

## **M. in Hell 61**

Chapter 61 - Do You Know Who I Am? (1)

- Do you want power?

When Kim Si-Hun heard a low-pitched voice inside his mind, he realized instinctively that it was the Martial God Tian Taihuang's soul speaking to him.

'I want power!' Si-Hun replied in his mind.

There was no reason to hesitate. There was no time to think. Si-Hun decided to accept the Martial God's strength, even if it could kill him.

Riiing.

[- Accepting the power of Martial God Tian Taihuang.

- Because your body is not ready to be a vessel, you may only accept a portion of the power.]

He heard the chime of a bell, and a blue message window appeared in front of him.

However, before he even had a chance to check its contents, an enormous amount of power rose from within him. The power stormed inside him so violently that he thought he was about to explode.

"Kurgh!" Si-Hun moaned in pain.

Nevertheless, he bit his lips and endured it. This was an opportunity that he had waited for so desperately. He couldn't let it go up in flames just because he couldn't endure this level of pain.

Tear! Pop!

His veins burst, dying his body red. Si-Hun felt like he couldn't even think because he was in so much pain.

'I have to endure it.'

Si-Hun glared at Kim Yeong-Hun.

The countless times he'd been ridiculed and humiliated because of Yeong-Hun flashed through his mind. Compared to the despair he had felt back then, the physical pain he felt now was nothing.

[- You have learned the superior version of the martial art Sleeping Dragon Sword Technique.

- You have learned the martial arts: Cloud Dragon Sword Technique and Cloud Dragon Steps.

- You have obtained a clue for Metamorphosis.]

Knowledge of martial arts flowed into Si-Hun's brain, and he naturally understood how to control the Martial God's overwhelming power.

Si-Hun quelled the power storming within him and pointed his sword at Yeong-Hun.

"Kim Yeong-Huuuuuun!!" Si-Hun shouted angrily.

He leaped toward Yeong-Hun by using the Cloud Dragon Steps while grasping a hold on his overflowing power.

"Wh-What the hell?!" Yeong-Hun uttered in surprise.

He was shocked to see someone who was about to die run toward him while leaking such violent energy.

Yeong-Hun raised his sword and tried to block Si-Hun's attack.

Slash!

"Argh!!!"

Si-Hun's sword, which was wrapped in a cloud of whitish smoke, slithered down Yeong-Hun's sword as if it were a snake and slashed his chest. The attack split Yeong-Hun's Unique-grade armor, and dark red blood leaked out from his chest. He became dizzy from the pain that he felt because of the chest wound.

"Y-You son of a bitch!!!" Yeong-Hun yelled.

He swung his sword wildly at Si-Hun in anger.

Despite his wild swings, Yeong-Hun had a high level and high-grade equipment, so his slashes were by no means something to take lightly.

Clang!

"Kurgh."

Si-Hun, who had blocked Yeong-Hun's attack, was pushed back.

Even after accepting the power of the Martial God, it was hard for Si-Hun to turn the situation around since there was still a thirty-level difference between him and Yeong-Hun.

'But...'

Si-Hun's eyes shone.

Yeong-Hun was far stronger and faster than him, but he had something that Yeong-Hun didn't—martial arts. Martial art techniques had been created through the experiences of countless warriors who had studied the most ideal way to use a weapon.

'Cloud Dragon Sword Technique, Third Movement, Cloud Dragon's Dance.'

Si-Hun used the Martial God Tian Taihuang's martial arts.

White-gray clouds filled their surroundings and engulfed Yeong-Hun. A sword flew out from the clouds and barraged Yeong-Hun with attacks.

"Why... Why am I being pushed back by a Level 20 player?!" Yeong-Hun shouted angrily.

He was having a hard time accepting the situation. Something that wasn't possible was happening right before him now. Yet, he didn't have the experience or techniques to overcome the situation. After all, he was only stronger than Si-Hun because of his high level and good equipment effects.

"Aaarrggghh!!!"

Yeong-Hun felt humiliated that he was being overpowered by a player only in his Third Awakening. Additionally, Yeong-Hun felt anxious because of how much Si-Hun's seemingly incessant sword slashes pressured him. These feelings of his had reached their limit.

He recklessly attacked Si-Hun as if he were trying to take Si-Hun down with him. Nevertheless, there was no way those kinds of attacks would work on Si-Hun, someone who had learned the Martial God's martial arts.

"Haap!"

Si-Hun, who saw a chance, swung his sword powerfully toward Yeong-Hun's neck.

'I won!' Si-Hun thought excitedly with bright eyes.

However, the moment he was about to cut Yeong-Hun's neck, someone appeared in front of him and blocked the attack. It was the man who had been standing silently next to Yeong-Hun as if he were a stone statue.

Slam!

"Cough!"

Si-Hun, who had barely managed to block the man's double-headed axe, was sent flying backward. The shock from the impact spread from his sword to the rest of his body, and dark blood spurted out of Si-Hun's mouth.

"Haa, haa! What the hell took you so damn long?!" Yeong-Hun yelled at the man, forgetting that he had ordered the man not to interfere.

It would be totally normal for the man to be frustrated in such a situation, yet he just bowed expressionlessly.

"I apologize, Vice Guildmaster," the man said.

"C-Cut off his limbs and then bring him to me!" Yeong-Hun shouted.

"Yes, sir," the man replied and nodded without any hesitation.

The man's name was Cheon Myeong-Ho. He was one of the Mir Guild's top players and Yeong-Hun's personal bodyguard. He was as large in stature as Kang Tae-Soo and wielded a double-headed axe that matched his size.

Myeong-Ho then turned to Si-Hun and warned, "If you follow us without resistance, I'll let you off with just cutting off one arm."

"B-Bull... shit!" Si-Hun spat.

Even with blood coming out of his mouth, Si-Hun stayed standing by using his sword as support. However, he could feel it. He might have had a chance against Yeong-Hun, but he wouldn't be able to win against that statue-like man.

[- You have suffered internal injuries from the enormous impact.

- Your internal injuries will aggravate if you do not immediately circulate your Qi.]

As if confirming his thoughts, system windows with 'Warning' written on them popped up.

Frustrated, Si-Hun dropped to the ground on one knee.

'I failed to overcome it.'

The wall that existed between him and Yeong-Hun was so massive that he had no way of overcoming it.

"Accept it," Myeong-Ho said as he slowly walked toward Si-Hun. "You'll never be able to surpass the vice guildmaster."

The words that came out of Myeong-Ho's mouth pierced Si-Hun's heart. Myeong-Ho wasn't wrong. It didn't matter what Si-Hun did or how much he struggled; he couldn't catch up to Yeong-Hun. Right from the start, the gap between them had been too wide to surpass due to their extremely different starting points.

"Damn it..."

Tears flowed down Si-Hun's cheeks.

The face of his mother, whom Kim Jae-Hyun had abandoned, came to his mind.

"I'm sorry for giving birth to you."

He remembered what his mother had said to him in tears when Jae-Hyun abandoned them. There were no phrases more hurtful than that.

Yet, even until now, he couldn't deny her words. He couldn't find a reason to do so. His life had been a succession of pain, and he had never felt happy even once.

"I'm sorry... everyone," Si-Hun said.

He was trembling as he turned his head toward Tae-Soo, Han Seol-Ah, and Choi Eun-Bi. It hadn't been long since he first met them, but they were the first comrades he ever had. He felt regretful that he couldn't protect them and that they had been put in danger because of him.

"Accept it. The only right that the weak have is to suffer," Myeong-Ho stated while raising his axe.

Si-Hun turned his head to Myeong-Ho, who was slowly approaching him. Myeong-Ho swung his axe down, aiming for Si-Hun's legs.

"Kuh!" Si-Hun uttered and closed his eyes tightly.

His mind was dominated by the fear that he would soon lose his legs.

Clang!!

"Kurgh!"

"..."

There was the distinct sound of metal colliding, followed by a groan from Myeong-Ho's mouth.

Si-Hun slowly opened his eyes and saw the back of a familiar young man in front of him.

"Wow. Nice words, man," Oh Kang-Woo commented.

After easily blocking Myeong-Ho's attack, Kang-Woo nodded with a smile as if savoring what Myeong-Ho had just said.

"Kang-Woo...?" Si-Hun asked while looking confusedly at Kang-Woo, who had suddenly appeared.

Kang-Woo turned his head around to Si-Hun and calmly said, "I'll explain later. Get some rest, Si-Hun. Seol-Ah, come here and heal him."

"Ah... Okay!" Seol-Ah replied.

She nodded in agreement, but she was both confused and happy that she could see Kang-Woo again after so long.

"Are you from the Hwarang Corps?" Myeong-Ho questioned, glaring at Kang-Woo warily.

He knew the government was investigating which guild was involved with the Demon Cult. Seeing how Kang-Woo had appeared as if he had been waiting for them, there was a high likelihood that he was a government agent.

"Do you seriously think I'd be alone if I was with the Hwarang Corps?" Kang-Woo responded.

"Then..."

"We're not close enough for you to keep asking me annoying questions, man. Hurry up and raise your weapon."

Myeong-Ho picked up his axe with a stiff expression.

Nevertheless, Kang-Woo was right. They were not in a kind of relationship where they could fully disclose their identities to one another, so talking was pointless.

"Then I'll make you talk by force," Myeong-Ho declared.

"Hahaha. Good. Nice attitude."

Kang-Woo smiled and waved his hand at Myeong-Ho, beckoning him over.

"Bring it," Kang-Woo said.

Myeong-Ho frowned upon seeing Kang-Woo's arrogant attitude. He clenched his axe tight, and blue mana stormed around his axe.

Unlike Myeong-Ho, who was prepared to fight with a determined attitude, Kang-Woo had his arms crossed and was waiting for Myeong-Ho to attack.

'Arrogant bastard,' Myeong-Ho thought.

He seemed upset by Kang-Woo's lack of preparation.

'You were lucky to block my attack earlier.'

Myeong-Ho was sure that his next attack would be different.

He grabbed the blue-mana-covered axe tightly and dashed toward Kang-Woo. Then he swung the axe at Kang-Woo's neck. However, Kang-Woo leisurely extended his hand toward the axe.

'Crazy son of a bitch!' Myeong-Ho thought.

Kang-Woo was trying to use his hand to block an axe that could cut even a giant shield in half. There was a limit to how crazy someone could be.

Nevertheless, Myeong-Ho continued swinging his axe, intending to cut Kang-Woo in half.

Tap.

"What?!" Myeong-Ho uttered.

Kang-Woo had easily caught the axe that Myeong-Ho had swung using all of his might.

Then Kang-Woo asked, "What was it that you said earlier? Oh, yeah."

Crack. He crushed the axe he'd caught in his hand.

Kang-Woo continued with a deep smile, "You said the only right that the weak have is to suffer, right?"

He licked his lips while nodding and saying, "I think so as well."

The axe's blade, which looked like it had been crushed by a hydraulic press, fell to the ground.

Chapter 62 - Do You Know Who I Am? (2)

"Wh-What the—?"

Cheon Myeong-Ho's eyes widened as he looked down at his squashed axe on the ground in disbelief. He was trembling.

This couldn't be happening. This was something that simply couldn't possibly happen. A person crushing an axe with his bare hands...? That was impossible unless he was a certain green monster from films.

"Urgh!" Myeong-Ho uttered and let go of his axe handle.

He lifted his right fist, and his arm muscles grew so large that they seemed like they were about to burst. Myeong-Ho then targeted Oh Kang-Woo's head with his right fist, which had become harder than steel.

Tap.

However, the same thing happened again. Kang-Woo leisurely caught Myeong-Ho's punch with one hand. The difference in the sizes of their hands was like comparing an adult's hands to a child's, yet Kang-Woo had blocked Myeong-Ho's punch easily.

Crack.

"Aaarrggghhh!!!"

The sound of Myeong-Ho's bones breaking was accompanied by his screams.

Kang-Woo kicked Myeong-Ho's chest. His feet pushed in deeply due to his amplified strength from using the Authority of Titanic Might, which made him stronger than a Giant Ogre.

Bash!

"Kurgh! Urgh! Cough! Cough!"

Myeong-Ho, who had fallen to the ground, coughed up blood. The fear he felt was visible on his face.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Kim Yeong-Hun shouted at him.

Myeong-Ho stood up while trembling and replied, "I-I apologize, sir."

"Damn it... Who the hell is that guy?" Yeong-Hun said, chewing his nails anxiously.

He didn't know who was the arrogant prick that had just appeared. The only thing Yeong-Hun knew was that he and Myeong-Ho wouldn't be able to win against the prick.

'There's no other choice.'

Yeong-Hun's eyes narrowed as he ordered, "Cheon Myeong-Ho, use demonic energy."

"..."

"What are you doing?! Hurry up and use demonic energy!" Yeong-Hun shouted angrily at Myeong-Ho.

Myeong-Ho's lips trembled as he stood up with a grim expression.

"... Yes, sir," he replied.

