

With The Gods 51

Chapter 51

The School of the Sapphire Sword earned its name because its sword was as pure as a clear sky. They might not have been a part of the noble clans, but they were definitely not a small, weak school. Instead, it was a mid-sized school that had hundreds of martial arts masters.

That's why Yang Wonil was proud to be a part of the School of the Sapphire Sword.

"Bring in ten outsiders in ten days, or you'll be kicked out of the school."

That was the punishment Wonil received from the head of the School of the Sapphire Sword. It was for having caused a fight within the school and crippling a fellow martial artist.

To be honest, compared to his misdeed, it was a fairly light punishment. As long as he could recruit ten outsiders, he would be forgiven.

The problem was that recruiting ten people was no easy task.

'How am I supposed to bring in ten people in just ten days?'

In the current martial realm, a school's authority changed depending on how many players they had.

If a player went through a certain school, climbed up the Tower, and became a Ranker, that would naturally raise the reputation of the school and bring in more students. That's why martial schools couldn't help but put in a considerable amount of effort in recruiting players.

'No matter what...'

Wonil resolved himself as he set out to recruit players.

Getting a job at a mid-sized school like the School of the Sapphire Sword was no easy task. It had taken Wonil a lot of effort to finally settle down on the 10th Floor. He couldn't get kicked out like this.

He had never done anything else in his life other than swing swords, but he was prepared to do anything—even if that meant using force if words didn't work.

The level of players that arrived on the 10th Floor was pretty clear-cut. There was the problem with stacking penalties, but he was a lower floor player that had only managed to climb up to the 15th Floor. He wouldn't have to worry about the penalty once he recruited ten people.

Or that's how things should have gone...

'Huh...?'

His eyes spun, and time seemed to move slower. Before he knew it, Wonil was sprawled out on the ground.

He didn't know what happened. He was sure that he had swung first, but he must have passed out for a moment.

When he came to, he noticed the gaze of the crowd staring at him.

“Gasp!”

Wonil stood up in surprise, but his legs gave out on him, and he flopped back down onto the ground.

“What happened?”

“Isn’t that Yang Wonil?”

“Yang Wonil?”

“The embarrassment of the School of the Sapphire Sword. I heard he caused some trouble recently, so why is he here?”

“Isn’t the head of Sapphire Sword greedy for outsiders? He was probably told to recruit them as a punishment.”

“But why is he like that on the ground?”

“Well, from what I saw earlier..”

Wonil could hear the whispers of the crowd.

He was ashamed to have ended up falling over in front of all these people.

Wonil gathered strength in his legs and carefully got back up. He then started looking around for YuWon, but some amount of time must have passed because he was nowhere to be seen.

‘Damn it!’

He clenched his fist.

Wonil cut through the crowd, trying his best to appear unphased. He lowered his head and got out of there as fast as he could. In his mind, there was one fact that wouldn’t leave.

‘The next time we meet...’

Killing intent filled Wonil’s eyes.

* * *

Ten days had passed.

After arriving on the 10th Floor, YuWon had continued to move on his feet without rest.

He liked the Martial Realm, but this was certainly a problem. There were no good methods of transportation here. There was no advanced magic or magical creatures that made moving around easier. So there was no choice but to run around on his own two feet.

“It’s so far.”

Ten days. That wasn’t a short period of time. And in that time, YuWon had traversed over 4,000km.* From Martial City, the starting area of the 10th Floor located in the northern region, all the way to Mt. Heaven in the western region. Due to the distance, no matter how fast YuWon was, it still took him time.

*PR/N: about 2,485.5 miles

‘So this is Mt. Heaven.’

Before his eyes was a great mountain and a clear, blue sky. It was easy to stare out into the overwhelming magnificence of nature.

YuWon got moving again.

Around the time he managed to climb halfway up the mountain, the sun had started to set.

Rustle—

On edge and alert, YuWon heard the rustling of the leaves.

He turned his head. There was a large group of people gathered up.

“Who are you?”

A voice filled with caution.

In order to hide their location, the voice was transferred to him through mana that echoed throughout the forest. There was only a single voice, but YuWon could sense the presence of more than just one person.

On the mountain, the sun set quickly. It had now become dark, and YuWon used [Cinder Eyes] in the darkness.

‘There’s roughly twenty of them.’

The number of people was an issue, but also each of them was fairly skilled.

As expected of Mt. Heaven. This place was riddled with monstrous people.

“Please don’t be on such high alert. I am not an enemy.”

“You don’t seem lost. You do know what kind of place this is, right?”

That was the question YuWon was waiting for.

He looked towards the owner of the voice that was observing him in the woods, and he replied, “Is this not the home of the Heavenly Demonic Cult, located on Mt. Heaven of the western region?”

The two locked eyes, and right as he responded, twenty people revealed themselves.

Shhk, shwoo—

Ssk, sssk—

The twenty people surrounded YuWon.

YuWon remembered something similar happening to him. It was like when he was surrounded by a group of Jackals right after entering the Tower. However, this was a very different situation.

‘Jackals can’t even begin to be compared to them.’

The Heavenly Demonic Cult was a group that had long been facing off against the Martial Artists’ Alliance. Currently they were unable to leave Mt. Heaven, but if you looked at the strength of each

school individually, the Heavenly Demonic Cult could have been considered the greatest martial arts school.

And these people here were the members of that same Heavenly Demonic Cult.

“So you did your research before coming.”

A martial artist from the Heavenly Demonic Cult looked YuWon up and down. It was probably to take into consideration things like his clothes, weapons, and the energy he radiated.

The atmosphere and energy that YuWon radiated wasn't all that bad.

The martial artist nodded his head at YuWon's visit.

“So, do you desire to join our cult?”

It was obvious the reason why a player would seek out the Heavenly Demonic Cult. Unless one was absolutely crazy, no one would ever come here to pick a fight.

It was a case where everyone who came here came to make the Cult their home. And the Heavenly Demonic Cult was very picky about the players that wanted to join.

“What floor player are you? If you want to join the Cult, tell us your floor, name, and show us your skills...”

“That's not it.”

YuWon shook his head. He did have business with the Heavenly Demonic Cult, but he had no intention of becoming a permanent member. The thought of giving up climbing the Tower to settle down on the 10th Floor like the other martial artists here had never even crossed his mind.

YuWon could have said that clearly, but he knew that this wasn't something to say to the plain martial artist in front of him.

There was a 'much bigger gaze' that had been looking at him since earlier. YuWon looked towards that gaze and spoke.

“I, player Kim YuWon, wish to take the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test.”

As soon as he said that...

[The Heavenly Demonic Cult's test will now start.]

The test began.

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

The day quickly became dark. Due to how tall the mountain was, the sun was up for a shorter period of time.

YuWon climbed up the mountain with the martial artists of the Demonic Cult.

Tmp, tmp—

The mountain was tranquil. The sounds of people stepping on leaves could be heard clearly.

The head of this group, Gwang HaMuk, decided to break the silence.

“It’s been a while since a player wanted to take the Cult’s test.”

Gwang HaMuk was a player who had climbed beyond the 40th Floor. He was skilled enough to be in charge of his own unit.

“Seeing as how you came all the way here, you already know, right? The reason why players avoid the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.”

“Isn’t it because the passing rate is low?”

“You’re wrong.”

HaMuk shook his head while smiling faintly.

“It’s not because it’s low, but because it’s impossible.”

“...”

“There has not been a single player to ever pass the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test. That’s how the unspoken rule has come to be—to never take the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.”

HaMuk looked over at YuWon.

“But maybe you’ll be different.”

There was not a single person in the Martial Realm that didn’t know of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. There were two reasons for this. The first was that the Cult possessed enough power to be considered the greatest martial arts school. The second was because no player had ever managed to pass the Cult’s test.

‘Which is why their forces are slowly growing weaker.’

A martial arts school incapable of recruiting new players. That’s why the only way the Demonic Cult could increase their forces was to accept players that descended from higher floors.

That was the reason why Mt. Heaven was so quiet.

Long ago, the Heavenly Demonic Cult had so many men that it occupied the entirety of this enormous mountain.

“It’s this way.”

Shwooo—

While following behind HaMuk, a sinister mana started to envelope YuWon's body.

[You have entered a barrier.]

[You try to resist the effects of the barrier.]

[You have failed to resist the effects.]

[If you go off the predetermined path, you will fall under the status effect : Hallucination.]

A barrier. Compared to the Jaegal Clan, known to have the most powerful barriers, the Cult's barrier wasn't as strong, but it was still impressive.

The path in front of him now looked completely different. There were dozens of different paths, and one had to find the true path among them. If one accidentally stepped on the wrong path, they would fall under the barrier's hallucination, as the message warned.

"If you take even a single wrong step, you'll be completely lost. Except for the Heavenly Demon, no one will be able find you, so be careful and follow..."

HaMuk turned his head to warn YuWon only to stop talking. His eyes widened.

YuWon was gone.

HaMuk could have sworn that he was there until a moment ago, but now... he was gone.

"W-Where did he...?"

HaMuk's head scanned back and forth. The entire area was the Heavenly Demonic Cult's barrier. And if he disappeared inside here...

"Fuck."

... YuWon might become unable to ever find his way out.

* * *

Tmp—

YuWon walked without hesitation.

As he walked down a path, another crossroad appeared. Among the dozens of paths, YuWon picked a single one and continued on.

[Cinder Eyes]

His red eyes let him see through the illusion created by the barrier.

The barrier was honestly not that amazing. They might be the Heavenly Demonic Cult, but they were still a part of the 10th Floor's world. [Cinder Eyes] wasn't some half-baked skill that couldn't even see through this place's barrier.

'How far does this go?'

The path stretched out pretty far.

