a completely different presence from the previous one. Hercules finally understood why he suddenly felt so weak.

In addition to the energy consumed by using the Lightning Bolt for the first time in his life.

"Is it because of that goat?"

A gigantic male goat with purple eyes.

Hercules felt instinctive fear toward that entity.

Step~

Odin approached Shub-Niggurath.

Hercules, as he did a moment ago, reached out to Odin while watching Odin advance toward Shub-Niggurath.

"You can't do it."

Squelch-.

Hercules grabbed Odin's foot and raised his head.

He was exhausted too. It made no sense for him to try to face Shub-Niggurath alone in his current state.

"What do you plan to do on your own?"

"You were alone too."

"You and I are..."

"I am Odin."

Hercules's response, which couldn't continue with the word "different," was as if Odin had understood him and spoke with irony.

"The King of Asgard. The Great Ruler of the Five Worlds."

Anyone who heard it might think that Asgard was the largest Guild in this Tower.

And Odin, the Ranker who founded Asgard. For some, what he said might sound like arrogance, but for him, it was pride and self-confidence.

And Hercules knew that, so he couldn't stop Odin.

Besides...

"It's an unnecessary concern."

Even Odin's closest friend.

Even Mimir approached Hercules and held him, trying to dissuade him.

Tumble, tumble-.

Hercules could no longer stop Odin as he advanced toward Shub-Niggurath.

"I must recover as soon as possible."

Since he boasted that his physical endurance yielded to no one. Hercules was determined to regain his strength quickly to join Odin.

And his thoughts were clearly reflected on his facial expression.

"Tsk. You don't have to be in such a hurry."

Mimir looked up when he saw Hercules's expression.

Hercules couldn't understand it.

The opponent was Shub-Niggurath. Furthermore, he had revealed his true form, displaying an even more imposing presence.

In contrast, Odin...

"He can throw Gungnir only one more time at most."

He had taken a breather, but he had already thrown more than two Gungnirs.

It was clear that he was quite exhausted.

"Even to launch Gungnir again, they need to give him time."

"Do you think that guy only has Gungnir?"

"It's not like that, but..."

"His Rank was not obtained overnight."

Mimir knew Odin better than anyone.

They had climbed the Tower together, risen in rank together, and founded Asgard in the Tower together. As they had reached the top together, they knew each other better than anyone.

Odin to Mimir.

And Mimir to Odin.

"Even so, Odin. His magic doesn't compare to mine, and in terms of physical ability, only you surpass everyone."

And what Mimir knew about Odin didn't make him such a grand figure to be revered as such.

It might not be the same now, having passed more than ten thousand years since they arrived in the Tower.

Until then, he had a long way to go to deserve the title of King ().

"Yet, why is that guy so great? Do you know why?"

An unanswered question.

It was then that a cold sensation ran through Hercules's skin as he waited for the next answer...

Shoosh-.

'The smell of wood.'

The scent that pervaded the bright air, making his nose tingle, was clearly the aroma of a living tree.

For Hercules, who had been trapped in the forest for a long time after the Gigantification's collapse, this was a familiar smell.

Hercules looked around, trying to identify where the smell was coming from.

However, all around him were the dead trees created by Shub-Niggurath in the Black Woods.

Despite searching extensively, he couldn't find any trace of a tree emitting this refreshing scent, even after rubbing his eyes.

"Many people don't understand. What truly makes Odin great is his ability to activate Gungnir."

Mimir said with a mocking laugh.

"No, that's just one of the many amazing aspects that describe him."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Look at that."

He clicked his tongue, and Odin, who was heading toward Shub-Niggurath, grabbed a dead wooden column.

And at that moment...

Color spread over the wooden column that had previously been completely black.

A moist brown pillar. Branches that regained life and green leaves that sprouted on them.

Hercules's eyes widened at the sight.

A tree that had died came back to life thanks to Odin's choice in the midst of the Black Woods. In the heart of the Black Woods, this tree, which had regained its strength, displayed its color.

"Odin's greatness lies in this."

Odin, the King of Asgard.

The reason he could reach this position was not only because of his robust body or the tens of thousands of magics he learned from Mimir.

The main reason was...

"It's because Yggdrasil grows inside his body."