Myeong-Ho placed his hand on his chest where he could feel his heart beating. The dense and dark demonic energy hidden within it spread through and enveloped him.

"A-Ahhh," Myeong-Ho uttered with his mouth wide open.

His eyes dyed red, and his blood vessels protruded, appearing hideous. Myeong-Ho's skin turned black, goat horns sprouted on his forehead, and wings resembling that of bats burst out through his back.

The energy of Hell that had been contained in his heart was changing him into a demonic beast. A strong desire for destruction rose from inside Myeong-Ho and devoured his sense of reason while enlarging his body.

"GRRRR..." Myeong-Ho growled like a wild beast and flapped his wings.

"Wow!" Kang-Woo uttered with bright eyes upon seeing Myeong-Ho's transformation.

'His transformation is the closest to a demon among all the other transformations that I've seen until now.'

Kang-Woo had seen many people accept demonic energy, but none of them managed to get this close to transforming into a true demon.

'But...'

Kang-Woo laughed.

Even if he had turned into a demon, nothing would change. Kang-Woo was close to achieving his Sixth Awakening, and he was almost at the same level of strength as Cha Yeon-Joo. Demonification wouldn't help Myeong-Ho close the gap between him and Kang-Woo.

"Kill him already!" Yeong-Hun yelled.

The overflowing power that Yeong-Hun felt from Myeong-Ho consolidated his confidence.

'I'll be the one to come out victorious in the end,' Yeong-Ho thought.

It had always been like that. To him, hardship and adversity were simply brief periods of entertainment that made life less boring. Yeong-Ho had been born a winner, and he had never lost even once.

'Bugs like you need to know your place and crawl at the level of my feet.'

Yeong-Hun smiled while looking at Kim Si-Hun and his partners.

As if agreeing with Yeong-Ho's thoughts, Myeong-Ho, who had been fully transformed into a demonic beast, let out a scream, "GRRRAARR!"

His chilling red eyes locked onto Kang-Woo.

Myeong-Ho flapped his wings and flew toward Kang-Woo at a frightening speed.

Yeong-Ho laughed, "Hahahahaha! You're dead n—"

Crack!!

Myeong-Ho's bones cracked as he was flung backward after colliding with Kang-Woo. It almost felt unrealistic to see Myeong-Ho get sent tumbling to the ground so easily even after turning into a demonic beast.

"Huh?" Yeong-Hun uttered in disbelief.

Boom! Crunch!

"Gaaaaahhh!!"

The horrifying violence ensued. Kang-Woo, the meddler whose identity was unknown to Yeong-Hun and Myeong-Ho, leaped ferociously toward Myeong-Ho. He punched Myeong-Ho, who had collapsed onto the ground, with fists covered in black energy. Every time he hit Myeong-Ho, there was a sound that resembled an explosion.

It felt like the roles of demon and human had been reversed. One might even feel sorry for Myeong-Ho, who had turned into a demon for no reason.

'What the...?' Yeong-Hun thought.

He couldn't believe that Myeong-Ho was being thrashed.

"What the hell is he...?"

Yeong-Hun trembled. Fear was engulfing his body. He realized that something had gone very wrong.

'Is he a Ranker or something?'

Someone couldn't have such an overwhelming win against Myeong-Ho, who was using demonic energy, unless they were as strong as Yeong-Hun's father or Cha Yeon-Joo.

Yeong-Hun turned around with a pale face.

Ultimately, it didn't matter if Kang-Woo was a Ranker. The important thing was that Yeong-Hun would become the next target after Myeong-Ho.

Yeong-Hun ran away without looking back.

"Huff! Huff!"

His breathing got heavier the more he ran. The route to the Gate's exit felt far too long.

'I-I have to... contact Father!'



Yeong-Hun had always turned to his father for help whenever he was in a predicament. He was sure that his father, Kim Jae-Hyun, would be able to resolve the issue and bring him victory.

With that in mind, Yeong-Hun took out an orb as big as his fist from his pocket. It was a magic tool that allowed a Player to make calls from inside Gates.

Right when he was about to activate it...

Smack!

"Kurgh!"

Yeong-Hun was hit and sent tumbling to the ground.

"Y-You!" he uttered.

Yeong-Hun paled as he looked at the person who had made him fall to the ground. Kang-Woo looked at him with a smile on his face.

"Where are you running so eagerly?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Wh-Who the hell are you?!"

"Why do you all say the same thing in situations like this?" Kang-Woo remarked. He squatted next to Yeong-Hun and looked at him disappointedly. Then Kang-Woo said, "Hand it over."

"H-Hand what over...?"

"You were about to contact Kim Jae-Hyun, weren't you?" Kang-Woo asked while pointing at the crystal orb with his finger.

With trembling hands, Yeong-Hun handed over the crystal orb, which Kang-Woo then activated immediately.

After a few dial tones, Kang-Woo finally heard the voice he had been waiting for.

[What is it?]

It was a stiff and low-pitched voice.

Kang-Woo's smile deepened after hearing Jae-Hyun's voice come through the crystal orb.

"Are you Kim Jae-Hyun?"

[... Who is this?]

"Mmm... Maybe you'll understand what's going on if I say that I'm the person who has taken your son hostage."

[...]

There was a heavy silence.

Kang-Woo realized that even though Jae-Hyun wasn't saying anything, his breathing had gotten rougher.

'He seems quite surprised,' Kang-Woo thought.

It would be weirder if Jae-Hyun were calm in that situation. After all, it was unlikely that there was a father in this world who could remain calm after hearing that his son had been taken hostage.

"F-Father! Th-This motherfucker dared to—!"

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

Kang-Woo kicked Yeong-Hun, who tried to grab the crystal orb, in the stomach. Yeong-Hun moaned in pain and curled up into a ball.

"You stay put," Kang-Woo said.

He used the Authority of Restraint and created chains made of demonic energy to restrain Yeong-Hun, wrapping around him like a chrysalis.

Struggling to break free, Yeong-Hun exclaimed, "G-Get this damn thing off of me, you bastard!!"

"Sigh, you don't listen, do you? Are you in puberty or something?"

Kang-Woo kicked Yeong-Hun in the head. There was a dull thud sound, and blood flew out of Yeong-Hun's mouth.

[Enough.]

"Hmph. I guess even human garbage like you worries about his son, huh?" Kang-Woo remarked.

[What do you want?] Jae-Hyun asked angrily.

It seemed like he had understood the situation quickly.

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction upon seeing that he had the chance to have a proper conversation with Jae-Hyun.

"If you want to save your son, come to the Mok-dong C-rank Gate right now."

[Alone, I'm guessing?]

"Hahahahaha!" Kang-Woo laughed. "Would you actually come alone if I told you to? No, right?"

[...]

"I know guys like you very well. Don't make it so complicated for yourself. Prepare as much as you'd like."

Kang-Woo was saying that Jae-Hyun could bring as much help as he wished.

Jae-Hyun let out a forced laugh and asked, [Are you out of your mind?]

"What, you don't like my thoughtful gesture? Fine. Come alone, then."

[... I'll make you regret those words.]

"Okay, okay. I'll be looking forward to it," Kang-Woo said. He placed his foot on Yeong-Hun's right ankle. Then Kang-Woo added, "If you don't come within twenty minutes, I'll begin crushing your son's limbs one by one, so take that into consideration."

[Wha...] Jae-Hyun uttered, his rage seeping into his voice. [Does a military unit under the government seriously think they can handle the consequences of torture? Furthermore, torture done to my son?]

"Huh? Government?"

It seemed that, just like Myeong-Ho, Jae-Hyun thought that Kang-Woo was part of the Hwarang Corps.

Kang-Woo smirked.

He said, "I'm not affiliated with the government, though...?"

[Don't tell me you're by yourself right now?]

"Yeah. I'm still single."

[You're insane.]

Jae-Hyun could tell that although Kang-Woo was joking around, he was telling the truth. He thought that Kang-Woo had truly done something so insane by himself.

[Did you do this while knowing who I am?] Jae-Hyun asked angrily.

He was the CEO of Mir Electronics, a multinational business. On top of that, he was the leader of one of Korea's five great guilds, the Mir Guild. He wasn't just wealthy; he also had such great influence that not even government officials could recklessly lay a hand on him. On top of that, he was one of Korea's most powerful players, just like Baek Kang-Hyun and Cha Yeon-Joo.

Money, authority, strength... Jae-Hyun was on top in every aspect. Even a World Ranker wouldn't dare to do something like what Kang-Woo was doing now.

"Hahaha!" Kang-Woo laughed and stepped even harder on Yeong-Hun's right ankle.

Yeong-Hun screamed in pain.

"What about you? Do you know who I am?" Kang-Woo asked.

[...]

"You don't. Do you?"

Crack.

Kang-Woo broke Yeong-Hun's ankle, causing it to twist at a weird angle. Yeong-Hun squirmed in pain while crying.

While looking down at him, Kang-Woo smiled. It was a creepy smile that resembled a demon's.

He continued, "If you don't, then you'll need a beating."

Chapter 63 - Do You Know Who I Am? (3)

"AAARRRGGG!! I-It hurts!! It huuuuuuurts!" Kim Yeong-Hun screamed desperately.

[Enough!] Kim Jae-Hyun's urgent voice rang out from the crystal orb.

Kang-Woo lifted his foot from Yeong-Hun's ankle.

"Sniff... Sniff." Yeong-Hun, who had likely never felt pain like that before, cried while hugging his ankle, which had been twisted in a weird direction.

Oh Kang-Woo calmly spoke toward the crystal orb, "Twenty minutes. If I don't see you in twenty minutes, I'll crush his other ankle."

His voice contained no hint of mercy or compassion. Rather, Kang-Woo's tone suggested that he was enjoying the situation, and that made Jae-Hyun even angrier.

Jae-Hyun said murderously, [I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you are trying to get a ransom from me, I can tell you it's too late for that. I will look for you, I will find you... and I will kill you.]

Kang-Woo smirked at those words and replied, "Good luck."

Crack.

The crystal orb shattered, and its pieces fell onto the ground.

"Right... Now, then," Kang-Woo said.

He turned toward Yeong-Hun, who was trembling. Yeong-Hun looked up at Kang-Woo with a pale face. He was so terrified that he couldn't even feel the sharp pain in his ankle.

"S-Spare me! P-Please! I-Is it money you want? If I could just talk to my father, I can get you as much as you—!"

"Money sounds good, but that's not what I'm after."

Kang-Woo crouched down next to Yeong-Hun. He was smiling so serenely that it was hard to believe he had just mercilessly crushed someone's ankle. In such situations, it was even scarier to see someone with unwavering emotions.

Yeong-Hun trembled.

With a fearful voice, he asked, "Th-Then, wh-what do you want?"

"Peace on Earth," Kang-Woo answered without hesitation.

Yeong-Hun bit his lips doubtfully; he seemed to think Kang-Woo was lying.

"D-Don't bullshit me and just tell me what you want!"

"Wow, you don't believe me?"

Kang-Woo looked at Yeong-Hun disappointedly.

Kang-Woo's goal was the eradication of the Demon Cult. Leaving the process aside, he wasn't lying about the end goal... because the Demon Cult was trying to turn Earth into Hell.

"All right, let's get ready," Kang-Woo said.

"R-Ready for what...?"

Kang-Woo extended his hands toward Yeong-Hun's head.

Yeong-Hun screamed hysterically, "P-Please!! S-Spare me! Please spare my life!"

"Don't turn me into a bad guy all on your own. I won't kill you."

"Th-Then..."

"We need to get ready to meet your father."

Upon hearing that, Yeong-Hun gulped. Hope seemed to return to his eyes.

His father—Kim Jae-Hyun, who was perfect in every sense of the word—would probably be able to save him from this situation.

Yeong-Hun thought, 'I don't know how you think you'll get away with this, but...'

Yeong-Hun was sure that his father would destroy this man.

"I'm glad," Kang-Woo said.

"... You're glad?"

"Yeah."

A deep smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face. He placed his hands on top of Yeong-Hun's head and activated one of his 666 Authorities. An explosive amount of demonic energy entered Yeong-Hun's head.

"Kurgh! Guh!" Yeong-Hun groaned.

His eyes turned upside down, and he was foaming at the mouth.

Kang-Woo gazed at Yeong-Hun, who was trembling, and said, "I'm glad Kim Jae-Hyun loves you."

A father's love for his son... Kang-Woo could sense it from Jae-Hyun's anger.

"It's easy to use someone who has people they love," Kang-Woo added with a laugh.

\* \* \*

After using an Authority on Yeong-Hun, Kang-Woo took him and the party out of the Gate. Once outside, he saw members of the Red Rose Guild and Hwarang's 3rd Squadron, whom he had contacted before attacking Yeong-Hun.

"Who are those people?"

"Huh? I-Isn't that Cha Yeon-Joo from the Red Rose Guild and the captain of Hwarang's 3rd Squadron, Baek Hwa-Yeon?!"