He'd had to choose a path over ten times now, but every time, YuWon managed to pick the true path and not a fake one created by the barrier.

30 minutes had passed since he'd started walking through the barrier. It was about time for him to see the end...

Ssk—

... The end of the chosen path.

Once again YuWon came to a crossroad, which brought him to a stop. This crossroad was different from the other ones.

‘There are two paths.’

Both paths were real and not fake.

YuWon wondered which one to pick.

In the end, he decided to trust his instincts. Regardless of his choice, he wouldn't fall under the hallucination of the barrier. So he picked the left path.

However, his choice wasn't based entirely on instinct. There was also the ‘wind.’

Tmp—

With every step, the scenery around him changed. The thick dense forest grew further away, and a small room revealed itself.

The room was quiet and simple with a single candle lighting the room. And in the middle of the room was someone sitting down with his back facing YuWon.

“So you've come.”

A low, thick voice.

That's when...

[You have passed the Heavenly Demon's 1st test.]

... The message he was waiting for popped up.

Chapter 52

‘The test of the Heavenly Demon, huh...’

The content of the message had changed. It went from the “Heavenly Demonic Cult's test” to the “Heavenly Demon's test.”

A reclusive group, one that couldn't—no, hadn't let a single player through to the next floor out of stubbornness or even obstinance, it was only natural that the Heavenly Demonic Cult became weaker as the ages passed. Yet despite that, the Martial Realm as a whole still considered the Demonic Cult as the greatest school of martial arts.

It was all due to the existence of one man. The living legend of the Martial Realm. An ancient High Ranker who was alive even before the Martial Realm entered the Tower. The one synonymous with the Heavenly Demonic Cult, the Heavenly Demon.

Fwoosh—

Wind blew inside the room, despite there being no open doors. The room became dark. Now all YuWon could see was the person's back.

"I shall ask you."

The man didn't turn around.

That's when YuWon finally realized that this place must have been a different location than what he was seeing, that he must have been standing somewhere that wasn't actually this dinky little room.

"At what point did you find out?" the man asked.

Yuwon had passed the test, so he wondered why he had prepared a meeting like this with him.

"Is that what you want to know?"

"This is also a test."

The Heavenly Demonic Cult's test was just as rumored. Unlike the tests of the other schools, the Cult's test did not have a pre-set frame or rules.

'So this question is a part of the test, huh.'

The man was quite shameless.

The system never lied. If this was a real test, he would have gotten a message that said the next test had started.

But it didn't matter to YuWon whether this was a real test or not. It wasn't something he needed to keep secret.

"Since the beginning."

"The beginning?"

"You've been observing me since before I even entered the barrier. That's when the test started."

The reason was simple.

"What kind of a test would only require me to follow someone?"

Yuwon had heard plenty about the Cult's notoriety. The Demonic Cult that YuWon remembered was a group entirely about combat and battling. So there was no way that the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test, especially the Heavenly Demon's, would only require you to walk behind someone.

"So you at least know how to find your way through properly."

There was a sense of satisfaction in the man's voice.

Fssh—

The scenery around YuWon started to fade. The dark room grew brighter, and the cramped room disappeared, revealing a view of the outside.

The Heavenly Demon's back could no longer be seen.

“You passed.”

YuWon could hear the voice inside his head.

There was no message. The question just now wasn't registered separately as a test. It was simply a personal test by the Heavenly Demon.

YuWon guessed that the Heavenly Demon would have treated him differently depending on his response.

‘A ‘pass’ he says...’

It seemed that he had managed to be seen a bit favorably, at the very least.

‘I guess I’m going to have a rough time for a bit, pleasing this ahjussi.’

YuWon looked at the torches that lined the street.

There was a large village. Despite it being past sunset in the mountains, it was bustling with people.

YuWon couldn't believe there was such a village deep in the mountains.

‘So this is the Heavenly Demonic Cult.’

YuWon stood still for a second and took it in. There were people carrying rice and various grains, chickens, cows, pigs, and other livestock down the mountain, as well as martial artists armed with swords and spears.

Some martial schools said that the devil lives in the Heavenly Demonic Cult. That was all baloney. YuWon knew a real devil.

YuWon took in his surroundings. This was also a place where people lived, just like in the rest of the Martial Realm.

While YuWon was taking a moment to admire the village...

“Y-You!” HaMuk, who finally passed through the barrier, shouted after finding YuWon.

“How are you here?”

HaMuk was quite surprised to find YuWon had come back in one piece after thinking that he'd fallen prey to the barrier.

YuWon thought about telling him the truth, that he had just met the Heavenly Demon. But the Heavenly Demon was the icon of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. Nothing good would come from bringing him up, not to mention the fact that they hadn't even talked face-to-face.

“I just walked here first.”

“You walked?”

HaMuk's eyes widened. That meant that YuWon had managed to get through the barrier by himself.

“How...?”

Though the Cult might not have been known for having the strongest barrier, it should still have been impossible for a normal 10th Floor player to get through it on their own. Even HaMuk wasn't sure he could make his way through the barrier if he hadn't been taught the proper path.

Yet here was YuWon, who had managed to cross the barrier faster than them, and they knew the right path. In other words, YuWon had crossed the barrier with ease.

"Is that important? I'm tired, so let's go. Or does the Heavenly Demonic Cult not provide lodging to testees?" YuWon spoke shamelessly before trudging along to the village.

HaMuk was speechless as he watched YuWon walk away. He had now been a part of the cult for over 50 years, and in that time, not a single player had managed to cross the barrier by themselves. In fact, he had never heard of a player doing such a thing, ever.

* * *

HaMuk ordered his subordinates to show YuWon to his lodgings. Then, he started looking into Kim YuWon.

It was clear to him that YuWon was skilled. After confirming that he was a player that had just ascended to the 10th Floor by using the player kit, it was likely YuWon wasn't lying about his identity either.

HaMuk figured that his name must have been somewhat well-known in the lower floors. He was sure that if he had his subordinates look into it, he'd be able to find detailed information regarding YuWon...

"Really?"

... But he didn't think it'd be this easy.

After giving the orders to a few of his men, HaMuk was able to learn about YuWon right away.

"Yes. A few guilds from above are already trying to recruit Kim YuWon."

The Heavenly Demonic Cult had long stopped caring about the matters of the lower floors. Because of that, except for martial artists from the Cult that were active outside of Mt. Heaven or merchants that came to trade with them, they rarely heard information about the lower floors.

This was the reason why HaMuk hadn't heard of YuWon.

"If that's true, then the Martial Alliance must have already tried to approach him."

The Martial Alliance, formally known as the Martial Artists' Alliance, was a mid-sized guild with many Rankers. As an alliance of various noble clans, it was a place with enough influence to possess an entire floor in the Tower.

"I'll have to look into it further, but it is likely."

"Yet he came all the way here? Even though it's so far away?"

“From what I heard, he passed all the tests of the previous floors with high marks. Seeing as how he even topped the 1st Floor Colosseum’s rankings, he probably wants to set another record here as well.”

“So that’s why he picked the Heavenly Demonic Cult...”

The Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test was uncleared by any player thus far. The Heavenly Demon was stubborn, refusing to adjust the difficulty of his test, unlike the other martial schools. In addition, the Heavenly Demon was the one that gave the test and had such high standards that it was impossible for anyone to pass.

“I guess some people are just built differently.”

Gwang HaMuk remembered the 1st Floor’s Colosseum.

Born inside the Cult, he was a Pure-Blood from the Heavenly Demonic Cult. So having mastered quite a lot of martial arts, he was able to easily make his way through the Tutorial.

Normally, players with the innate talent to become Rankers were able to at least pass the tenth trial.

Knowing this fact, the Colosseum’s trials felt like hitting a wall to HaMuk. When he got to the seventh trial, he had felt his limits for the first time in his life. With martial arts and the power of the system, he thought he’d be able to reach the top of the Tower in one go, but the Colosseum ended up completely shattering HaMuk’s self-confidence.

“Captain, have you ever taken our cult’s test?”

HaMuk nodded his head at his subordinate’s question.

His loyalty to the Cult was exceptional. From a young age, he dreamed of one day becoming a player and passing the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.

Unfortunately, he was unable to pass it. The Cult’s test was a wall that was even taller and harder than the one he had faced during the Colosseum’s trials.

“I have.”

“How was the test?”

HaMuk shook his head in response.

“I don’t know.”

“Excuse me?”

“I failed as soon as I started.”

“What do you mean, sir...?”

His subordinate couldn’t understand. Failing the test as soon as he had started?

Seeing the subordinate waiting for an explanation, HaMuk decided to unravel his pent up frustrations.

“He told me I didn’t have the qualifications.”

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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A hot, steaming bath was drawn.

Once the female servants finished filling the tub with water, YuWon sent everyone out and immersed himself in the hot water.

Shaaa—

As the bath overflowed, more steam rose to the top.

“Haah—”

He felt the fatigue from the 10-day-long journey melt away. His muscles loosened up as he closed his eyes inside the circular wooden tub for a moment.

He indulged in the luxury for a few minutes. Then he opened his eyes and looked around.

It was a small bathing area located outside.

Just by looking at this place he could tell.

“... It’s small. Like, really small.”

Well, rather than being small, the Heavenly Demonic Cult wasn’t affluent, which was inevitable.

The current Heavenly Demonic Cult was behind the times. The recruitment of new players, revenue through collecting points from new recruits, and connections to the outside world from the players and Rankers trained by the Cult... There was none of that, and the Cult was simply a husk of its former glory.

‘That ahjussi is so stubborn.’

So much could change by just slightly lowering the difficulty of the test.

YuWon thought that he was the same as always.

‘Though I’m sure he has his reasons.’