Han Seol-Ah and Kang Tae-Soo's eyes widened in surprise.

"I'll explain later. First, take Si-Hun to a safe place," Kang-Woo said.

"B-But..."

As they walked away from the Gate, Cha Yeon-Joo approached them.

She called out, "Kang-Woo! I was wondering where you were. We couldn't find you anywhere after you called us here."

Seol-Ah was surprised. She had only seen Yeon-Joo on the news, yet Yeon-Joo spoke like she knew Kang-Woo.

"K-Kang-Woo, you know the Red Rose Guild's guild master?" Seol-Ah asked.

"Sadly, yes," Kang-Woo replied.

"That's my line," Yeon-Joo said, glaring at Kang-Woo. She then turned her head to look at Seol-Ah.

"Well... it seems like you know me. Who are you?"

"M-My name is Han Seol-Ah."

"Hmm," Yeon-Joo murmured as she gazed at Seol-Ah.

She looked at Seol-Ah from top to bottom and paused at Seol-Ah's breasts.

"Keh!" Yeon-Joo uttered with veins protruding on her forehead.

She took a deep breath and asked, "What's your relationship with Kang-Woo?"

"I-I should be the one asking you that question. And why do you address him so c-casually?" Seol-Ah replied, glaring at Yeon-Joo in the most intimidating way she could.

'She doesn't look scary at all, though.'

It was as if a cat had brandished its claws against a tiger.

Kang-Woo ended their strange war of nerves, "Let's leave introductions for later. There's something more important than that right now. Seol-Ah, take the rest of the party members away with you."

"Ah..."

"Once it's over, I'll tell you everything at home."

"Okay, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah seemed a bit sad, but she nodded and left the Gate area with the other members.

Yeon-Joo turned her head to Kang-Woo, who was watching Seol-Ah walk away.

"So, where's the fish that took the bait?" Yeon-Joo asked.

"Here," Kang-Woo replied.

He threw Yeong-Hun, whom he had dragged along, to the floor.

Yeon-Joo's eyes shone brightly and said, "I had a feeling it was the Mir Guild."

"Were you expecting it?"

"It was just a feeling. After all, among the major guilds, they're the only ones crazy enough to do something so insane."

Yeon-Joo's guess had been influenced by her personal feelings.

'I remember something about them having bad blood,' Kang-Woo thought as he recalled what he'd heard from Kang Seong-Soo.

Yeon-Joo continued, "So, we just have to interrogate and get information out of him, right?"

"No. Kim Yeong-Hun is just a pawn. He probably won't know the exact details."

"Then..."

"I called Kim Jae-Hyun here. He'll be here within twenty minutes."

"...!"

Baek Hwa-Yeon's and Yeon-Joo's expressions hardened upon hearing that name.

"W-Wait! You called Kim Jae-Hyun here?" Yeon-Joo asked in surprise.

She looked at Yeong-Hun, who was unconscious on the floor. Then one thought crossed her mind.

Yeon-Joo said, "Don't tell me... you took Kim Yeong-Hun hostage?"

"I could sense his great love for his son."

"You crazy son of a..." Yeon-Joo uttered, looking at him in disbelief.

Interrogating Yeong-Hun was one thing, but calling Jae-Hyun here...?

"Kim Jae-Hyun won't stand for this," she stated.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," Kang-Woo replied calmly.

"Haa... So, that's why you said to bring as many of our forces as possible," Yeon-Joo said with a sigh.

She didn't think they would be having an all-out war against the Mir Guild so out of the blue.

Yeon-Joo thought, 'It was bound to happen eventually, but...'

They couldn't just leave the Mir Guild alone now that it was certain that the guild was connected to the Demon Cult. A war against the Mir Guild was an inevitable part of the process to eradicate the Demon Cult.

'But I never thought that it would be now.'

Yeon-Joo bit her lip lightly.

She hadn't been able to bring all of their elite members because she'd left as quickly as possible to look for Kang-Woo. It had been the same for Hwa-Yeon. The government would normally join forces with a major guild to tilt the odds in their favor, but the odds were fairly even in the current situation.

"Don't worry. It isn't going to be a difficult battle," Kang-Woo said calmly.

Hwa-Yeon spoke while frowning, "I'm sorry, but neither Yeon-Joo's guild nor my 3rd Squadron are fully present. There's no way that the battle against the Mir Guild won't be a difficult one. Aren't you being too hasty?"

"Hwa-Yeon, what happens when the commander of an opposing force charges at you completely devoid of reason?" Kang-Woo asked.

"... The fight would obviously end in our victory."

"Yes. That's what's going to happen," Kang-Woo replied as if he had foreseen the future.

Hwa-Yeon seemed confused and asked, "Are you saying that Kim Jae-Hyun will charge at us... completely devoid of reason?"

"A father's love for his son is unconditional," Kang-Woo stated with a shrug.

Yeon-Joo shook her head with a stiff expression and commented, "Even if Kim Yeong-Hun is a mindless idiot, Kim Jae-Hyun is different. He won't lose his mind just because you've taken Kim Yeong-Hun hostage."

After all, Jae-Hyun was so calculative and cold that he could become the CEO of a colossal corporation like Mir Electronics.

Kang-Woo laughed lightly at her words and said, "No. He'll charge at us."

"... Are you planning on destroying his son's arms and legs in front of him or something?" Yeon-Joo questioned while looking at Yeong-Hun's right ankle.

Kang-Woo shook his head and smirked as he said, "Of course not. You seriously think Kim Jae-Hyun would lose his mind over something like that?"

"... Seriously, what are you planning on doing?" Yeon-Joo asked.

She got goosebumps while looking at Kang-Woo.

Without answering, Kang-Woo directed his eyes toward the road and said, "Looks like he's here."

"Ngh...?!"

Vroom!!

Around twenty SUVs raced into the area, destroying the barricade around the Gate's entrance.

Click.

The car door of one of the cars opened, and an expressionless middle-aged man got out of the car. The man, who had slicked-back hair, was emitting a suffocatingly powerful bloodlust.

"... I should have known you people were behind this," Jae-Hyun said, directing his strong bloodlust at Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon. Then his gaze darted around the area. He remarked, "How reckless. Do you think that it's over just because you've taken my son hostage?"

Jae-Hyun was quick to notice that the Red Rose Guild and the Hwarang Corps hadn't brought all of their forces.

Jae-Hyun's gaze burned with an intense bloodlust as he asked, "Where is the man I spoke to?"

"Over here," Kang-Woo answered, waving his hand as if he were greeting a friend.

Jae-Hyun's bloodlust grew stronger.

"I thank you for not running away," he said.

Click, click.

The doors of the other SUVs opened, and over two hundred members of the Mir Guild got out from the cars.

Jae-Hyun glared at Kang-Woo and asked, "So, where is my son?"

"Here, take him."

After saying that, Kang-Woo picked up Yeong-Hun and threw him over.

"Chairman!"

"Watch out!"

Two people immediately stepped in front of Jae-Hyun, thinking that a bomb might have been planted on Yeong-Hun.

Thump.

"..."



"What the..."

There was a heavy silence.

Unlike their expectations, nothing happened. Before Yeong-Hun landed on the ground, there was even a cloud of black smoke that appeared and cushioned his landing.

"... Step aside," Jae-Hyun ordered.

"Chairman, please wait. It might still be a trap—"

"I said, step aside."

Jae-Hyun pushed his subordinates aside and scooped Yeong-Hun up off the ground.

After picking his son up, Jae-Hyun trembled as he said, "I'm not sure why you've done this, but..."

Enormous amounts of mana burst out from him and stormed his surroundings. Jae-Hyun glared at Kang-Woo with eyes filled with bloodlust.

"With this, you have no chance of victory. I will kill you in the worst way possible," Jae-Hyun declared while grinding his teeth.

"U-Urgghh..." Yeong-Hun came back to his senses right then.

"Yeong-Hun!"

Jae-Hyun withdrew his bloodlust and hugged his son. He softly caressed the cheek of Yeong-Hun, who was slowly opening his eyes. It was a scene that would move anyone who wasn't aware of what was going on.

"A-Ahh..." Yeong-Hun uttered when he opened his eyes completely.

He looked around and then fixed his gaze on Jae-Hyun, who was still hugging him. Yeong-Hun trembled in fear, but it wasn't in fear of Kang-Woo and the acts of ruthless violence that Kang-Woo had done to him.

His fear was... directed toward Jae-Hyun.

"Wh-Who are you... mister?"

Chapter 64 - Do You Know Who I Am? (4)

"Wh-Who are you... mister?" Kim Yeong-Hun asked.

"What...?" Kim Jae-Hyun uttered. His eyes widened as he looked at his son in confusion. "Yeong-Hun, it's me. Your father!"

"Wh-What are you talking about, mister?"

Yeong-Hun was glaring at Jae-Hyun warily. It was as if all his memories of his father had been erased.

"Y-Yeong-Hun," Jae-Hyun said with quivering eyes.

Yeong-Hun couldn't remember Jae-Hyun. He was looking at his father warily as if they were strangers. That shock made Jae-Hyun tremble.

"A-Ahhhh..." Jae-Hyun uttered and then covered his mouth.

He felt nauseous, and he thought that he was about to vomit at any moment. His mind went blank. It was so strange for Jae-Hyun to hear Yeong-Hun calling him 'mister.'

"What... did you do?" Jae-Hyun asked.

He was still shaking when he turned and found Oh Kang-Woo standing there with a smile. Just seeing him smile was enough to make Jae-Hyun lose control.

"I said, what did you do?!" Jae-Hyun shouted.

His eyes were opened wide, and his tone sharp. His image of a reserved gentleman changed completely.

However, that was understandable. On the contrary, it would have been strange if he had maintained his composure. The memories of his beloved son had been erased. It was more shocking and terrifying to him than if his son's limbs had been torn apart.

Was this how he would feel if Yeong-Hun had died in front of him? Jae-Hyun wasn't sure. He wouldn't have had to feel such an ambiguous and indescribable feeling if his son had died instead.

"L-Let me go, mister! Forget that. Where am I?" Yeong-Hun said while trying to free himself from Jae-Hyun's arms.

Jae-Hyun gradually lost hold of his rationality every time his son called him 'mister.'

"Y-You..." Jae-Hyun uttered, trembling as he looked at Kang-Woo.

After letting Yeong-Hun go, Jae-Hyun slowly stood up. He felt as though his entire world was crumbling. No, it had already crumbled.

Jae-Hyun exuded an intense bloodlust.

"Ch-Chairman."

"Please calm down!"

The executives of the Mir Guild tried to talk Jae-Hyun down, but he could not hear them.

Jae-Hyun stared at Kang-Woo's mouth, ingraining that smile into his mind. He could almost hear Kang-Woo's mocking laughter.

"You bastaaaaaard!!" Jae-Hyun yelled.

His mana exploded, splitting open the land around him.

Jae-Hyun was one of the top ten Players in Korea. The minimum requirement to become a Ranker was to achieve the Eighth Awakening, but he had achieved his Ninth.

This man who was rumored to possess four S-rank Traits was losing control of himself.

Boom! Boom!

He leaped forward. The ground around him shook like there was an earthquake, and the concrete covering the ground was destroyed by the exploding mana.

Golden mana enveloped Jae-Hyun's fists in a distinct shape. It was similar to condensed Qi, a higher form of Qi that often appeared in martial arts novels.

While covered in materialized mana, Jae-Hyun leaped toward Kang-Woo.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Cha Yeon-Joo yelled, blocking Jae-Hyun's path.

Red chains flew out of Yeon-Joo's hands and surrounded Jae-Hyun. Jae-Hyun swung his fists against the red chains, which were also enveloped in materialized mana.

Boom!!

A huge explosion shook the surroundings the moment that Jae-Hyun's fist and Yeon-Joo's chains collided. Jae-Hyun and Yeon-Joo exhibited powers that transcended human capabilities.

"Move!" Jae-Hyun, who had completely lost his mind, shouted at Yeon-Joo, who was blocking his way.

Jae-Hyun leaped forward like a beast, and Yeon-Joo once again shot the red chains at him.

Boom!

"Kurgh!!"

Jae-Hyun was one of Korea's top ten players, but Yeon-Joo was also in that group.

Yeon-Joo's red chains moved as if they were alive and wrapped around Jae-Hyun, climbing upward. The thorns on the chains embedded into Jae-Hyun's skin and ripped it.

Jae-Hyun caught the chains and broke them with his bare hands. Then he threw the red chains to the side. Blood leaked out from his wounded skin, but Jae-Hyun paid his injuries no mind.

He persisted in trying to push forward and ignoring Yeon-Joo, who was in his way.

"Haap!" Baek Hwa-Yeon uttered.

She stopped Jae-Hyun's charge this time. She swung her white longsword at Jae-Hyun's neck, but Jae-Hyun smacked away the white longsword with his mana-covered fists. Hwa-Yeon was pushed back by his absurd power.

"Cough!"

Hwa-Yeon was one Awakening stage lower than Yeon-Joo and Jae-Hyun, so it was hard for her to block Jae-Hyun's charge.

"Hwa-Yeon! Stay back for now!"

"Understood!"

Hwa-Yeon nodded and increased her distance from Jae-Hyun.

Yeon-Joo filled the gap and spread her arms out. Then red chains exploded out from her red bracelets. These chains were the Legendary-grade weapon Bloodthirsty Chains. It was considered her trademark weapon.

Thrash!

She gathered the red chains together and formed a flail, which she launched toward Jae-Hyun. He could tell it was not a light attack, so he raised his right fist to block.

The chains then spread out like a net. If Jae-Hyun were to stay still, he would be caught by the net. However, Jae-Hyun didn't move backward even in that situation. Rather, he moved forward as if he couldn't see the net that was about to swallow him whole.

Yeon-Joo's chains enveloped Jae-Hyun.

"Raaaahhhh!" Jae-Hyun screamed while thrashing about in the net of thorny chains.

Jae-Hyun paid a hefty price for that. Parts of his skin got caught on the thorns and were torn open, but he didn't care about that.

He grabbed the thorny chains with both of his hands. The muscles of his arms, which were covered with materialized mana, swelled as if they were about to burst.

Crack!

The chains were ripped apart as if they were just thin ropes.

"I told you to move!!" Jae-Hyun's crazed voice rang throughout the area.

Blood seeped out from the horrible wounds all over his body. The wounds were so deep that it wouldn't be weird if he died immediately. However, he had surpassed Level 80 and achieved his Ninth Awakening, so he wouldn't collapse from just that.

"Fucking hell..." Yeon-Joo muttered.

She was shocked by Jae-Hyun's lunacy.

'I can't believe he took that attack head-on,' she thought.

Yeon-Joo's Legendary-grade weapon, Bloodthirsty Chains, had a special effect called Energy Drain. It snatched a significant amount of health from a target whose flesh had been ripped by the thorns on the chains. Yet, the crazed Jae-Hyun was going as strong as ever.

'He isn't going to stop his charge, even if it kills him.'

Yeon-Joo's expression hardened.

"AARRGGHH!" Jae-Hyun roared, resuming his charge.

Back Hwa-Yeon leaped forward from the rear.

"Yeon-Joo! I'll be counting on your support!"

"Got it!"

Yeon-Joo extended her hand toward Hwa-Yeon, and the red chains formed a shield in front of the latter.

Boom!!

Jae-Hyun stomped on the ground, destroying his surroundings that were within a ten-meter radius. He twisted his torso, raised his right fist, and used the generated momentum to smash his fist downward.

The mana around his fist spread outward, engulfing Hwa-Yeon in an enormous shockwave. She hid behind the shield of chains that Yeon-Joo had made, but Jae-Hyun's materialized mana destroyed the chains.

Hwa-Yeon then slashed upward, cleaving the mana that had gotten past the chains into two. A gap in Jae-Hyun's defenses had formed after the massive attack, and Hwa-Yeon's gaze turned sharp when she spotted it.

'Whirlwind.'

She activated her Trait skill.

A strong gust surrounded the white longsword, and Hwa-Yeon swung it at a speed that forced even Jae-Hyun, who was in a crazed state, to leap backward. Hwa-Yeon's blade brushed past Jae-Hyun by a narrow margin.

Slash!

Jae-Hyun managed to avoid the blade, but he couldn't dodge the whirlwind around it. The whirlwind slashed him from his flank to his collarbone, causing a fountain of blood to spray out.

Hwa-Yeon flinched when she saw that she had dealt an almost fatal wound to Jae-Hyun. It would be troublesome if Jae-Hyun were to die; they wouldn't be able to get information about the Demon Cult from him.

Hwa-Yeon's hesitation created an opportunity for Jae-Hyun.

"Abyss!"

Crackle!!

Jae-Hyun smashed the ground with both of his fists. Powerful energy exploded into the ground like a volcano, accompanied by a thunderous sound.

The storm of mana engulfed Hwa-Yeon. It sent her tumbling to the ground, and she coughed up dark red blood.

"Kurgh!"

Jae-Hyun's attack was powerful.

Hwa-Yeon staggered to her feet. She could be fatally wounded if she remained still and was injured by Jae-Hyun's subsequent attack.

Nonetheless, she had been worried over nothing. Jae-Hyun wasn't targeting her.

"Raaaahhhh!" Jae-Hyun, who was covered in blood, shouted like a monster and ran toward Kang-Woo.

There were only twenty meters between them. Players possessed superhuman strength, so they could close that distance with a single step.

However, Yeon-Joo wasn't stupid enough to let go of an opponent who was ignoring her and charging toward Kang-Woo.

"Chain spear!"

She threw five chains toward Jae-Hyun's back.

Stab.

There were fifteen meters left between Jae-Hyun and Kang-Woo. A chain embedded itself in Jae-Hyun's right thigh.

Stab Stab.

There were ten meters left. A chain penetrated his left hand and elbow.

Stab.

There were five meters left. A chain pierced his right shoulder.

"Haa, haa..."

Jae-Hyun looked down at the last chain that had pierced through his stomach. He was breathing roughly, and blood was running down from his mouth.

Then he shifted his gaze to the young man who was now standing right in front of him.

Kang-Woo was smiling, seemingly to mock Jae-Hyun.

"Urgh, a-argh," Jae-Hyun groaned.

He squeezed out all of his remaining strength and swung his right fist. His fist did not contain any mana at all, let alone materialized mana.

Tap.

His right fist hit Kang-Woo's chest weakly. Then Jae-Hyun, who had used up all of his strength, collapsed.

Kang-Woo bent down and made eye contact with Jae-Hyun. Jae-Hyun looked at him with a gaze that showed he was about to die out at any moment.

Kang-Woo slowly extended his hand and grabbed the back of Jae-Hyun's head. Their faces got so close to each other that their noses were about to touch.

Kang-Woo said quietly, "Do you know who I am now?"

Chapter 65 - Do You Know Who I Am? (5)

"Kim Jae-Hyun has been taken to the hospital! He's currently being treated by doctors and healer-class Players. Fortunately, his life isn't in danger, and he is recovering quickly."

"Okay. How long will it take for him to be healed?"

"He will be well enough to be able to move in a few hours."

Even while saying that, the Hwarang Corps member seemed to have a hard time believing it.

Chains had pierced Kim Jae-Hyun's entire body, and he'd also been slashed from his collarbone to his pelvis. Despite that, the outlook was that he would be mostly recovered in just a few hours.

It was true that having top-notch hospital staff and healers treat him aided in his swift recovery. However, the main reason was that Kim Jae-Hyun's recovery speed was absurdly fast.

"Put mana restraints on him as soon as they finish treating him and then bring him to the investigation room," Baek Hwa-Yeon ordered.

"Yes, ma'am!"

Unlike the surprised member of the Hwarang Corps, Hwa-Yeon was calm. She knew about the superhuman capabilities of a Player in their Ninth Awakening. As long as their vital organs weren't hurt, it wouldn't take them long to recover.

'However, we don't want him to recover fully.'

The real problem would occur if Jae-Hyun were to recover fully. It would be better if he recovered just enough that he could talk.

"I'll be leaving to take care of them," Hwa-Yeon told Cha Yeon-Joo and Oh Kang-Woo, gesturing to the members of the Mir Guild.

Hwa-Yeon gazed at the Mir Guild members, who were like soldiers who had lost their general.

After Jae-Hyun was neutralized, the Mir Guild members didn't put up any resistance or try to escape. It was the expected reaction, considering they had watched their leader suddenly lose his mind and get defeated soon after. Moreover, the Mir Guild's power was heavily centered around Jae-Hyun, so the situation was quickly resolved upon his defeat.

After Hwa-Yeon left, Yeon-Joo turned her head to Kang-Woo.

"What did you do?" Yeon-Joo asked, glaring at Kang-Woo with a thorny gaze.

Kang-Woo shrugged and calmly answered, "I just fiddled around with Kim Yeong-Hun's memories a little."

"... You can even alter memories?"

"I can do a lot of things."

Yeon-Joo remained silent.

In her mind, she knew that his strategy had been brilliant. With it, they managed to defeat the Mir Guild without any casualties, which was an amazing achievement. They would've suffered great losses if Jae-Hyun hadn't lost his mind.

'But...'

Yeon-Joo recalled Jae-Hyun's lunacy. She understood why he had gone mad. His son could not even remember his name... It would've been stranger if Jae-Hyun didn't feel an ounce of despair in that situation.

She wasn't sure what Kang-Woo had done to make Kim Yeong-Hun lose his memories, but just thinking about that made her sick. Yeon-Joo almost pitied Jae-Hyun and Yeong-Hun, the father and son whom she had bad blood with.

'Although they aren't people whom I should ever feel pity for.'

Thinking about all the pain that they had caused, maybe it was a fair punishment. No, it probably wasn't enough. It was widely known that Yeong-Hun was an asshole. He had ruined the lives of countless people. Jae-Hyun was even worse. The mountain of corpses in his wake was as tall as the mountain of wealth and power that he had accumulated.

'I guess this is what you would call... poetic justice?'

Yeon-Joo felt confused.

In terms of punishing evil and rewarding good, Yeon-Joo did not believe that the one who had dealt the punishment, Kang-Woo, was good in the slightest. Rather, it was as if evil had been devoured by a greater evil.

"... What are you, really?" Yeon-Joo asked, looking at Kang-Woo warily.

She couldn't make sense of the man named Oh Kang-Woo. She wasn't even sure if he was the same person whom she'd investigated before recruiting.

"I'm human, as you already know."

"Enough of that bullshit. This goes beyond talent at this p—"

"Cha Yeon-Joo," Kang-Woo said, cutting her off.

Their eyes met, and Yeon-Joo flinched, suddenly feeling chills run down her back. She felt that Kang-Woo's eyes, which were as deep as an abyss, were about to devour her.

"I can help you, and you're of great help to me. Isn't that good enough?" Kang-Woo asked.

"..."

"You don't need to know much, nor are you obligated to understand everything. The world doesn't vanish just because you close your eyes. The important thing isn't who I am, but what you want to do. You said that you wanted to get revenge before, right?"

"Yeah..."

"I will help you get that revenge. I will help you wipe out the Demon Cult that killed the person who's dear to you, so..." Kang-Woo's deep voice flowed into Yeon-Joo's ears. "Just close your eyes."

Yeon-Joo thought his words were sweet beyond belief. They felt so pleasant that it was as if her mind was about to go numb. She believed that she'd be able to get what she wanted as long as she followed that sweetness.

Yeon-Joo felt like she could finally understand the phrase 'sweet whispers of the devil.' She had thought that it was cringy nonsense when she first heard it, but it matched the current situation perfectly.

'I guess I haven't been raising a tiger cub.'

Yeon-Joo bit her lip. She thought that she could see another figure overlaying Kang-Woo—a smiling demon with goat horns and bat wings.

Then she wondered in regret if sponsoring Kang-Woo had been an irreversible mistake. He had grown strong enough to be on par with her in less than two months. She couldn't even think of how strong he would become in the future.

'It's too late now.'

Yeon-Joo would not cry over spilled milk.

'In that case...'



Her gaze quivered as the memory of a beautiful girl with shoulder-length black hair resurfaced in her mind. Jeong Ha-Eun—that was the name of the Red Rose Guild member who used to follow Yeon-Joo around as if Yeon-Joo were her older sister.

Veins protruded from the skin of Yeon-Joo's hands as they clenched into fists, and an uncontrollable rage surged inside her. She looked at Kang-Woo and remembered his sweet words about helping get her revenge.

It didn't matter if he was a tiger or a demon. Yeon-Joo had a goal that she had to achieve, even if she had to join forces with a demon to do it.

Yeon-Joo closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened her eyes again.

She said, "The process aside, thanks. We were able to capture Jae-Hyun without any casualties thanks to you."

"You're welcome," Kang-Woo replied.

Then he looked around and asked, "Are we going to go to the investigation room right away?"

"Of course. Considering what we went through to get this opportunity, we have to dig up as much information as possible before the Demon Cult makes a move in response," Yeon-Joo answered while leaking out a strong bloodlust.

It seemed that she had quite a deep hatred toward the Demon Cult.

"You're coming too, right? Kang-Woo?"

"Obviously."

If Kang-Woo didn't go, he would've captured Jae-Hyun for nothing.

Yeon-Joo nodded and walked toward her car with Kang-Woo following behind her.

\* \* \*

A few hours later...

Kang-Woo, Yeon-Joo, and Hwa-Yeon were sitting in the investigation room, waiting for Jae-Hyun. Click.

The door opened, and Jae-Hyun was dragged in. He had been bound with mana restraints all over his body. The restraints were similar to the straitjackets that were used in mental hospitals.

Jae-Hyun glared silently at Kang-Woo while leaking out an intense bloodlust. His hair, which had been neatly slicked back before, was in a complete mess. The dark circles under his eyes and his sullen cheeks showed that he was in terrible condition.