The Tower’s system never malfunctioned. This fact was true in all the Tower’s long history, and it held true even in the distant future.

The Tower also always gave a bigger reward the harder the test. That’s why, when thinking about the 10th Floor, everyone came to the same conclusion.

“The Heavenly Demonic Cult.”

“Yep, it should be the Demonic Cult.”

“There really is no other option.”

During the meeting where they discussed what to do after the Tutorial, naturally the Heavenly Demonic Cult was brought up for the 10th Floor’s test.

“The Grand Martial Arts Tournament really is the jewel of the Martial Realm, but...”

“The Grand Martial Arts Tournament is an attractive option. If you win, not only would you receive a Great Scarlet Medicine Ball, but you’d be able to learn the best secret arts of the NamGung Clan, the Shaolin Temple, or wherever you want.”

“But is there even anyone here who hasn’t managed to win the Grand Martial Arts Tournament?”

“... Me.”

“I haven’t either. Are you trying to pick a fight right now?”

... YuWon remembered that there was a bit of a commotion regarding that, making him let out a small laugh.

It seemed that there had been a few present who either didn’t know about the Tournament or had participated and didn’t win.

The one that had caused the biggest ruckus was Son OhGong. Apparently he went onto the next floor as soon as he passed his test, so he didn’t get a chance to participate in the Tournament.

‘He’s the kind of guy who would have never missed a tournament like that.’

Anyway, YuWon was one of the people who showed interest in the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test. It was a test that, even far in the future, no one had ever managed to pass.

“It’s a shame the Heavenly Demon died early on.”

“If he was still alive, we’d be able to at least figure out something.”

“He’s already a goner. Missing him will do nothing for us.”

The Heavenly Demon lost his life early on in the fight against the Outer Gods. And since 「Chronos’s Clock Movement」 was made after the Heavenly Demon’s death, they were unable to ask him anything.

So in the end, nothing was known about the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.

‘I guess there’s no choice but to face it head on.’

Yuwon knew nothing. Not what the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test was, not why, compared to all the other tests, this one was particularly more difficult. And...

“So, what’s with the Heavenly Demonic Cult? Does anyone know anything?”

“I don’t.”

“There’s definitely something.”

“So we just don’t know what that something is.”

“Whatever it is, it won’t be anything ordinary. Because out of everyone here, not a single one of us has ever passed the Demonic Cult’s test.”

“Isn’t it a gamble? What if it’s a dud?”

“The Tower never betrays one’s efforts and hard work. We can’t be certain what the result might be, but there’s no way it’ll be a dud.”

YuWon’s first order of agenda was to find out what it was that the Cult was hiding. There was only a very slim chance, but he couldn’t risk it actually being a dud.

But...

[「?’s Egg」 wiggles.]

It seemed that it wasn’t a dud.

“It’s been a while.”

The unknown egg wiggled inside his inventory. And seeing the Egg awaken after so long made him think back to when he had just passed the 1st Floor’s test...

Chapter 53

A month ago...

The world of the 2nd Floor wasn’t all that nice of a place to live. The weather was hot and humid. It lacked food. And you never knew when monsters might attack the village.

Because of that, civilization had barely advanced, and every lodging was cramped and moldy.

“One point.”

The only silver lining was the low prices.

YuWon was used to filthy environments from experiencing war for such a long time, so he paid and entered the inn without hesitation.

Flop—

Creak—

As soon as he laid down on the bed, he could feel the bed frame creak. However, YuWon wasn’t concerned with stuff like that. His head right now was so full of thoughts, it felt like it was about to explode.

‘The Egg.’

The nameless egg that was slumbering inside his inventory. YuWon had originally thought that it was a pathetic reward for having cleared the long Tutorial while breaking every single record.

There were only two types of eggs that YuWon knew. The first were eggs that mythical or magical beasts hatched from. The second were edible eggs for consumption.

Though he had assumed that this egg probably fell in the first category, it was clearly different.

The incubation rate was stuck at 0%.

Yuwon had even been contemplating boiling it and eating it for nutrition if he couldn't find a use for it.

'Is it actually an Outer God's egg?'

He knew that it was no ordinary egg. That's why he came up with a few hypotheses.

One of them was that it might be an egg of some great Dragon or Demon, the ruling races of the Tower. But after confirming the pattern of an Outer God on it, as well as watching it eat the entirety of Orochi's corpse, YuWon was certain.

Inside this egg was a 'God' that existed from outside of the Tower.

Yuwon put his hand inside his inventory and pulled out the Egg, which had grown multiple times in size compared to when he had first obtained it.

"Hey."

[...]

The system was silent, and the Egg did not respond.

This was the first time he had attempted to talk to it. He couldn't figure out if either it had heard him and was ignoring him or if it was still in slumber.

"Are you sleeping?"

He tried talking to it a few more times, but there was still no response. YuWon gave up on talking to it and put the Egg back into the inventory.

After giving up on calling it out, he ended up thinking back to the Egg's form that had feasted on Orochi's corpse. A large, black something. The dozens of eyes and sharp teeth within it...

'There's no way it's a monster that actually looks like that.'

Yuwon had fought against quite a few Outer Gods.

Their appearances varied greatly. Some looked like animals while others looked human. One of them was so large you couldn't properly perceive its form, and it possessed multiple tentacles.

However, guys like him weren't the truly terrifying ones. Most of the scariest ones actually looked fairly normal. There was a simple reason for this. It was because they didn't have a predetermined form. They acted like a mirror for their opponents' emotions like fear. And by using those emotions, they revealed themselves.

Unknown and incomprehensible beings. Even YuWon, who had been fighting against them for so long, didn't know everything about the Outer Gods.

'If those guys were with me, I could at least talk it out with them.'

YuWon laid his head down on his bed.

Son OhGong, Hercules, Odin, Chronos, Asura...

YuWon thought back to the many comrades that fought together with him in the war.

Returning to the past from the destroyed Tower was a decision they'd made together, and the path he was on right now was the product of their discussion and research.

However, at this point in time, not a single person knew about the existence of Outer Gods. And of course, none of them would remember YuWon.

"Do I keep this alive or not?"

[「?'s Egg」 shakes its head.]

YuWon furrowed his brow.

He put his hand back inside his inventory.

"You bitch..."

Until just a moment ago, it wasn't responding, but as soon as he started contemplating killing it or not, it answered.

That meant that it had heard YuWon and ignored him.

YuWon shook his head from the sudden outburst of annoyance. He wanted to stir-fry or boil it and eat it, but he couldn't just do that.

The day was spent contemplating about the Egg.

Nervous, the Egg trembled. It knew that YuWon could toss it into a flaming hot fire at any moment.

After a whole day...

Shing—

YuWon drew his sword.

[「?'s Egg」 is in shock.]

Was it due to the higher incubation rate? The Egg was communicating more of its feelings. It was only borrowing the system's messages, but it was clear that the Egg was alive and breathing.

"I'm sorry."

YuWon swung his sword down towards the Egg.

"It's quite regretful."

Slash—!

[「?'s Egg」 screams.]

A desperate message.

YuWon's sword stopped right above the Egg.

The Egg wasn't the only one that was nervous. YuWon, who didn't know anything about it, was in the same boat.

After stopping the sword right over the Egg, YuWon took a second to look around.

It was tranquil. Nothing had happened.

"... Hmm."

Click—

After putting the sword back in its scabbard, YuWon stared at it.

Thinking back to what happened with Orochi's corpse, the Egg was clearly more than capable of exerting physical force. Yet, the thing didn't bite its owner when he tried to harm it.

YuWon wasn't certain if it didn't or if it couldn't, but this had demonstrated that it was likely not dangerous.

"Well... I guess I have no choice but to see what happens."

* * *

[「?'s Egg」 twitches.]

[「?'s Egg」 feels cozy.]

From within the inventory, the Egg had been sending a message every once in a while since entering the territory of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

The Egg had been silent since the 2nd Floor, yet here it was saying it was cozy.

YuWon took it out of his inventory. Seeing as how the incubation rate was still the same, it hadn't grown at all in the past month.

"You like this?"

[「?'s Egg」 responds.]

"You need to tell me what your response is."

[「?'s Egg」 nods its head.]

"So you do like this, huh."

It hadn't changed at all even after some time had passed, staying asleep most of the time.

YuWon guessed that in order to increase the incubation rate, he'd need some sort of power related to Outer Gods, like with 《Yamata no Orochi.》

[「?'s Egg」 falls asleep.]

The thing that had been sleeping for an entire month fell back asleep after saying just a few words. YuWon wasn't sure why it had suddenly woken back up, but he guessed that it had something to do with the Cult.

“The Outer Gods and the Heavenly Demonic Cult...”

For there to be some sort of connection between the two... YuWon couldn't be certain yet, but he had a feeling that this test wasn't going to be easy.

“I hope I didn't enter a tiger's den.”

That was something he'd have to figure out first-hand from now on.

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

A guest had arrived at the Heavenly Demonic Cult. Within a day, the news broke out within the entire Cult.

“What interesting news.”

Someone who desired to take the Cult's test.

The Heavenly Demonic Cult's test wasn't just infamous within the Cult, but it was like a ghost story within the Martial Realm.

The Cult was located in a place where you had to specifically seek it out, and even among the people who sought them out, many ended up leaving empty-handed.

That was why players no longer challenged the Cult's test. It was an unspoken rule of sorts. Attempting the test would be a waste of your time at best, and at worst, you might even lose your life.

“A challenger, huh...”

“It's the first one since Cheon JaRyong.”

“How many years has it been?”

“I think it's been about 30 years.”

“It's been 34 years.”

The four leaders that made up the Heavenly Demonic Cult had gathered together.

The Sword Lord, the Dao* Lord, the Spear Lord, and the Fist Lord.