"I have a few questions for you."

It was Hwa-Yeon who spoke first.

"Since when have you been involved with the Demon Cult?" she questioned with a hard voice.

"..."

"Is there anything you know about the 'summoning'?"

"..."

"Do you know anything about the man in the red demon mask?"

"..."

There was no response from Jae-Hyun. Only Hwa-Yeon's voice could be heard in the investigation room.

Hwa-Yeon slapped Jae-Hyun violently.

Crash!

Jae-Hyun fell from his chair.

Hwa-Yeon looked down at him furiously and said, "Answer the questions. At this moment, you are neither the CEO of Mir Electronics nor a guild master. You're nothing but a criminal who joined forces with a fanatical cult."

"..."

"I told you to answer the questions."

Hwa-Yeon grabbed Jae-Hyun's disheveled hair.

The corners of Jae-Hyun's mouth curled up.

"Do you seriously think I'll talk?" Jae-Hyun said.

"..."

"No matter how much power the Hwarang Corps possesses, you're nothing but a dog of the government—a dog that does as it's told. Baek Hwa-Yeon, have you forgotten who I am? How many congresspersons do you think I have under my beck and call?" Jae-Hyun continued with a malevolent smile. "Do you still not understand? You are the dogs, and I am the owner holding the leash. How dare a dog bare its teeth toward its owner?"

"You goddamn psychotic motherfucker..." Yeon-Joo, who had been listening in silence, cursed.

She stood up and grabbed Jae-Hyun's collar. The bracelet on her slender wrist shone red, and red chains emerged from it and instantly enveloped Jae-Hyun. The thorns on the chains penetrated the mana restraints and dug into Jae-Hyun's skin. The mana restraints quickly became wet with blood.

"Kurgh," Jae-Hyun started to groan in pain.

"Talk."

"Kurghhh..."

"I said, talk."

"G-Gaahh."

"TALK, YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!" Yeon-Joo's scream rang throughout the investigation room.

Even while suffering immense pain, Jae-Hyun laughed, "K-Kehehehe... In the end... you will all lose against him. You can't even imagine... how massive they are... or what they are... planning."

"You—!"

"Stop, Yeon-Joo. It would be bad if Kim Jae-Hyun dies," Hwa-Yeon said.

After Hwa-Yeon talked Yeon-Joo down, Yeon-Joo took a deep breath and called the chains back into her bracelet.

The two women looked at him in frustration. They weren't sure how to get him to talk.

At that moment, Kang-Woo, who had been silently watching, spoke up, "All right, I guess it's my turn now."

"You!" Jae-Hyun roared, frowning angrily upon seeing Kang-Woo.

"Tell us everything you know about the Demon Cult," Kang-Woo said.

"Hmph, are you deaf? Do you seriously think I'll talk?"

"Yes. I think you will," Kang-Woo replied with a soft laugh. He looked at Jae-Hyun and said, "I'll return them."

"What...?"

"If you tell us everything you know, I'll return Kim Yeong-Hun's memories."

"...!"

Jae-Hyun's eyes widened, and he started to tremble. He recalled Yeong-Hun, who had called him 'mister' while looking right at him.

This was an offer that Jae-Hyun couldn't refuse. There was simply no way that he could turn down having his son recognize him again.

Jae-Hyun clenched his hands into fists.

"Y-You...!"

He was blinded by irrational rage.

Kang-Woo had made Jae-Hyun's son forget about him and was even using that as leverage against him. Jae-Hyun could not resent Kang-Woo any more than this.

"YOOOOUUUU!!" Jae-Hyun bellowed.

In a frenzy of rage, he twisted and turned under the mana restraints, trying to break free. Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon grabbed Jae-Hyun as he attempted to charge toward Kang-Woo.

Jae-Hyun let out a scream filled with hatred and resentment, "YOU WILL GO TO HEEELL!!!"

His scream was closer to a wail.

Kang-Woo smirked and said, "I've already been there, man."

Chapter 66 - Summoning Ritual (1)

"I met him... about eight months ago."

Kim Jae-Hyun began talking.

Oh Kang-Woo leaned on the chair and listened carefully.

"Are you talking about the man in the red demon mask?"

"Yes."

"You don't know who he is?"

Jae-Hyun shook his head with a heavy expression on his face. He didn't seem to be lying.

'I guess even Kim Jae-Hyun doesn't know who he is.'

The information Kang-Woo wanted to know the most had disappeared.

"Keep talking."

"When I first met him eight months ago, he gave me a proposal. He said that he would turn me into a demon if I provided him with the sacrifices he needed for the rituals."

"... And you accepted that?"

Cha Yeon-Joo looked at him in disbelief.

Supplying the live sacrifices was so insane that it would destroy everything that Jae-Hyun had built up until now. Why would someone like Jae-Hyun take such a risk just to become a demon?

"Hmph. You can only say that because you know nothing about demons."

"... What do you mean?"

"Demons are immortal. As long as their heads aren't severed or their hearts don't burst, they will live forever without aging."

Immortality. Eternal youth.

There was no offer more enticing for a mortal being. Even the wealthiest of people ultimately died, so it was possibly understandable for someone like Jae-Hyun, who possessed great power and wealth, to struggle against the clutches of mortality.

"Hah, immortality?"

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

"Because they've been alive for over a thousand years."

"What...?"

It wasn't just Yeon-Joo who was surprised.

Kang-Woo, who had been silently listening, opened his mouth and asked, "The Demon Cult has existed for over a thousand years?"

Players had only begun to appear on Earth after the Day of Calamity five years ago, so Kang-Woo had obviously thought that the Demon Cult had appeared after that day.

Jae-Hyun nodded with a heavy expression.

"They have been here for a thousand—no, even longer than that. They have been hiding all over the world and secretly growing. But of course, they only became active a few years ago."

"Hmm."

Kang-Woo frowned.

If they'd been present for such a long time, it would probably be hard to wipe them all out.

"... Then you've been kidnapping Players and offering them to the Demon Cult in exchange for immortality?"

"Yes."

"Crazy son of a bitch." Yeon-Joo looked at him in disgust. "Do you want to be immortal so badly that you are even willing to commit such hideous acts? Do you think a human can stay sane while living for thousands of years?"

There were many novels and manhwas about what would happen if one was immortal, but the result was always a catastrophe.

She believed that a human would eventually lose their mind if they lived for such a long time.

Jae-Hyun laughed at her words.

"You truly know nothing about demons. The body of a demon preserves the mind and amplifies one's desires."

"... What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means you cannot get bored of life. You can live for eternity in youth. Isn't it the best?"

"Don't bullshit me. There's no way that's possib—"

"It is. Do you think I'd risk everything if it weren't?"

Yeon-Joo shut her mouth.

She knew that Jae-Hyun wasn't stupid.

'If he's telling the truth...'

It would make sense how the Demon Cult had amassed such a large number of followers so easily. The reward that they offered was hard for a human to resist.

"What a load of bull," Kang-Woo mumbled in a low voice.

"Kang-Woo...?"

Yeon-Joo looked at him, surprised by his tone from which she could sense an intense bloodlust.

"Do you seriously believe having insatiable desires is a good thing?"

Kang-Woo looked at him with sharp eyes.

Desires were limitless. Even humans always wanted more if they had one or two of something. Considering that, a demon's desires weren't even worth mentioning.

Insatiable desires brought about thirst that couldn't be understood by anyone who had never experienced it firsthand. It was comparable to eternally wandering around a desert in search of water and was like struggling to breathe in an atmosphere with no oxygen.

This suffering was incomparable to anything that could possibly be experienced.

Kang-Woo had desperately learned a way to control his desires so that he would not lose his mind from the suffering, but it was impossible to perfectly control his desires even after having lived for ten millennia and having devoured the seven princes that used to rule over Hell.

'You're the one who knows nothing about demons.'

Kang-Woo stopped those words from leaving his mouth.

It would be a problem if he acted as if he knew a lot about demons.

He forcibly changed the topic because he felt he would throw up if he heard any more. "Well, we've heard enough about your motive. Talk about something else now."

"Kuh..."

Just looking at Kang-Woo made Jae-Hyun angry. He bit his lip to calm down.

"I provided them with sacrifices as they had proposed, and I made a few members of my guild accept demonic energy through the ritual."

"Demonic energy? Is it something like mana?" asked Yeon-Joo.

"It is the power of Hell. It is similar to mana but fundamentally different."

"Hmm... So do you also have demonic energy?"

"No. I haven't accepted it yet."

"Why? Didn't you join forces with the Demon Cult to get it?"

"I did. But if you recklessly accept demonic energy, you become unable to control your desires and become something closer to a monster than a demon."

"... Just accepting that thing called demonic energy can transform a human?"

"Yes. The man said that they needed more time to prepare if I wanted to become a full-fledged demon with perfect hold over my intelligence."

"... Then why did you make your guild members accept it? You said that it would transform them into monsters."

"But it grants great power in exchange. Guild members are nothing more than expendable soldiers. As long as they can fight, it doesn't matter if they're human or monster."

"Crazy son of a bitch."

Yeon-Joo frowned.

Jae-Hyun made her sick.

After hearing his explanation, she felt that Kang-Woo had been too soft with him.

"Then what is the summoning about? What are they trying to summon?"

"... A demon."

"A demon?"

Kang-Woo looked at him with narrowed eyes.

Jae-Hyun nodded and kept talking.

"I don't know the exact details, but what I know for sure is that they're trying to summon a demon."

"Is the Demon Cult's ultimate goal to summon demons?"

"I'm not sure about that either, but what I do know is that they're highly obsessed with the act of summoning demons."

"Hmm..."

Kang-Woo nodded.

Since they called themselves the Demon Cult, it would be weird if they weren't obsessed with summoning demons.

'It's not like I've devoured every single demon.'

Kang-Woo had devoured tens of thousands of demons, but it wasn't like he'd devoured every single one.

The Nine Hells were gigantic.

Even though Kang-Woo had lived in Hell for ten millennia, there were places he'd never been to and demons he'd never met.

Kang-Woo had only fought to survive, and he hadn't gone out of his way to eat demons that hadn't bared their fangs at him.

'I'm not sure what rank of demon they're trying to summon, but...'

If they managed to summon a demon that belonged to the Seventh Hell or higher, Kang-Woo would likely struggle against them with his current strength.

"Have they successfully summoned a demon before?"

The organization had been present for more than a thousand years, so there was a chance they had successfully managed to summon a demon before.

"I don't know, but they said that this was their first attempt in Korea, at the very least."

"This is their first attempt?"

"They said that the dimensional wall had recently become drastically weaker. It was about... one month ago. They mentioned that they'd become able to summon a demon thanks to the weakened dimensional wall."

"..."

Kang-Woo's expression hardened.

He naturally recalled the Gaia System once he heard that the dimensional wall had weakened.

The time that Jae-Hyun had mentioned when the dimensional wall had weakened matched the time when Kang-Woo had returned to Earth.

'So...'

Because the Gaia System had gotten weaker, the Demon Cult had become more active.

'It's all my fault, then.'

Kang-Woo frowned.

Based on the information he had gathered, he had surmised that he was the reason why the dimensional wall had weakened.

'Can't it repair itself?'

"Is that thing you call the dimensional wall still in a weakened state?" Kang-Woo asked with a sliver of hope.

"It's apparently getting weaker by the day."

"Fuck."

Not only was it not repairing itself, but it was also becoming worse.

'At this rate, are demons and demonic beasts gonna freely jump over to Earth?'

It wasn't just Hell. There was also the chance that beings from Aernor, like Reynald, would also travel to Earth.

'There might also be other dimensions besides Hell and Aernor.'

It was clear that the situation was critical. The problem was that there was no way to solve the situation at this moment.

'Did I really fuck things up this badly?'

It was as if Earth's atmosphere had disappeared and asteroids were falling with zero resistance.

It was only this bad because the Gaia System was still more or less intact. He couldn't even imagine what would happen if it was completely destroyed.

"... Fuu."

Kang-Woo took a deep breath.

He felt his head clear up a bit.

'Let's focus on what I can do right now.'

It wasn't like he would get an answer just by thinking about the Gaia System. What he could do at this moment was thwart the Demon Cult's scheme and figure out the identity of the man in the red demon mask.

"Do you know where the man in the red demon mask is? I'm asking about the Demon Cult's headquarters in Korea."

"I do, but... they would already be somewhere else by now."

"Somewhere else?"

Jae-Hyun nodded.

"They're preparing for the summoning ritual."

"... I thought they were lacking sacrifices."



"Who knows? I sure don't."

"Wait. That doesn't add up. You guys were the ones providing them with sacrifices."

If they had enough sacrifices, there would be no reason for Kim Yeong-Hun to target Kim Si-Hun. It was weird for the Mir Guild not to know whether they had gathered enough sacrifices.

Jae-Hyun smirked.

"That's because we're paid based on our performance."

"... Damn."

Kang-Woo frowned. It was not hard for him to figure out what Jae-Hyun had meant.

Yeon-Joo tilted her head in confusion.

"What does he mean?"

Kang-Woo clearly and concisely answered, "It means that Mir isn't the only major guild that had cut a deal with the Demon Cult."

## Chapter 67 - Summoning Ritual (2)

With Jae-Hyun mentioning 'we' and the knowledge that the Demon Cult was paid based on performance, Oh Kang-Woo easily figured out that more than one major guild was working with the cult.

"Where will the summoning ritual take place?" Kang-Woo asked in a low voice.

Kim Jae-Hyun slowly opened his mouth.

"Pohang."

"The S-rank Gate."

It was a possibility Kang-Woo had already thought of when he'd first heard that the Demon Cult would be performing the summoning ritual.

If summoning meant that one would be calling an otherworldly being to Earth, then the higher the Gate's rank where the summoning took place, the more powerful the being one would be able to call.

Kang-Woo had figured that out after summoning Echidna.

"How did you...?"

Jae-Hyun looked at Kang-Woo in surprise. He'd just mentioned Pohang and had never said anything about the Gate.

"That's none of your concern. Hwa-Yeon, Yeon-Joo, let's go to Pohang immediately."

"Right now?"

"Yes. They're probably aware that we're right on their tail, so they're probably going to try to perform the ritual right away, even if they have to take risks."

They weren't sure if the other major guild had managed to provide the Demon Cult with all the necessary sacrifices or not, but based on what Jae-Hyun had said, it was clear that Kang-Woo and the others couldn't waste any more time.

"Wait. Isn't Hwarang's 2nd Squadron stationed at the S-rank Gate in Pohang?"

"I'll check."

Baek Hwa-Yeon took out her smartphone and called someone.

The call was short.

Hwa-Yeon's expression hardened.

"A few hours ago, a large party of about twenty people entered the S-rank Gate."

"... Like I'd thought, they immediately made their move."

Kang-Woo frowned after hearing how fast they'd taken action.

Cha Yeon-Joo got closer to Hwa-Yeon and opened her mouth.

"What about the identities of the people who entered the Gate? If we investigate their access permits, won't it be easy to figure out which of them are members of the Demon Cult?"

"It'll probably be pointless."

Kang-Woo shook his head.

"... Why?"

"Because their access permits are likely all fake."

Even Yeon-Joo had easily gotten Kang-Woo an S-rank Gate access permit when he couldn't get one through normal means. The Demon Cult was receiving the help of at least two major guilds, so there was no way they wouldn't be able to obtain fake access permits.

"Ugh."

Yeon-Joo let out a sigh as if she felt guilty.

To be honest, getting an S-rank Gate access permit wasn't that hard because most people who were unqualified wouldn't even try to get inside an S-rank Gate. If they forced their way inside, they would only become monster prey. So, who in their right mind would enter an S-rank Gate out of their own volition?

"I told the 2nd Squadron about the situation. They said they would also enter the Gate and search for them, but... not only is the Pohang S-rank Gate vast, but its terrain is also complex. I'm not sure they'll be able to find them."

"Let's get going."

"I'll contact my guild members too," Yeon-Joo said, then turned to Hwa-Yeon. "The Hwarang Corps has a military helicopter, right? Let's use that. It'll take too long to get to Pohang by car."

"Okay. I'll contact headquarters imm—"

"There's a better way than that," Kang-Woo interrupted Hwa-Yeon.

"A better way...?"

Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon looked at Kang-Woo. He nodded.

"A dragon is probably faster than a helicopter."

\* \* \*

"Kang-Woo...!"

As he opened the door, a little girl whose hair reached her waist ran toward Kang-Woo. Her red eyes showed how she'd spent the last few days.

"I'm sorry."

Kang-Woo lightly patted Echidna's head as she hugged him.

It was true that it couldn't have been helped, but it was also true that he had neglected Echidna for over a week.

To Echidna, who had only just barely been able to escape from loneliness, Kang-Woo was an irreplaceable being. It wasn't hard to imagine the despair she had felt for the last week.

"... Where were you?" Echidna asked in a trembling voice while hugging Kang-Woo.

"I had something I had to do."

"... I didn't upset you in any way, did I? You're not trying to abandon me, right?" Echidna asked while looking up at him anxiously.

'I believe she said that her father had suddenly disappeared one day.'

While thinking that he should have paid more attention to her, he said, "Yeah. It's nothing like that, so don't worry."

"... Okay. I believe you."

Echidna nodded while smiling.

"This girl is..."

"You met her last time, didn't you?"

Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon nodded.

"But is she actually a dragon?"

"She just looks like a little girl..."

Both looked at Echidna suspiciously.

Echidna opened her mouth and grabbed Kang-Woo's clothes.

"I am a dragon."

Echidna created two small wings on her back and flapped them.

Just the fact that two wings had appeared on the girl's back proved that she wasn't human.

"A little girl with dragon wings..."

"The combination gives off an extremely dangerous feeling."

Hwa-Yeon and Yeon-Joo gulped after looking at the breathtakingly cute girl. Even though they didn't know her well, they wanted to hug her.

"Echidna, I need you to do me a favor," said Kang-Woo.

"Okay. I'll do anything if it's something I can do."

Echidna nodded without hesitation at Kang-Woo's words. You could see in her eyes that she really trusted him.

"... Do summoned beasts always trust their masters so much?" Yeon-Joo asked Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo shook his head while smiling bitterly.

"No. Echidna's a bit special."

In reality, Echidna and Kang-Woo hadn't known each other for very long. Even though she was a summoned beast, there was another reason why she trusted him so much.

'It's because she doesn't want to be alone anymore.'

Kang-Woo gently patted her head and turned around.

"There's a place we have to go right now. I need you to revert to your original form and fly us there."

"Okay."

Echidna nodded with her eyes shining.

"I'll transform right now."

"Calm down. If you transform here, you'll bring the house down. First, let's go outside."

Kang-Woo took Echidna outside.

"Won't it cause a panic if a dragon suddenly appears?" Yeon-Joo asked with worry.

"I've already thought about that," Kang-Woo answered without hesitation.

Yeon-Joo looked at Echidna questionably.

Without giving a care about how Yeon-Joo looked at her, Echidna asked Kang-Woo, "Kang-Woo, should I transform now?"

"Yeah."

As Kang-Woo nodded, Echidna started to glow with a blue light. The blue light grew until it became a dragon that reached twenty meters in size.

"Wha..."

"I can't believe it..."

The two girls looked surprised at Echidna, who had become a black dragon.

There were some players who could control monsters as summoned beasts, but there wasn't anyone who could control a dragon.

[Where should I go, Kang-Woo?]

"Mmm. It'd be... that way."

Kang-Woo pointed in the approximate direction as he climbed up on Echidna's back.

Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon followed him.

[... I don't want anyone else but Kang-Woo on my back,] Echidna protested.

Kang-Woo laughed and gently patted her neck.

"It's urgent, so endure it this one time, okay?"

[... Will you reward me if I do?]

"What reward do you want?"

Echidna snorted in excitement at Kang-Woo's question. The black flames that spewed from her nostrils burned the apartment's garden.

She spoke in a trembling voice.

[I want to go play with Kang-Woo somewhere.]

"Hmm..."

It was too small of a favor to ask in such a serious tone.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"Okay. Once this is over, let's go play somewhere."

[Really?]

"Yup."

[Yay!]

Fwoosh!

Echidna, who couldn't control her excitement, snorted once more.

The flames spewing from her nostrils exuded boiling heat.

[I'll do my best!]

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Echidna flapped her wings and rose to the sky.

Kang-Woo covered her with the Authority of Projection, and she turned translucent and melted into the background. If one didn't look closely, one couldn't distinguish her.

"Whoa. You can even do things like this?"

Because Yeon-Joo was on top of Echidna, she'd also become translucent. She looked at her body, which she could see through as if she were a ghost.

"How do you have so many abilities?"

Yeon-Joo looked at Kang-Woo in disbelief.

Not only was he very strong at fighting, but he could also manipulate other people's memories and even do things like make people translucent. He seemed to have dozens of different Traits that people usually obtained once every ten levels.

"I'm just very capable."

"... Arrogant prick."

Yeon-Joo lightly glared at Kang-Woo.

She didn't like the fact that she couldn't deny his arrogant words.

[Okay. Here I go.]

Flap! Flap!

With an excited voice, Echidna began flapping her wings.

The translucent dragon began flying at an incredible speed.

A strong wind hit Yeon-Joo, Hwa-Yeon, and Kang-Woo.

"Huh...? Whoaaa?!"

"Kurgh."

The two women held on to Echidna's sharply protruding scales to resist the strong wind, but it wasn't just them who were struggling.

'It's too fast.'

Kang-Woo hugged Echidna's neck while enduring the enormous drag.

Echidna was flying too fast.

He felt as if he would fly off if he didn't use the Authority of Titanic Might, but the problem was that the Authority of Titanic Might and the Authority of Projection were both highly advanced.

To use both Authorities simultaneously, he had to concentrate. However, it would be very difficult to use these two Authorities simultaneously when he was about to lose his grip.

"Echidna, please slow down..."

[Hmph! Hmph!]

It seemed Echidna couldn't hear his words anymore.

Kang-Woo hugged Echidna's neck even tighter.

[...!]

After Echidna felt Kang-Woo hug even tighter, her eyes shone.

'Why are you speeding up?'

[Hmph! Hmph!]

'Stop.'

[Kang-Woo, you can hold even tighter.]

'I'm already holding on for dear life.'

[Are you maybe embarrassed?]

Kang-Woo had displayed even more strength when he had latched on to the Giant Ogre's neck when they had hunted together for the first time.

Echidna didn't know that Kang-Woo had been using the Authority of Titanic Might during that fight, so she thought he wasn't putting in more strength because he was embarrassed.

[You don't need to feel embarrassed, Kang-Woo.]

'Save me.'

[I'll always welcome your embrace.]

'I don't want to die.'

[I want to feel Kang-Woo's warmth... with my body.]

'I'm falling.'

AAAAHHHH.

### Chapter 68 - Summoning Ritual (3)

Bright light from the hanging stalactites filled the giant cave.

Even though a group of people was inside a cave, the cave didn't feel dark at all. Rather, they felt it was dreamlike to be in a cave filled with mysterious light.

About twenty people were walking around the cave, placing mana stones on top of a summoning circle drawn on the floor. Others were pouring some kind of dark red liquid.

One man, who was looking at them from the side, took out a crystal orb from his pocket. A dry voice sounded from the crystal orb.

[How are the preparations going?]

The man, who had geometrical tattoos all over his face, answered respectfully, "We are almost done, but... because we've rushed the preparations, I cannot guarantee its success..."

[Hmm.]

You could feel that the person on the other side was annoyed.

[Make it a success. No matter the cost.]

"Understood," the tattooed man answered in a low voice.

[This summoning is only the first step of our great plan. Failure is unacceptable,] said the voice. Then, the crystal orb lost its light.

The tattooed man put the crystal orb back into his pocket and then walked toward the magic circle.

"Have you poured all the blood that came from the sacrifices?"

"Yes! All preparations are complete, Father Yoo Tae-Shik!"

The blood of the sacrifices who had absorbed demonic energy through the ritual was the most important catalyst for the demon summoning.

The tattooed man kneeled and placed his hands on the summoning circle where the blood of the sacrifices had been poured.

'Like I'd thought, we don't have enough sacrifices.'

As soon as the Demon Cult had heard that the leader of the Mir Guild, Kim Jae-Hyun, had been captured, they'd started to immediately prepare for the summoning. That was because there was a chance that the summoning would be canceled if Jae-Hyun gave away their information.

However, they hadn't been able to gather enough sacrifices because they'd hurried things. If they hadn't had the support of another major guild, they likely wouldn't have even been able to attempt the summoning.

'Tsk, what a useless bunch.'

Tae-Shik recalled the people of the Mir Guild confidently saying that they would provide them with a Player with an S-rank Trait as a sacrifice.

The Mir Guild had been so obsessed with obtaining results that the government had trapped them and ruined the Demon Cult's plan.

'It can't be helped.'

Tae-Shik's eyes shone wickedly.

The summoning ritual was possible with the materials that they possessed at the moment, but the chances of success weren't high. For it to be a success, they needed a few more sacrifices.

Stab!

"Kurgh!"

"F-Father Yoo?"

Tae-Shik stabbed one of his subordinates with a sharp dagger.

The subordinate's carotid artery was cut, and blood began spewing out of it like a fountain.

"Blame your own incompetence for not being able to obtain more sacrifices in time."

Tae-Shik looked at his subordinates with eyes full of madness.

Their faces paled.

"F-Father!"

"Please, mercy...!"

They began trembling in fear while kneeling.

Tae-Shik smiled while looking down at them.

"Don't worry. Your blood will become the demon's flesh, and you will enjoy eternal life through it."

What he was saying was nonsense.