*TL/N: In Murim/Wuxia, swords and daos are commonly differentiated. A sword is a double-bladed weapon, while a dao is a single-bladed weapon.

Each of them had reached the top of the Heavenly Demonic Cult within their respective fields, and they were the central figures that managed the cult.

The Cult Council was a meeting held between the Four Lords where they discussed matters regarding the Cult. Normally, they'd simply be talking about trading with the outside as well as small- and large-scale problems within Mt. Heaven, but today, a different matter was the central subject.

There was a new challenger attempting the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test for the first time in decades.

"Cheon JaRyong has been loyal to the Cult since long ago, so that wasn't a surprise. But who is this new fellow?"

"Apparently his name is Kim YuWon."

"Kim YuWon?"

"You haven't heard of him? How can you know so little about how the world is going? I get that you've taken root inside Mt. Heaven, but I've constantly reminded you that you can't ignore what's going on in the Tower..."

"Stop the useless nagging. Just tell me who he is," said the Sword Lord, the oldest among the Four Lords.

The Dao Lord, the one who was 'uselessly nagging,' cleared his throat before continuing, "So the thing is..."

His explanation of YuWon wasn't all that long. To begin with, there wasn't much known other than that he was a rookie that climbed up while rewriting the rankings of each floor.

"A new record... So his goal isn't all that different from the previous challengers."

"If there is one thing that's different, it would be his skills. They say that he managed to clear up to the twentieth trial of the 1st Floor's test..."

"We can't be certain until we see him for ourselves. Rumors are easy things to get blown out of proportion."

"That might be the case with rumors, but the records inscribed into the Tower do not lie. Don't be such a pessimist."

The Four Lords extensively debated regarding YuWon, and in the end, they came to a single conclusion.

"Let's just call him over and see for ourselves."

"... Hmm. You have a fair point. We could talk here all day, but that'll be nothing compared to meeting him in person."

The Spear Lord nodded his head. He raised his hands, and the countless martial artists that were kneeling within the hall raised their heads, responding to his call.

"Yes, sir!"

Thump, thump—!

The stomping of hundreds of martial artists rang throughout the hall. And at the same time, a large door opened up, and a single person walked inside.

The person's footsteps were light with not even a hint of nervousness.

It was hard to believe someone could be so composed in front of hundreds of martial artists and the Four Great Lords of the Heavenly Demon Cult.

This kind of brazenness was rare to see from anyone that wasn't a Ranker, the ruling class of the Tower, or a ruling race, such as Dragons, Giants, or Demons.

"Oho..."

"He seems to have quite the guts."

The Sword Lord and the Dao Lord nodded their heads, seeing the sword that was fastened around the man's waist.

The sword and the dao. As the two Lords wielded weapons of similar nature, they found him more favorable than the other two Lords did because he was a man that carried a weapon similar to them.

YuWon looked at the Four Lords as he walked down the hall.

The four each wore a different colored dragon robe. It was as if there were four emperors. However, among them, the one known as the God of the Heavenly Demon Cult, the Heavenly Demon, was not present.

'So the Heavenly Demon didn't come.'

They were the next best thing.

YuWon looked at the four martial gods that symbolized the Heavenly Demon Cult.

Sword, Dao, Spear, and Fist.

They were beings that had reached the pinnacle of their art within the Demon Cult. And they were also the people that ruled over the Cult in the place of the reclusive Heavenly Demon.

"So it is you, the one that passed the first test of our leader."

"Indeed. He truly is different."

"Still, I wonder if he'll be able to pass all the tests..."

"I have quite the expectations. It seems it wasn't just an exaggerated rumor."

The Four Lords whispered amongst themselves while looking at YuWon.

They each had different personalities and ideals, but on this matter, they were on the same page. There was no more need to think or debate.

They exchanged looks and nodded their heads.

"Then, the second test shall..."

“Please wait for me!”

One of the martial artists in the hall, a man who donned a black martial arts uniform, stepped out.

“Vice-captain of the Black Tempest.”

“I apologize for interrupting, but I have a request for the Lords.”

The vice-captain of the Black Tempest Squad, Cheon JaRyong. The man who was the last player to take the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test 30 years ago looked at YuWon.

“May I please test this man first?”

—

Chapter 54

Cheon JaRyong’s request brought the hall to a dead silence.

This was because the people who had to answer his request would not speak.

Waiting for an answer from the Four Lords, JaRyong remained kneeling on one knee, bowing his head.

““Test,’ you say...”

The first one to speak after the long silence was the Sword Lord. He looked over at the other three.

“Let’s make a decision through our usual means.”

“Raise your right hand for a yea, your left hand for a nay.”

“That’s fine with me.”

“We shall go with the majority vote.”

Without any hesitation, the Four Lords simultaneously made a decision.

The Sword Lord did not raise his hand. The Dao Lord raised his left hand, while the Spear and Fist Lords raised their right hands.

“One abstention. One nay. Two yeas.”

The decision was quickly made.

“You may do as you wish, Cheon JaRyong.”

“Thank you.”

JaRyong put his palm and fist together, bowing with a kung fu salute to thank the Four Lords.

Subsequently, the martial artists in the hall took a few steps back, forming a large circle. YuWon and JaRyong ended up in the center of the circle.

“This isn’t an official part of the Cult’s test, is it?”

After taking a second to assess the situation, YuWon looked over at the Sword Lord, the head of the Four Lords.

This was an unprepared stage. There wasn't even a notification from the system. In addition, as JaRyong, a player from a higher floor, displayed hostility against YuWon, the penalty lingered in the air. That meant the Tower had not recognized this 'stage' as a test.

"That's right. There cannot be a test without a reward. Now let's see..." the Sword Lord spoke. After thinking for a brief moment, he continued, "Among the Cult's elixirs, we shall reward you with the Crimson Blood Medicine Ball. How does that sound?"

The 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 A medicine ball that was red like blood, it was one of the better elixirs that the Heavenly Demonic Cult possessed.

Though it was not as great as the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 that could be won from the Grand Martial Arts Tournament, it was still a more valuable elixir than the 「Lesser Scarlet Medicine Ball」. Among the elixirs one could obtain in the Martial Realm, it was a pretty decent one.

Yuwon smiled faintly. While looking at the Sword Lord, he quickly glanced over at JaRyong, who was openly displaying hostility towards him.

"That will suffice."

[The stage has been acknowledged as a test.]

[Cheon JaRyong's restriction has been reduced.]

[Cheon JaRyong's penalty has been reduced.]

[Defeat Cheon JaRyong and receive his acknowledgement.]

Vzzzt—

The penalty surrounding JaRyong was now lighter. It was as good as having no penalty.

'So he's probably around the 30th Floor in strength.'

To defeat a player of this caliber in an unplanned test, this was fairly high in difficulty.

'So how hard is the actual test?'

Yuwon had heard over and over that the Cult's test was difficult, but this was the first time he would experience it in person.

JaRyong had his black sword ready, aiming it at YuWon.

"Did you say your name is Kim YuWon?" asked JaRyong.

Yuwon nodded his head as he answered, "What about it?"

"I heard you passed the first test. That means that the Heavenly Demon has acknowledged you."

It seemed that the news that YuWon passed the first test had already spread throughout the Demonic Cult. Though that should have been pretty obvious to YuWon. This many martial artists and the

Four Lords wouldn't have gathered over someone who wanted to take the test with no qualifications whatsoever.

YuWon guessed that this gathering was ordered by the Heavenly Demon.

"I don't know what made the Heavenly Demon acknowledge you and give you a pass, but I—"

"So you weren't acknowledged," YuWon cut him off. He was going on too long, but he didn't care to listen to him any further. "Unlike me."

As the last player to attempt the Cult's test, JaRyong was quite proud of that fact, despite still not having accepted being failed without even getting to properly take the test.

Kkk—

JaRyong ground his teeth. YuWon had hit the nail on the head with his words, and sometimes the truth hurt the most.

Unable to hold back his anger, JaRyong charged in.

Slash—!

JaRyong's black martial uniform fluttered as he swung his sword.

His movements were quick, but despite the sudden attack, YuWon leisurely turned his body to dodge JaRyong's sword.

"That's right! I wasn't acknowledged by the Heavenly Demon! I, who had sworn eternal loyalty to the Heavenly Demonic Cult!"

Whoosh—

His sword was fast and had weight behind it. On the edge of his blade, there was a type of mana called 'ki' in the martial Martial Realm, which increased the deadliness of his attacks.

"I dedicated my life to passing this test! From when I was young, I waited to become a player, strengthening my body, practicing martial arts! And when I made it back to the Martial Realm, I challenged the test! So why?!"

Crackle—

JaRyong must have exerted his power to the limit, causing the penalty to start sparking.

Instead of striking back, YuWon just dodged his sword.

"How did an outsider like you get acknowledged?! Why?! Why couldn't I be—!"

"You're like a kid."

Tak—

Slide—

YuWon's scabbard blocked JaRyong's blade. Then JaRyong's sword that had seemed like it was going to slice YuWon in half slipped sideways after losing balance.

“You wanna know why?”

Burst—

YuWon’s arm became reinforced with the power of a Giant.

[Your arm has been imbued with the power of a Giant.]

[Partial Gigantification will occur.]

Wham—!

YuWon punched JaRyong in the back, knocking him down.

“Kugh!”

Slam—!

After hitting the ground, JaRyong’s body recoiled, twitching. After a bit, he tried to get back up, but his eyes were already halfway rolled back.

Ssk—

Flop—

JaRyong fell to the ground, his body going limp.

YuWon said, “There’s no special reason. It’s because you were weak,” as he looked down at the man passed out on the floor.