They'd wanted to enjoy their current life for eternity, not enjoy eternal life by becoming the sacrifice for a demon.

They were taken over by their obsession and desire to live.

"Eek!"

The one who ran away first was a woman with freckles.

As soon as she realized something was wrong, she turned around and tried to escape.

Tae-Shik frowned while looking at her.

"Disloyal scum. Have you all already forgotten the words of His Eminence?"

"KYAAA!!"

He pointed a dagger at the back of the woman trying to escape.

Black energy elongated from the dagger's blade.

The woman's back was pierced, and she let out a scream.

"Being willing to sacrifice yourselves for a demon is one of the ten commandments of our cult. Tsk, tsk. To think that people who aren't willing to make such sacrifices dared to desire immortality..."

The slaughter began.

Tae-Shik killed everyone. The ones who tried to escape, those who took out their weapons to try to fight back, even those who became crazy and willingly offered their lives... everyone was killed.

Dark-red blood was splattered around the summoning circle.

"Hehehe, this much should be enough."

Tae-Shik put his hands on the summoning circle with a smile on his face.

A demon of the Ninth Hell.

It was about time they summoned the immortals worthy of worship to the modern world.

'Although it took us a bit longer compared to other branches.'

The Demon Cult was spread throughout the entire world. Compared to other branches, it took Korea's branch a bit longer with their preparations.

'From what I heard, the Japanese have already succeeded in summoning three demons.'

Although the circumstances in Japan were a bit different from Korea's, it still didn't change the fact that Korea had fallen behind.

'At the very least, we can't lose to them.'

He frowned while remembering the face of the Japanese cultists he had met once before.

Falling behind them was an insult to the cardinal whom he had pledged his loyalty to.

Tae-Shik drew forth the demonic energy within him and activated the summoning circle.

"Ered'achor! Havik! Galar!"

Shine!

The summoning circle that had absorbed blood began to shine ominously.

\* \* \*

"Huff! Huff! Huff!"

"I-I thought I was going to die."

Cha Yeon-Joo breathed heavily after climbing down from Echidna. If she hadn't tied herself to Echidna with her chains, she might have fallen from several kilometers up in the air.

"Kang-Woo, how did I do?"

Echidna looked at Kang-Woo with shining eyes. She was asking for head pats.

Kang-Woo patted her head while smiling awkwardly.

"Hehehe... Next time..."

"Hmm?"

"You can fly a bit slower."

Echidna's cheeks became red.

"I see, you wanted to fly with me for a bit longer."

'It's because I want to live.'

"Okay. I'll fly a bit slower next time. I also want to be hugged for longer."

"... Okay."

Kang-Woo nodded with a troubled expression on his face. She seemed to have misunderstood something, but as long as she flew slower, it didn't matter.

'Even if she misunderstands, as long as she does what I say...'

He turned to the S-rank Gate while nodding.

Baek Hwa-Yeon walked toward the Hwarang Corps members guarding the S-rank Gate.

"How is the investigation going?"

"They haven't found them yet."

"Tsk... Okay. What about Captain Goo Hyun-Mo?"

"After hearing the news, he entered along with the squadron members."

"I want to talk to him."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Hwa-Yeon received the magic tool that could communicate with those within the Gate.

"Yes, yes... Understood. I will head there immediately."

After a short conversation, Hwa-Yeon walked toward Yeon-Joo and Kang-Woo.

"How is the investigation going?"

"They hadn't made any progress, but they apparently heard a huge explosion from within the cave just now. He also mentioned that he felt an inexplicably unpleasant energy from inside."

"An unpleasant energy?"

"He most likely felt... demonic energy."

Yeon-Joo's expression hardened.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth to say, "It seems like the summoning has already begun."

"I've been given the cave's location. I warned the 2nd Squadron members not to approach until we get there, so we should also hurry."

Kang-Woo nodded and followed Hwa-Yeon into the S-rank Gate.

Inside the Gate was a massive hill riddled with numerous holes—it resembled an ant hill.

'Are those all cave entrances?'

Kang-Woo recalled that the 2nd Squadron had told Hwa-Yeon they weren't sure whether they would be able to find the Demon Cult members. Finding them among all the countless caves was almost impossible.

"Over there."

Kang-Woo followed Hwa-Yeon to one of the cave entrances.

There, he saw members of Hwarang's 2nd Squadron with their weapons out. They were preparing for battle.

"Oh! You're here! Ah, I apologize for how long the investigation took, Hwa-Yeon. There are just too many caves here..."

A blond man wearing sunglasses approached. He was the captain of Hwarang's 2nd Squadron, Goo Hyun-Mo.

"It's okay. That aside, is this the right place?"

"Yes! We clearly heard a loud boom from here! You all heard it, right?"

"Yes, sir!" the squadron members answered the loud man.

Kang-Woo looked at the cave entrance they were pointing to.

'Demonic energy.'

He could feel demonic energy gushing out from inside the cave.

"Let's go," Kang-Woo said.

"Understood. I will be counting on your support, Captain Goo."

"Haha! Of course I will since it's you who's asking, Hwa-Yeon! Squadron! Formation A!"

"Formation A!"

The members of Hwarang's 2nd Squadron assumed formation while making a loud shout. They moved fast as if they were just a single entity.

Kang-Woo looked silently at the Hwarang Corps members' cringeworthy poses, which made them look like a certain group of color-coded superheroes.

'Are these guys really going to be of any help?'

Judging by their outer appearance, rather than government agents, they looked like a group of crazy people.

"Let's go!!" Hyun-Mo shouted, then glanced at Hwa-Yeon. It seemed he thought that his Formation A looked extremely cool.

After he shouted, the members of the Hwarang Corps entered the cave.

Kang-Woo followed after them.

The inside of the cave was surprisingly not dark, and the stalactites were shining with green light.

It was beautiful.

"Kang-Woo, I smell blood."

Kang-Woo nodded. There wasn't even a need to use an Authority. Unlike their dreamlike surroundings, the entire cave reeked of blood. Kang-Woo followed the stench deeper into the cave. Deep inside, he saw a cavity more than a hundred meters deep. At the bottom of the cavity was a complex magic circle reeking of blood.

'Is that the demon summoning circle?'

Kang-Woo turned toward a man who was extending his arms out toward the summoning circle. The man's face was covered in tattoos that made it difficult to make out his facial features.

The man smiled at the people who had just arrived.

"Kekeke... You're too late."

Crack.

A black rift formed in the air as if a sheet of glass was breaking.

Chapter 69 - Summoning Ritual (4)

Crack.

A black rift formed in the air as if a sheet of glass was breaking.

The rift, which started small, grew larger very quickly.

Thick demonic energy leaked out of it.

'Demonic energy from Hell.'

Oh Kang-Woo's expression hardened. He was used to this kind of demonic energy.

The light shining from the summoning circle darkened.

"That's..."

"Wh-what's happening?"

The voices of the members of Hwarang's 2nd Squadron began to tremble.

A rift had appeared out of nowhere. It was as if a Gate had appeared inside another Gate.

The squadron members couldn't help but feel unbearably uneasy.

"Hahahaha!!! Now, immortal beings, come forth! I beseech thee, use your power to destroy these petty mortals!" Yoo Tae-Shik shouted in a voice full of madness.

He took his hands off the summoning circle and spread his arms wide open. Not even he knew which demon would come out of the summoning circle. He just wanted the demon to be as violent and powerful as possible.

[GRRRR.]

A low-pitched cry...

A giant hand emerged from the rift...

A muscular arm with black skin...

Crack!!

The demon's arms pulled the rift wider as if tearing a piece of paper. The black rift became larger, revealing red shining eyes.

[Who has called me, Oriax, a demon of the Seventh Hell?]

"Ohhh...!"

Tae-Shik fell to the ground after hearing the voice coming from the rift. He then bowed toward the demon coming out of the rift.

"Lord Oriax!! This humble mortal greets the immortal one!"

[Are you the one who has summoned me?]

"Yes, my lord," Tae-Shik answered the demon who had just appeared.

Oriax looked down at Tae-Shik with his red shining eyes.

"Th-That's..."

"A demon...?"

The members of the Hwarang Corps became stiff after looking at the being that came out of the rift.

Oriax was a giant almost seven meters tall and had a muscular physique and bat wings.

They could see the madness in his eyes and the two horns on his forehead.

Even if they didn't know that the purpose of the summoning had been to summon a demon, they would immediately be able to tell that the entity before them was a demon.

[Why have you summoned me?]

Tae-Shik shouted in response to Oriax's question, "I desire the flesh and blood of pathetic mortals! I beg you to guide your worshipers to eternal life with your almighty power! I will lay down everything for you as long as I can escape the fate of mortality!"

[So you want to be immortal.]

Oriax looked down at Tae-Shik condescendingly.

Since Oriax had lived as a demon from the day it had been born, he found the human bowing his head just to escape the chains of mortality all too pathetic.

[Do you want eternal life?]

"Yes!"

[Do you want a life of infinite desires and endless pleasures?]

"Yes!!" Tae-Shik shouted excitedly.

Bang!

Tae-Shik smashed his head down so hard on the ground that his forehead was split. Blood seeped from the wound.

"I want to be immortal! I want to have great power and eternal life just like you, Lord Oriax!"

He looked at Oriax with eyes full of madness.

A demon from Hell...

They were the ideal of the Demon Cult, their messiahs.

'Eternal life! Infinite desires! Endless pleasure!'

The words Oriax said filled his head.

Before he became part of the Demon Cult, Tae-Shik was one of the very few Muslims in Korea. He had desired to break free from his earthly body and live for eternity by his God's side. But one day, a man in a red demon mask had completely turned his life upside down.

The man's teachings had changed his ways of thinking.

- Is there a need to pursue eternal life with such ambiguous beliefs? We can give you eternal life here on Earth. The eternal life spoken of by your god is nothing but self-consolation supported by your beliefs. What's the point of eternal life if you have to die to obtain it?

His words had shocked Tae-Shik.

To think that one could aim for eternal life while staying alive!

To think that one could live life without fearing death every single day!

As long as you were born on Earth, there was nothing more certain than death.

However, demons were beings that had broken free from that inevitable fate; there was absolutely no reason to follow and worship them.

Boom!

[Hahahaha! Good! I like your desires, human!]

Oriax could feel the strong desires coming from Tae-Shik, and those passionately blazing desires stimulated Oriax.

[Now, tell me, human. Where are the sacrifices that will bring me the pleasure of slaughter?]

"Over there."

Tae-Shik pointed toward the Hwarang Corps. An intense bloodlust leaked from Oriax.

[Kehehehe. Not bad as sacrifices for slaughter.]

The corners of Oriax's mouth rose up. The power that he could feel from the beings pointing their weapons at him stimulated him. He wasn't sure how such petty mortals had managed to acquire such power, but they were good opponents for him to run wild with.

"Kuh."

"So that's a demon..."

Cha Yeon-Joo warily glared at Oriax. She touched her bracelet.

Oriax clearly felt different from the monsters that she usually fought—he felt more destructive and violent.

"Squadron, prepare for battle! I'm not exactly sure what's going on, but you'd better focus up and keep those buttcheeks clenched!"

Goo Hyun-Mo swiped up his sunglasses and took out his two short swords. Mana began gathering on their edges.

"Fuu. What a stupidly scary-looking creature."

Hyun-Mo gulped and looked at Oriax. He didn't become nervous often, but even he couldn't help but feel nervous in front of Oriax. That was how strong the energy leaking from Oriax was.

"There will most definitely be a huge uproar if that monster gets out of the Gate. We have to stop it here, no matter what."

Baek Hwa-Yeon also took out her white longsword and prepared to fight.

Yeon-Joo clicked her tongue.

"It would've been easier if I had brought my guild members..."

"There's nothing we can do about it. We have to be satisfied with the fact that we made it here before that demon rampaged outside the Gate."

It would've been better if they'd been able to stop the summoning itself, but it was already too late for that. The only option they had was to kill the demon that the Demon Cult had summoned.

Yeon-Joo and Hwa-Yeon gathered their mana and glared at Oriax.

"Oh, Immortal Oriax! Please show those petty mortals your greatness!"

[Kekekeke. Very well. Battle and slaughter are the forms of entertainment that I, Oriax, enjoy the most.]

Oriax stood up, and his height reached almost seven meters. He unfurled his wings.

Crack. Crack.

His muscles swelled, and intense demonic energy enveloped his body. Oriax's eyes met the members of the Hwarang squad. The thought of the battle he was about to have with them made him tremble in excitement.

Oriax violently stomped on the ground and extended his hand. From the rift that remained, a giant scythe appeared.

[Come, you filthy bugs!] Oriax shouted while wielding the giant scythe.

The ones who moved first were Hyun-Mo and the members of Hwarang's 2nd Squadron.

While gripping his two short swords, Hyun-Mo shouted, "Formation C! Let's show that muscle pig how strong we are!"

"Yes, Captain!"

The members of the Hwarang Corps began moving in perfect order—their formation resembled a sharp spear.