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

JaRyong had already lost consciousness. And even though he wasn’t lucid to hear it himself, with how many people in the hall heard YuWon’s words, he was bound to hear about it soon enough.

YuWon turned his head and looked over at the Four Lords, asking them, “Isn’t that right?”

“Hah!”

“Hahahah!”

“Ahaha!”

The Lords broke out in laughter. The Sword Lord, who had a silent and serious personality, only smiled, but the other three were having a ball.

“That is indeed true.”

“It’s been a while since I was so entertained.”

“Even though a stage was created, if JaRyong wasn’t penalized...”

“That hypothetical is meaningless. He didn’t even draw his sword.”

“You have a point.”

The Lords started chattering amongst themselves.

YuWon patiently let them go on. He guessed that since it had been a while since someone from outside had taken their test, he should let them enjoy it as much as possible.

The Lords finished chatting after about five minutes. The first one to come to his senses was the Sword Lord.

“I apologize for making you wait. Getting chatty naturally comes with old age.”

“That’s okay, sir.”

“Where did you learn martial arts? I don’t know what school that move was from, but the way you deflected JaRyong’s sword was quite impressive.”

“I was simply imitating it.”

“You were imitating it? ‘Imitating,’ you say...”

A large smile grew on the Sword Lord’s face. He looked like he was about to burst out into laughter.

“You there! Bring out a Crimson Blood Medicine Ball!”

Following the Sword Lord’s order, a female servant that was on standby brought out a box containing the 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball.」

The box was delivered to YuWon, and as soon as he took the box, he got a message.

[You have passed the test.]

[You have obtained a 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball.」]

YuWon opened up the box. Inside the box, there was a bright red ball the size of a thumbnail. The 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 was now in YuWon’s possession.

“Though it isn’t that great of an item, think of it as a present for entertaining these old men.”

“Since I didn’t really do much, I am more than satisfied with this gift.”

“What did you just say? Hahahah!”

The Fist Lord, the one who had the loudest personality amongst them, broke out into laughter once again.

There were two meanings behind YuWon’s words. Firstly, that he wasn’t one bit nervous about the test against Cheon JaRyong, the vice-captain of the Black Tempest Squad. To begin with, YuWon had found the test against JaRyong as easy as a

challenge from a little child. Secondly, that he didn't consider the elixir 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 an all that amazing item.

The 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 was an elixir that was definitely far from the caliber of the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball.」 However, that didn't mean that the 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 was just some mediocre item. It was easily worth over 10,000 points. No player that had only just reached the 10th Floor should have even gotten to see such an expensive elixir. Even right now, in the Demonic Cult, there were countless players that wouldn't hesitate to jump in if the 「Crimson Blood Medicine Ball」 was put up as a reward.

‘The reason why they put up the Crimson Blood Medicine Ball was because a reward of that level is required in order to decrease the restriction on JaRyong as much as possible. Despite that...’

YuWon had taken down JaRyong far too easily. The fight had ended much sooner than they had expected. But that's also why the Four Lords found the fight that much more entertaining.

“I shall now tell you the contents of the second test,” said the Sword Lord.

“The second test of the Heavenly Demonic Cult will be with me, The Fist Lord, Pung BaekLim.”

The Fist Lord. Among the Four Lords, he was the one with the most brazen personality.

YuWon shifted his attention from the Sword Lord to the Fist Lord.

Though there wasn't much information about the Heavenly Demon, there was plenty known about the Four Lords.

‘The First Lord. One of the greatest masters of hand-to-hand combat. He's a player that became a Ranker by mastering martial arts.’

Every one of the Four Lords were Rankers. As some of the strongest people within the Heavenly Demonic Cult, they were currently the ones actually leading the Cult.

“Of course, we won't be having a normal duel. The objective is to endure three techniques against me, the Fist Lord.”

Three techniques. On first impression, it didn't seem like that hard a test. But the opponent was a Ranker. On top of that, it wasn't against a new greenhorn Ranker like Chryses, but one of the leaders of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

‘The Fist Lord is the weakest among the Four Lords. However, the power behind each of his strikes rivals the Sword Lord, who has the highest ranking.’

That was the gist of the information known about the Fist Lord in the Martial Realm.

‘And unlike with Chryses, this will be an official test.’

The penalty was a power that existed to prevent a player of a higher floor from indiscriminately using their power and destroying the ecosystem of the lower floors. However, in the case of a test recognized by the Tower, the domain of the penalty was diluted depending on the test.

Therefore, depending on the penalty, the power that the Fist Lord could use would be unpredictable.

‘But if it’s only three attacks...’

Seeing YuWon get lost in thought after hearing the contents of the test, the Fist Lord smirked.

“Of course, I also think that this is a nonsensical test.”

To require a player that had only just reached the 10th Floor to withstand three techniques from a Ranker was merciless. Even if it was the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test, the difficulty made no sense.

The Fist Lord raised three fingers.

“I’ll give you three months.”

Three months wasn’t a very long time, however, depending on how one used it, it also wasn’t a short period of time.

“With the exception of elixirs, we’ll provide you with every resource within the Cult. The training facility, grain balls,* clothes, and a comfortable place to rest. Whatever you desire, we can—”

*TL/N: A food made by mixing grains with elixirs. It’s said to be able to hold back hunger, make your body into peak condition, and prevent you from losing too much weight during excessive training.

“No. That won’t be necessary.” Having finished thinking, YuWon shook his head.

The Fist Lord furrowed his brow, wondering what he meant.

“What do you mean, ‘it won’t be necessary’?”

Instead of responding immediately, YuWon looked at his surroundings. Thanks to the fight against JaRyong, the martial artists of the Cult were already far away from him. It was already an ideal set up.

“Let’s start right away.”

The stage had already been prepared.

Chapter 55

The hall became turbulent.

“Did you hear that?”

“I did. He wants to start right away.”

“Okay, so I didn’t hear that wrong. Does he have no fear?”

“He probably just doesn’t know the Lords’ true powers. He’s an outsider who is unfamiliar with the cult, unlike the vice-captain.”

“Maybe he misunderstood the rules.”

“Or he’s really that arrogant...”

The Heavenly Demonic Cult’s martial artists present in the hall were angry, disapproving, and baffled. They were all thinking the same thing—he must not know any better.

“Kim YuWon.”

Having heard the Spear Lord call his name, YuWon looked up at him.

“You might not know this, but the Fist Lord is a Ranker. He’s nothing like the passed-out vice-captain over there.”

His voice sounded calm, but he appeared a bit angry.

“You seem to be looking down on our cult too much just because you managed to take down a vice-captain.”

This was the reason why the Spear Lord was angry. He thought that YuWon was looking down on the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

As this was a natural misunderstanding, YuWon bowed and apologized.

“I’m sorry if it sounded like that. However, I promise that I am not looking down on the Heavenly Demonic Cult.”

“Then—”

“That’s enough, Spear Lord,” the Fist Lord butted in between YuWon and the Spear Lord.

The Fist Lord stood from his seat. When he stood up, he revealed that he was actually much taller and had a larger frame than it appeared while he was sitting down.

“He says it’s a misunderstanding. We should just do as he wants then.”

Though that was what he said, it was as clear as day that his pride had been hurt. The energy around him enveloped his body instead of spreading outward. It wrapped around him so sturdily, it was as if he was wearing steel armor.

He looked as if he was about to dash towards YuWon at any moment and launch his fist.

But right as the Fist Lord was about to take a step...

“Fist Lord,” said the Sword Lord, “Stop.” His words brought Pung BaekLim to a halt.

“Do you expect me to just let it slide after hearing that?” the Fist Lord retorted.

Though there was a difference in skill between the Four Lords, they were all in equal standing. There was no need for one to listen to another. However...

“This is a test bestowed by the Heavenly Demon. It is different from the test that just took place.”

The Fist Lord’s expression wavered ever so slightly.

The Heavenly Demon. With the mention of his name, the Fist Lord had no choice but to back off. The Heavenly Demon’s name carried absolute power within the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

Additionally, the Sword Lord’s words weren’t just to stop the Fist Lord.

“The only one who can change the Heavenly Demon’s test is the Heavenly Demon himself. Three months time. Do not disregard that.”

“... I was careless.”

The Fist Lord sat back down. The prideful Fist Lord of all people. That’s how great the authority of the Heavenly Demon was.

But this did mean that YuWon wouldn’t get what he wanted, no matter how much of a tantrum he threw.

‘Three months, huh...’ YuWon thought.

In the end, he was given three months’ time. He didn’t particularly like it, but this wasn’t something to be disappointed by.

Yuwon looked down at the sword at his waist.

‘It won’t be too bad.’

Though he had taken a seat, the Fist Lord was still glaring at YuWon. He appeared to be holding himself back with everything he had.

“Well then, I shall see you in three months,” said Pung BaekLim.

* * *

Yuwon was treated as an important guest within the Cult for taking the Heavenly Demon’s test. But another reason why he was treated well was because he had demonstrated that he wasn’t a run-of-the-mill player like the ones that attempted the test long ago.

One could tell that was the case just by the number of martial artists that had gathered in the hall. Rumors about YuWon had already spread throughout the Cult, which was why hundreds of martial artists had gathered to watch him.

‘But still...’ thought YuWon.

Tmp, tmp—

He looked at the old man walking in front of him.

The Sword Lord, Shin MuGuek. He had personally taken on the task of guiding YuWon around. When the second-in-command of the Heavenly Demonic Cult took on a task as lowly as being a guide, his subordinates all opposed the idea.

However, this was the Sword Lord. There was no one on Mt. Heaven who could bend his will except for the Heavenly Demon.

“Was this also an order from the Heavenly Demon?”

YuWon tried to suss out MuGuek’s true intentions to see if the Sword Lord’s interest in him was curiosity, good will, or hostility.

Even though Rankers couldn’t easily mess with an average player, MuGuek was someone to still be wary of.

“No, it was not.”

“Then?”

“Think of it as for my personal enjoyment. It has been a long time since I last met an outsider.”

During the entire future that YuWon lived through, MuGuek had remained inside the Heavenly Demon Cult. Because he never left the 10th Floor, he was eventually forgotten by YuWon and the other Rankers.

The most loyal subject of the Heavenly Demon, the man that never went outside the Heavenly Demon Cult’s territory. That was everything YuWon knew about the Sword Lord.

‘So it’s just simple curiosity.’

If that was the case, he’d be in the clear. YuWon hoped that MuGuek wouldn’t become a variable in this test. But as long as it was just simple curiosity, YuWon thought it’d be okay.

But...

“And I have high expectations.”

“Expectations?”

“How could I not have high hopes after seeing you in person? I believe that if it’s you, you might actually pass the Heavenly Demon’s test.”

MuGuek spoke as if he wanted YuWon to pass the test, which was likely the case. It was actually the same for most martial schools. They wanted someone to learn their martial arts, pass their test, receive acknowledgment, and climb the Tower. They wanted great players to become Rankers and make a name for their martial school.

However...

‘This feels a bit different.’

There was nothing concrete to back this feeling up, but YuWon felt an odd sense of desperation in MuGuek’s words just now. It was a feeling that was different from simply wanting someone to climb the Tower and bring prosperity to the Cult.

Tmp, tmp—

With MuGuek showing him the way, YuWon finally arrived at his destination after a long walk.

Muguek turned around and finally asked the question that he'd been curious about for a while. "So why this place? If you have something you need to prepare, wouldn't the weapons warehouse or even the martial arts library where we store our secret arts be more appropriate?"

"I can skip the weapons warehouse. As for the martial arts library, I'll stop by there later."

"Are you saying that the medical house is even more important?"

YuWon started walking towards the medical house's door in response to his question.

That's when MuGuek noticed that YuWon was smirking as he passed him.

"You said that the Heavenly Demonic Cult will provide as much support as possible until the next test, right?"

"That is indeed correct."

If there were a myriad of challengers attempting the Cult's test, such conditions would have made no sense. However, YuWon was the first challenger in decades. Maybe because of that, the Heavenly Demon made such a proposition. With the exception of elixirs and the high-rank secret arts, they'd spare no resources for him.

As soon as YuWon had heard this proposition, he'd immediately thought of one thing.

"Those words..."

Drag—

As the medical house's door opened, the thick scent of medicinal herbs filled the air.

"You're gonna regret them."

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

"A-All of them?"

The chief doctor of the Heavenly Demonic Cult's medical house, Jin il-Hwan, was shocked by all the medicinal ingredients that YuWon gathered.

It wasn't just him, though. It was the same for the other doctors that worked under him in the medical house. They had just spent half the day bringing out medicinal ingredients from their storage per YuWon's request.

It was a pile that weighed hundreds of kilograms at least. Just by looking at the amount, this was roughly half of all the medical ingredients that the medical house possessed. And with the

exceptions of medicine that counted as elixirs and the lowest-grade medicinal ingredients, one could say that all the medicine of the medical house was gathered here.

“Yes. Thank you very much for all this.”

Without even looking a little bit sorry, YuWon started putting all the ingredients into his inventory.

Jin il-Hwan was absolutely baffled, but he couldn't say a thing because of the Heavenly Demon's orders.

“With the exception of elixirs and the high-rank secret arts, spare no resources for him.”

He didn't know why the Heavenly Demon had given such an order.

The martial artists of the cult didn't think much of the Heavenly Demon's order. With the exception of elixirs and the secret arts, there wasn't much to provide him with. The weapons could just be loaned to him for a few months, and if you excluded the high-rank secret arts, there wasn't anything that wasn't already provided to their normal martial artists.

The training facility, food, a few medical ingredients, and low-rank martial arts. They had thought that would be all they would need to support him, but...

“Why do you need this many medicinal ingredients?”

With this many ingredients, the Demonic Cult could have even declared war against the Martial Artists' Alliance. So for a single person to use all this, especially in only three months, it made no sense.

Naturally, the chief doctor thought YuWon's request was absurd.

“I'll say this again, but any medicinal ingredients you have remaining after three months have to be returned. And if an ingredient that you didn't use gets damaged...”

“I have to reimburse it out of my own pocket. I'll make sure to remember it.”

In the time they were talking, YuWon finished putting all the ingredients into his inventory.

It was a fairly expansive inventory. Not only was it large, it also had a great ratio of weight reduction. Despite that, the inventory was almost crammed full.

‘There was a shit-ton.’

After emptying out the medical house, YuWon was guided by a female servant.

He thought he could hear the chief doctor's scream behind him, but YuWon decided to ignore it.

‘In three months, he'll really be bawling his eyes out.’

Yuwon thought maybe he should have at least left them with something, but then he shook his head.

The belt around his waist, the 「High-Grade Inventory,」 had become heavy from all the items, yet YuWon was still uneasy.

‘This might still not be enough.’

The place the servant guided him to was a cave halfway up Mt. Heaven.

The entrance was only two meters tall, but inside, there was a large, empty space. It was a training chamber filled with grain balls.

“We’ve arrived.”

“Thank you.”

“Also, this...”

The servant handed YuWon a torch drenched in oil.

YuWon lit the torch and walked inside the training chamber. As he lit the lights around the chamber, the dark interior brightened up.

Fwoosh—

Flicker—

It was a long cave. As he went deeper inside, he found that the training chamber was hundreds of meters in diameter. On one side, there was a pile of grain balls.

While he was taking the space in...

Rumble—

Draaag, thump—

... The entrance of the training chamber was sealed off.

That entrance would likely not open for three months. The mechanism made it so it was only possible to close it from the outside and only be opened from the inside. So now, except for YuWon, no one could open that door.

‘Without breaking it, that is.’

This was the perfect space to train without any interruptions.

Also...

‘It’s perfect for consuming this.’

YuWon put his hand inside his inventory. From Inside it, he managed to grab a hard gem-like thing.

[Orochi’s 7th Heart]

▷ It is the 7th heart of Orochi, which was separated after being sealed by Susanoo.

▷ It possesses a powerful poison.

「Orochi’s Heart.」 An item he had received as a reward for clearing the 1st Floor’s Colosseum, he had been unable to do anything with it yet. And there was a good reason for that.

▷ It possesses a powerful poison.

Due to the poison inside 「Orochi's Heart,」 without some high-quality medicine, one couldn't even think about consuming it. That was how powerful the poison in the Heart was.

‘I was wondering where I could obtain antidotes to consume this thing...’

YuWon smiled while looking at his inventory full of medical ingredients.

“To think I'd end up hitting the motherlode here.”

Chapter 56

Crash—!

Rumble, rumble—

The peak of Mt. Heaven shook.

JaRyong trembled, feeling the tremors. “The Fist Lord seems very angry,” he said.

“I think he plans on completely crushing the challenger, disregarding the fact that the Heavenly Demon is favoring him.”

HaMuk, who was standing besides JaRyong, looked over at one of the peaks of Mt. Heaven.

The Fist Lord was the most combative of the Four Lords. It was natural for him to warm up before a fight, but this time around, there were different feelings mixed in with his actions.

“Even though he's still a kid.”

“Are you saying I got wrecked by a kid then?”

“Hahah!”

HaMuk burst out in laughter from JaRyong's question. He ended up remembering the duel between JaRyong and YuWon.

“You're right. He's no ordinary kid.”

“How can someone that's only climbed up to the 10th Floor be so strong?”

“He's probably fundamentally different from us. ”

“But even if he's a Pure-Blood...”

JaRyong and HaMuk were both players. Though they had now given up on climbing the Tower further, they were at one point also the center of attention for being Pure-Bloods from the Martial Realm.

Though they couldn't be compared to Pure-Bloods from giant guilds like Olympus, the Heavenly Realm, or Asgard, they were quite proud of their origins.

However...

“Isn't this just too great of a difference?”

JaRyong thought back to his duel against YuWon. But, no, that wasn't a duel. That was a one-sided act of violence.

Despite him having had most of the restrictions from the penalty removed due to the stage creation, JaRyong was taken down in an instant by YuWon.

HaMuk also clearly remembered what happened back then. Though he wasn't taken by surprise as much as JaRyong, he was still pretty shocked.

"So what do you think?"

Crash—!

Rumble—

The earth shook again.

A single strike from the Fist Lord was capable of shaking the top of Mt. Heaven. And with every punch, the mana in the air grew denser, overflowing into the central area of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

"Do you think he'll be able to withstand that?"

JaRyong could still feel the Fist Lord's strike throughout his entire body, even after the rumbling had subsided. Though he might have been the weakest among the Four Lords, a Ranker was still a Ranker.

No matter how skilled one might have been, it would have been very difficult to withstand three techniques from the Fist Lord, who had been to the top of the Tower.

"I'm not sure."

JaRyong thought about it long and hard.

Yuwon and the Fist Lord.

A reckless test where one had to withstand three techniques from a Ranker...

"I think..."

* * *

Munch, munch—

Yuwon chewed on the medicinal ingredients for a while. Various awful, bitter flavors enveloped his mouth. He thought maybe he should have brought some honey, but that would have only weakened the potency of the medicines.

"Blegh—"

Almost vomiting a couple of times, Yuwon stopped eating the medicinal ingredients.

"It's so gross..."

He thought maybe getting stabbed by swords while fighting would feel better. Never had Yuwon imagined that there were so many different bitter flavors. And even though he had tried a wide variety of medicines in his life, he had never eaten this many at once.