Hyun-Mo, who was at the forefront, smiled and shot forward.

Boom! Clang!

"Kuuurgghh!"

The scythe and the short swords clashed against each other.

A short grunt came out of Hyun-Mo's mouth, and he was violently flung back. As expected from Oriax's build, the demon possessed enormous power.

"It's so damn strong!" Hyun-Mo shouted while trying to calm down his trembling hands. If he were fighting the demon one-on-one, it wouldn't have been weird if his body was split in two by the demon's subsequent attack.

But...

"Haha! I can't believe you were blown back after putting on all those airs!"

"That's our captain for you!"

Hyun-Mo wasn't alone. The squadron members who had followed him attacked the demon endlessly like a storm. Most of their attacks were blocked but not all of them.

Oriax was being injured more and more.

[Good!]

As wounds began appearing on his body, Oriax shouted in excitement.

The thrill of battle surged from within him.

Fwoosh!

He swung his giant scythe.

Fan-shaped demonic energy residues were left in the scythe's path and exploded.

"Kurgh!"



"Cough!"

The Hwarang Corps members were swept away by the explosions as if they were leaves.

"Hahahaha! Did you see that, you pathetic bastards? This is the power of a demon! One who has grasped the power of immortality!" Tae-Shik shouted in a voice full of madness. He became excited after seeing how powerful Oriax was.

'To think we'd summon one so strong on only our first summoning!'

The dimensional wall was weakening each day. That meant that they would be able to summon even stronger demons from now on. Once that happened, it would be child's play for the Demon Cult to have the entire world under their feet.

Living in a world where he ruled without worrying about death...

Just imagining it made him excited.

[Hahaha! Is that all you have, humans?! Entertain me more! Excite me more!] Oriax shouted while relishing in his madness.

He looked around to see if there were any stronger opponents. At that moment, he saw a human standing still and looking at him from a distance.

[Hm?!]

Oriax's expression rapidly hardened after he saw Kang-Woo.

[Wh-Wha... H-How...?]

Oriax looked at Kang-Woo in fear.

He dropped the scythe in his hand and began trembling severely.

[Wh-Why is he... N-No. That's impossible.]

He mumbled as if he'd suddenly gone crazy. Trembling in fear, Oriax looked desperate.

"Lord Oriax...?"

Tae-Shik looked at Oriax in bewilderment. Oriax looked toward Tae-Shik.

[C-Cancel it, human!!]

"... I'm sorry?"

[I TOLD YOU TO CANCEL THE SUMMONING RIGHT NOW!!]

"Wh-What do you..."

[I-I am going back to Hell! Cancel the summoning and send me back this instant! Aaaahhh! That monster is getting closer! Send me back to Hell now!]

Oriax's desperate screams echoed throughout the cave.

Chapter 70 - Summoning Ritual (5)

"..."

Everyone became silent after hearing Oriax's sudden screams of desperation.

Not being able to follow what was going on, Yoo Tae-Shik looked at Oriax with a confused expression.

"Wh-What is the matter, Oh Immortal One?"

[Immortal One? Do not be ridiculous, human! We just do not have a fixed lifespan. We can still die!]

"B-But you just said that battle and slaughter were your favorite forms of entertainment..."

[There is no way that I would have fun when I am on the losing side!]

'Why is he being so unsightly?'

Tae-Shik stared at Oriax in disbelief.

One obviously wouldn't have fun if on the side of being slaughtered, but it was surprising that a demon who'd sounded so confident would suddenly say it.

'What's going on?'

Oriax had been speaking confidently...

Tae-Shik wasn't sure why Oriax had suddenly changed his attitude.

The demon was acting like one of those kids who talked all high and mighty in an internet cafe until their mother suddenly came in to find them playing video games.

[What are you waiting for?! Cancel the summoning now! Send me back to Hell!!] Oriax screamed frantically.

Tae-Shik bit his fingernails. His plan was going awry.

'Of all demons, why did a coward like this have to get summoned...?'

Tae-Shik thought that he was extremely unlucky.

To think that a demon from the Seventh Hell would be such a pathetic coward... Tae-Shik's mind was in jumbles, and he wasn't sure how to resolve the situation.

"It's impossible to go back. Please do not worry, Lord Oriax. They are nothing but mere mortals! You can easily eradicate such weaklings with your great power."

[Mere mortal? Weakling?]

Oriax glared at Tae-Shik. His eyes were filled with fear, and his voice was laced with desperation.

[You moronic human! What do you know to say such nonsense?! You know nothing about who that man is and what he has done!]

Tae-Shik's mind was filled with even more questions. He couldn't tell who was instilling so much fear into a demon.

"Who are you talking ab—"

Boom!

A huge explosion shook the cave before Tae-Shik could finish his sentence.

Oh Kang-Woo had used the Authority of Shattering Air. He looked at Oriax with a troubled expression.

'I can't believe he recognized me.'

Kang-Woo frowned at the unexpected development.

It was true that Kang-Woo was infamous in the Nine Hells, but unlike Earth, there wasn't any form of video or a way to communicate with others in Hell. Rumors spread only by word of mouth.

That was why most demons probably didn't know what Kang-Woo looked like even though they might have heard rumors about him.

To think that the summoned demon could recognize him... One could say that Kang-Woo was unlucky.

'Actually, it might actually be the reverse.'

Kang-Woo looked at Oriax, who was trembling in fear.

Most of Kang-Woo's power was currently sealed. Thanks to leveling up and his Authority of Predation, he had recovered part of his strength, but his current strength couldn't be compared to his prime. Therefore, fighting against a demon from the Seventh Hell in such a situation was quite burdensome.

'If he's becoming scared all on his own, that makes things much easier.'

The corners of Kang-Woo's mouth rose up.

[Oriax, was it?]

[Gasp!]

Kang-Woo's voice spread through Oriax's ears.

Oriax trembled in fear. Just hearing Kang-Woo's voice was enough to make his mind go blank. The fear was engraved into his soul, and this uncontrollable fear of the demon king, an absolute being, devoured him.

[Y-Yes,] Oriax answered in a trembling voice.

[Speak so only I can hear you.]

[Ah... Yes! I understand!]

Oriax quickly nodded. He had been talking to the humans by sending them his thoughts. It wasn't hard to make it so that only one person could hear him.

[Wh-Why are you here, my king...?]

[Did I give you permission to question me?]

[N-No! I apologize!]

Oriax shook his head while trembling.

Kang-Woo smiled, satisfied after seeing how Oriax overreacted to everything he said.

'This is gonna be easier than I thought.'

Huge fear devoured one's reason.

Kang-Woo wasn't sure where Oriax had seen him, but judging by the demon's reaction, it seemed Oriax's fear of him was really deep. It was as if Oriax was lying on the ground like a dog before even fighting.

'It's fine as long as I don't get caught.'

As long as Oriax didn't realize that Kang-Woo had become weaker, fooling the demon would be a cinch.

'Deceiving a fear-stricken dog is a piece of cake.'

It wasn't hard at all. Rather, it was so easy that it almost felt boring.

[You've meddled in my plan,] Kang-Woo said in a serious tone.

Oriax's eyes widened, and a one-sided conversation ensued.

[P-plan...?]

[How dare you talk back to me?]

[I-I apologize!]

Oriax became desperate because his question was denied, and he was trembling because he feared the demon king.

Kang-Woo thought, 'And the more desperate he becomes...'

The more thoughts Oriax would have.

[U-Urghh...]

Oriax was desperately thinking about what Kang-Woo's plan could possibly be.

Kang-Woo looked at Oriax with a relaxed expression on his face. It didn't matter how much Oriax thought—there was no way he'd be able to figure it out.

'Because there is no plan. I just used some random serious-sounding words.'

To make Oriax not suspect that he had become weaker, Kang-Woo only had to make the demon not have time to think.

Oriax's face distorted even more. He couldn't figure out Kang-Woo's plan no matter how hard he thought.

Kang-Woo, who had been waiting for the right timing, spoke in a low voice.

[I will give you a chance.]

[A-A chance, you say?]

[Yes. If you succeed, I will accept you as my Familiar.]

[F-Familiar?!]

Oriax was shocked.

A Familiar of the demon king...

After all the seven princes of Hell had been killed under the hands of the demon king, the greatest honor among the demons was to become the demon king's Familiar.

If he became the demon king's Familiar, he'd be able to receive a portion of his power. Receiving even a fragment of the demon king's near-infinite demonic energy would make him absurdly powerful in an instant.

Oriax would probably become so strong that no one in the Eighth Hell, or even the Ninth Hell, would be able to take him lightly.

For demons, who worshiped strength, it was an offer they couldn't refuse.

[I will follow any order! I, Oriax, swear eternal loyalty to the demon king!] Oriax shouted excitedly at the sudden offer.

[Defeat every single human here without using your weapon. I will test whether or not you are worthy.]

[Yes, my king!]

Oriax nodded without hesitation.

Kang-Woo smirked.

'You should learn to doubt at least a little.'

Most living beings with intelligence would have doubts if someone asked them to fight without weapons against enemies to test their strength.

'Although he probably can't think properly right now.'

This wasn't a matter of knowledge or intelligence. It was the effect of the absolute authority that the title of demon king possessed. Just like the Milgram experiment had shown, humans tended to obey authority figures all too easily.

It was the same for demons.

Oriax dropped his scythe and kicked it to the side, getting into position to fight against the Hwarang Corps bare-handed.

"What's that demon doing all of a sudden?"

"I'm... not sure," Baek Hwa-Yeon said while narrowing her eyes. "But I'm sure this is the perfect opportunity for us to attack."

They weren't sure why the summoned demon had suddenly started to act strangely... but they were sure that because of it, they had been given the upper hand.

'Westerly Wind.'

Hwa-Yeon extended her sword out to the side.

Wind blew from her white sword. Hidden within the serene wind, which was created with mana, was a sharp materialized aura that could tear apart flesh.

Slash!!

[Kuurrghh!]

Oriax moaned in pain. He'd defended against the wind with his bare hands, and his skin was split.

[Damn insects!]

Oriax swung his fist. Hwa-Yeon's sword and Oriax's fist clashed against each other.

Clang!!

"Kurgh!"

A loud explosion rang through the cave. It was hard to believe that the sound had come from the clashing of a sword and a fist.

Hwa-Yeon was pushed back.

Oriax was about to charge toward Hwa-Yeon when Yeon-Joo blocked his path.

"Hmph, who the hell do you think you're calling an insect?"

Yeon-Joo angrily extended her hand as she closed her eyes to concentrate. The bracelets on both of her hands shone with a red light.

'Blood Chain.'

Dozens of chains with sharp thorns shot out from her bracelets and, like snakes, slithered across the cave floor. They spread throughout the cave like a massive net and engulfed Oriax.

[Gaaaahhhh!!]

The sharp thorns pierced Oriax's skin. His skin was torn apart, and blood leaked from him. The chains greedily absorbed his blood.

Oriax glared at Yeon-Joo while frowning.

'She's strong.'

It was hard to believe that she was just a human.

[Damn!]

Yeon-Joo's attack was so strong that he wasn't sure if he could have blocked it with his weapon. He looked down at his bare hands in frustration.

Maybe things would've been different if he was a demon that fought with bare hands, but he'd fought with a scythe for a very long time. All his movements had been optimized for fighting with a scythe. Therefore, he would obviously struggle if he suddenly began fighting with his bare hands.

Oriax's movements had become sluggish, and the power he could exert was beyond terrible.

'But this is all to pass the demon king's trial!'

He quelled his frustration and kept fighting against the humans.

The longer he fought, the more wounds he received. His movements started to become slower, and his eyes started to lose light.

[Guuuuuhh.]

Oriax knelt on one knee.

He wasn't sure if he would be able to beat the humans at that point, even if he used a weapon.

At that moment, he saw Kang-Woo approach him with the weapon he had kicked aside.

'He's trying to return my weapon!'

Oriax's eyes recovered hope. Once he got his weapon back and received the demon king's power, he'd be able to completely wipe out all the humans and, with overwhelming strength, crush all the insects that'd dared to threaten his life!

'I can already see it happening!'

He had tried his best to overcome the trial. The demon king had probably been moved by his effort.

[Ahhh... my k—]

Stab!

[Huh...?]

The scythe that Oriax had thought the demon king would return had pierced his chest. Oriax looked down at his chest in confusion.

[Wh-why...?]

"Do not resent me, Oriax."

Kang-Woo violently slashed down with the scythe he had used to stab Oriax. The wound deepened, and blood poured from Oriax's chest like a fountain.

A deep smile appeared on Kang-Woo's face.

"It's your fault for being fooled."

Ring.

[You have successfully defeated Oriax, a demon of the Seventh Hell!]

[Additional EXP has been awarded for dealing the finishing blow.]

[Exponentially increasing EXP.]

[Your level has risen by 5.]

[You have reached Level 50 and have achieved your Sixth Awakening.]

[Unlocking a new Trait.]