[You consumed an 「Antler Herb.」]

[Your resistance to poison increases slightly for 24.1 hours.]

[You consumed a 「Poisonous Aster Root.」]

[Your resistance to poison increases for 24.4 hours.]

[You consumed a 「Banchok Flower.」]

[You have gained resistance to 98 types of poison for 45.7 hours...]

All sorts of medicinal ingredients and a myriad of antidotes created by the Heavenly Demonic Cult. After eating them until his stomach was full, YuWon looked unsightly. His stomach now hurt from the effects of all the different medicinal ingredients.

‘I think some of them got mixed into poison.’

Medicine was something that shouldn’t have been consumed without the proper consultation from an apothecary. The reason for that was simple. When consumed incorrectly, medicines could become poisonous.

Mixing various medicines together to create poison was something that the famed SaCheon Clan was well known for.

‘It can’t be helped. It’s not like I know what every medicine does.’

Yuwon had asked the chief doctor about fatal combinations just in case. Thanks to that, YuWon was able to avoid consuming medicines that were potentially lethal together, but the chief doctor must not have taken into account the possibility of eating so many kinds all at once.

Though it was only a little bit, one of the medicines he had consumed had a toxic reaction. Luckily, all it did was cause a bit of a stomach ache.

‘But...’

Yuwon picked up the main course he had set aside for today.

“This’ll be over when they stop fighting against each other.”

[「?’s Egg」 opens its mouth wide.]

Sensing the egg inside his inventory move, YuWon frowned.

It was happening again.

“This one’s off limits.”

[「?’s Egg」 makes a curious face and—]

“I said no. If you try it again, I’m going to fry you up.”

[「?’s Egg」 is scared shitless.]

[「?’s Egg」 falls back into slumber.]

The threat must have worked because it fell back asleep, giving up on 「Orochi's Heart.」

This had already happened once before. While trying to figure out how to consume 「Orochi's Heart,」 the Egg had attempted to swallow it.

Because he had properly scolded the Egg back then, it didn't reveal its teeth instantly this time, but YuWon was still on high alert.

“... That'll probably do it.”

Yuwon felt like his life was being shortened by the Egg that was thrust upon him.

Like he was sneakily eating lunch in the middle of class, Yuwon carefully looked around his surroundings before going in for a bite.

Crunch—!

Yuwon's teeth broke the hard heart.

The inside of his mouth felt like it was burning, and in a hurry, Yuwon chewed and swallowed.

[You consumed 「Orochi's 7th Heart.」]

[Orochi's poison spreads throughout your body.]

[Your poison resistance tries to resist the status effect: Poisoned.]

[Your poison resistance tries to resist the status effect: Poisoned.]

[Your poison resistance...]

An endless stream of messages, and with it...

[You have failed to resist Orochi's poison.]

[You are now afflicted by the status effect : Poisoned.]

[Status effect : Poisoned increased to level 2...]

“Kugh...”

Orochi's poison spread through Yuwon's entire body. He felt as if his skin and muscles were being scorched.

“Ahhhhhh!”

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

Munch, munch—

Gulp—

YuWon barely managed to reach out his arms, grab the herbs, and eat them.

[Your poison resistance tries to resist the status effect: Poisoned.]

[Your poison resistance increases by 1.]

YuWon couldn't remember how many times he had heard this message now.

His poison resistance had gone up dozens of times, to the point that most normal poisons would have no effect on him.

However, even such a high poison resistance was futile against Orochi's poison.

There was only a single effect.

‘The pain's lessened.’

The pain from the poison was decreasing very slightly.

YuWon had to be satisfied with this. The higher his poison resistance increased, the slower the poison spread throughout his body while also strengthening the medicines' effects.

“Fuu—”

YuWon, who had been flopped over and barely grabbing and eating the herbs, managed to turn his body over onto his back.

His stomach still felt like it was engulfed in flames, but at least this was something.

While chewing on a root he didn't know the name of, YuWon slowly opened his paralyzed eyes.

[Your Arcane Power increased by 1.]

[Your Arcane Power increased by 1.]

His stats increased along with his poison resistance, and Arcane Power was starting to increase at a rapid rate.

‘It's going up faster than I expected.’

YuWon's current Arcane Power was 88. This was the result of increasing the completion rate of the [Heaven-Slaying Star,] leveling up, and climbing the Tower.

Stats were something that were harder to increase the higher they were. Because of that, after a certain point, it became very difficult to increase one's stats except by leveling up.

For this reason, rather than leveling up, YuWon had prioritized raising his stats through methods like consuming elixirs. And in that regard, 「Orochi's Heart」 was one of the highest grade elixirs there were.

But even taking that into account, his stats were increasing rapidly beyond his imagination.

There was a single reason for this.

‘I’m barely losing any of the mana that the Heart possessed.’

Consuming an elixir was unlike eating normal food. Setting the poison neutralization side, it depended on the individual’s mana control for how much of the elixir’s mana they would be able to absorb.

But even with great mana control, it should have been impossible for YuWon to absorb all the mana in Orochi’s Heart with his current power level. Despite that, YuWon was able to absorb it with barely any loss.

“How is this possible...? Wait.”

YuWon remembered a skill he had forgotten. He quickly checked the skill.

[Master of Mana]

▷ Rank : S+

▷ Proficiency : 3.05%

[Master of Mana] was a skill that increased the recovery rate, resistance, and sensitivity to mana. On top of that it let one ‘rule’ over mana.

At first, YuWon was confused about the effect he had never heard of before, but now he somewhat understood what it could mean.

‘Mana will follow me by its own will.’

It felt like the mana that was dispersed, the mana he was unable to make his own after consuming the elixir, was following him of its own accord.

‘This is a new discovery.’

[Your Arcane Power increased by 1.]

His stats went up again.

YuWon continuously felt mana fill his body.

It was a shocking speed. To already be on the precipice of hitting 90 Arcane Power...

‘If I can get it to triple digits like this...’

Clench—

YuWon grabbed a bigger handful of medicinal herbs. He shoved it in his mouth and started neutralizing the poison that had begun spreading inside his body again.

This had now been going on for a few days. In order to neutralize all the poison and absorb all the mana inside 「Orochi’s Heart,」 YuWon would need more than just a few days.

Even though blood dripped from his mouth because of the internal injuries caused by the poison, YuWon was still smiling.

“This... is going to take quite a bit.”

* * *

The Heavenly Demonic Cult had been frozen like the winter of the northern sea.

It was an organization that had been in seclusion for a long time, located on the outskirts of the Martial Realm on the 10th Floor of the grand Tower. Within that Cult, a small wind had started blowing.

“It’s been a month now.”

“He might be planning on staying inside for the full three months.”

“You might be right. I thought he would have at least come out in the middle to obtain a secret art or something.”

HaMuk looked at the entrance of the training chamber YuWon had entered.

A month had already passed by, and the only thing YuWon had taken with him were the medicinal ingredients he got from the medical house. He didn’t take any secret arts or weapons of the Heavenly Demonic Cult with him.

HaMuk thought, ‘There’s no way a player that only just arrived on the 10th Floor would pass on the opportunity to learn a secret art of the Martial Realm. He should at least know that, but...’

They had naturally assumed that YuWon would come out sometime in the middle, but, as if he didn’t need a break or any other preparations, YuWon hadn’t emerged.

“And I’m not sensing any special traces of ki.”

The Fist Lord’s training was loud enough to shake the mountaintop. Meanwhile, YuWon hadn’t let out a sound nor any trace that he was even alive. There was a stark contrast between the two.

‘The Fist Lord entered seclusion training for three months. His goal is probably to resume training, which he hadn’t been making much progress in,’ thought HaMuk.

People thought that he was going overboard while trying to face a player from just the 10th Floor. But HaMuk thought maybe it was natural for the Fist Lord to act this way after seeing YuWon’s duel against JaRyong and taking YuWon’s words as provocation.

And so, YuWon should have displayed an appropriate response, but to his dismay, YuWon was silent as the dead inside his training chamber.

“What training do you think he’s doing? He’s beyond quiet.”

“I’m wondering that too. I don’t think he’d have spent the past month only meditating.”

“I heard that he took all sorts of medicinal ingredients from the medical house...”

“Wait,” HaMuk interrupted JaRyong. “Be quiet for just a second.”

Tmp—

He felt a presence inside the training chamber.

YuWon, who had been still this entire time, was starting to move.

The sound of his movements grew closer.

HaMuk honed in on YuWon's steps and said, "... He's coming out."

Rumble—

The door of the training chamber opened.

Chapter 57

YuWon, who had exited the training chamber after almost a month, looked skinnier. His face was thinner, and his skin was a pale white from not having seen the sun in such a long time.

'What the...?'

'Has he been sick and not training?'

'Is it because of the medicinal ingredients?'

'By the looks of it, he won't even last a single technique, let alone three...'

HaMuk and JaRyong's heads were filled with all different thoughts on YuWon. Though you weren't supposed to judge a player by their outward appearance, that was how bad YuWon was looking.

"Are you guys here to welcome me?" YuWon asked HaMuk and JaRyong who had been waiting at the entrance of the training chamber.

Despite his sickly appearance, YuWon was walking just fine. In fact, his gait looked even more stable than before.

HaMuk didn't fail to notice this detail.

'Did he learn a stepping technique while he was inside?'

YuWon had gotten pretty close to him, and HaMuk responded while trying to hide what he had just thought.

"We just stopped by in passing. So, did you manage to make any progress while you were inside the...?" HaMuk suddenly shut his mouth mid-sentence.

YuWon put on a new pair of clothes from the female servant that was waiting for him nearby.

There was a thick smell of medicinal herbs surrounding YuWon, which was the reason why HaMuk stopped talking.

"I heard that he grabbed all sorts of medicinal ingredients from the medical house..."

That was something that HaMuk had heard plenty of times. He had heard the rumors that because the challenger took a huge amount of medicinal ingredients and antidotes, the medical house was short on supplies.

HaMuk had wondered what he'd needed so many medicinal ingredients for. Getting injured during martial arts training wasn't uncommon, but there was no way he would need so much medicine.

“Did you actually consume all of that?” HaMuk asked.

JaRyong also picked up on the thick scent of medicinal herbs from YuWon and ran inside the training chamber. He wanted to check if the inside of the training chamber also stank of herbs.

“I’m hungry,” YuWon said while rubbing his stomach that had only seen bitter medicinal ingredients and antidotes for a month. “Let’s first grab some food.”

* * *

Clatter, clatter—

Rip, chomp—

Yuwon ate up his food like a savage. After tearing apart a chicken leg and shoving it in his mouth, he pointed at the vegetable stir-fry with his chopsticks before he was even done chewing. And at the same time, he looked around at the other foods on the table.

HaMuk, who was dining on the opposite side of the table, stopped his hand and asked, “Did you starve yourself for a month or something?”

There were grain balls inside the training chamber. Though they weren’t delicious, one could satiate their hunger and get the necessary nutrition by eating them.

There could have been some mistake and the training chamber might have had no grain balls, but if that was the case, he would have left the training chamber much sooner.

“I had planned on coming outside at least once so I wouldn’t have any reason to eat those nasty things.”

“... So you did starve?”

“Yep.”

After answering, YuWon continued to feast.

To have actually starved himself for a month... HaMuk couldn’t believe it. He then thought how technically YuWon hadn’t been starving since his stomach was full of something, just not food.

‘I can’t believe he actually ate all those medicines,’ HaMuk thought.

The scent of various medicinal ingredients still hadn’t dissipated.

‘Where did he use all those ingredients? He doesn’t look injured. Was he poisoned or...?’

HaMuk’s train of thought came to a halt and his eyes widened. Poisoning. That would explain all this.

Among elixirs, there were a few that were hard to consume due to their strong poison. In those cases, the poison was often more powerful than its effect as an elixir, so it was more common to simply use them as poisons instead.

But (not-so) hypothetically speaking, what if someone could get an infinite amount of antidotes provided to them, regardless of how many points they were worth...

‘That adds up. A poisonous elixir...’

But there was still a lingering question in his mind.

‘How poisonous was the elixir?’

HaMuk had stopped caring about the meal. He was busy staring at YuWon, who had cleared almost all the food on the table, including his own.

Then, as soon as the meal was over...

“I’ll be on my way then.”

With his stomach now full, YuWon got up without any hesitation.

After just a single hearty meal, YuWon’s pale and sickly appearance was nowhere to be seen.

“Where are you headed?”

“I’m headed to the martial arts library.”

“To the library?”

“Yes.”

Now that YuWon had finished his first order of business, it was time to prepare for his next course of action.

‘Figures. As a player, training martial arts for two months is bound to be better than leveling up a couple of times...’ thought HaMuk.

For the first time since YuWon had made it to the Heavenly Demonic Cult, his actions seemed reasonable.

HaMuk nodded his head as he spoke, “Just remember that there are restrictions to the books you can check out.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Well then...” YuWon gave a short goodbye to HaMuk before leaving.

After asking the servant assigned to him, he was guided to a large building with dozens of martial artists on guard.

While following the servant, YuWon closely observed the martial artists.

‘They all seem like players.’

He couldn’t tell if they were Pure-Bloods like HaMuk or JaRyong, but they were all players that had climbed somewhat high up the Tower.

Among them, there was even a player that appeared much more skilled than HaMuk. YuWon guessed that he might have even been pretty close to being a Ranker.

‘No, there might even be a real Ranker amongst them.’

YuWon looked over at the man that was standing guard right in front of the library. He had the most normal-looking face, and he was wearing a plain outfit, but YuWon was sure that he was the one in charge here.

‘The security is tight.’

They had placed one of the few Rankers of the Heavenly Demonic Cult here.

‘I guess that’s only natural.’

The martial arts library was the most important place of every martial school since the records saved inside were basically the roots and foundations of their schools. It was essentially everything for a school.

So of course it would be even more sacred for the Heavenly Demonic Cult, considered the strongest martial school, as well as the origin of the Heavenly Demon, the strongest martial artist.

‘This means that it’ll be impossible for me to view any information beyond what I’m permitted.’

This wasn’t just a test of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. The martial schools of the Martial Realm’s tests were recognized by the Tower’s system, and the Cult was no different. This was the Tower’s test. And the Tower’s test wasn’t so flimsy as to easily let someone view information beyond what they were permitted.

“Is this really necessary? Even without a guard, I wouldn’t be able to see it anyway,” YuWon asked, annoyed by the watch of the guards following him.

The martial artist who YuWon thought was a Ranker answered, “It’s a standard procedure. Please follow it.”

He was at least more respectful than HaMuk. YuWon had heard that most of the martial artists of the Cult were combative and lacked manners.

After hearing his answer, YuWon stopped complaining. Since he was in the middle of taking the Cult’s test, he knew that they wouldn’t interfere or butt in with what he was doing...

‘As long as I stay within the lines that is.’

After complying with the simple procedures, YuWon was able to step foot inside the library.

The building had a high ceiling, and there were bookshelves stacked all the way up to it.

“Wow...”

Even YuWon couldn’t help but voice his amazement.

How many books could there be in here? Hundreds of thousands? Maybe millions?

It was simply one massive library.

“You are not allowed to go into the area connected by that door. Please keep that in mind, but feel free to browse any books inside here.”

After telling him that, the head guard stepped to the side of the room so as to not get in his way.

YuWon was surprised by the fact that there was a dust-covered steel door where the head guard had pointed to. He was amazed that there were even more books.

‘Does that mean that these are all just the low-rank martial arts?’

The Heavenly Demonic Cult had a history of thousands of years. They existed even before entering the world of the Tower, and they endlessly worked to create, invent, and advance martial arts. And this martial arts library was the essence of that very cult.

‘It’s even more impressive than I had imagined.’

YuWon had previously seen the martial arts library of various martial schools, like the NamGung Clan’s. He had been invited by martial schools that had wanted to leave a good impression on him, as he had been a player that was soon to become a Ranker.

‘It’s got to be at least three... no, four times larger than that of the NamGung Clan’s.’

YuWon grabbed the first book that was within his reach and checked it out.

The letters of the martial realm were automatically translated by the system.

‘This must be a fist technique that’s based on the Eight Extreme Fists. It’s more complicated, which results in more destructive power, but at the cost of defense.’

Since he opened it, YuWon thought he might as well try it, mimicking the drawings in the book.

As he had previously managed to pass the test on the 10th Floor, he already had some knowledge of martial arts.

Mimicking the forms didn’t last very long.

Tak—

YuWon closed the book.

‘I already knew this, but martial arts just don’t suit me.’

In the Tower where the power of the system existed, martial arts was a slow and frustrating field of study. Unless one had real talent for martial arts, learning them to become stronger simply wasn’t efficient.

After putting the book back in its place, YuWon started looking around the massive library. There were an endless number of books. It made YuWon wonder how he would ever manage to read through all of them.

Still, he didn’t have a choice. Looking through a single library would beat searching through every nook and cranny of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

‘There’s no way three months was just given arbitrarily.’

The Tower did not test the impossible because an impossible test lost its meaning as a test. That was the unchanging law that YuWon remembered.

But this test had a nearly impossible level of difficulty for a normal player.

‘Not only do I have to withstand three techniques from a Ranker, it’ll be the Fist Lord’s, no less.’

This wasn’t a test that should have been given to a player who had only just reached the 10th Floor.

When the test was first explained to him, YuWon thought something was odd. Of course, he thought he was capable of passing the test, and he did try to challenge it right away, thinking that he could gain a bigger reward by completing it faster, but that didn’t brush away the feeling of oddness.

‘The key things for clearing this test are the three months of time and the resources provided to the player.’

And that’s why YuWon came to the library to find it.

‘There’s two months left.’

Tmp—

Yuwon started thoroughly searching the martial arts library.

‘I need to find it within one month, max.’

Flip, flip—

Yuwon opened up a book, flipped through the first chapter, and put it back. There was no need to read it thoroughly. It was a daunting task, to skim and sort through hundreds of thousands of books one by one.

In reality, it was an impossible task to read all these books. One couldn’t decide which of these countless books to learn by first reading through them all.

There were plenty of ways to cut down time, such as checking the category of the book, inspecting the exterior and title, as well as skimming through the first chapter, because YuWon already had a hunch.

‘This is a cultivation technique. This is a sword technique. This is... a meditation technique? There was something like this?’

What YuWon wanted wasn’t something like a sword technique, a dao technique, or a stepping technique.

‘It has to be here...’

The Fist Lord was one of the leaders of the Heavenly Demonic Cult, not to mention a Ranker, as well as one of the strongest martial arts masters in the Martial Realm. There had to be a clue somewhere in here on how to go up against Pung BaekLim.

‘... The origins of the Heavenly Demon God.’

Chapter 58

“Half a month?”

“Yes. Apparently, he’s been browsing the martial arts library for that long.”

MuGuek put down his teacup after hearing the report from his subordinate.

He had already heard that YuWon had exited the training chamber. He thought YuWon would just pick a few martial arts and go back into the training chamber, but for him to have holed up inside the library for half a month now...

“What is he doing in there?”

“When I checked in on him, he appeared as if he was planning on skimming through every single book.”

“All of them?”

MuGuek himself had been inside the martial arts library a few times. He’d even looked through a few martial arts books as well.

To skim through all those books would be impossible to do in three years, let alone three months.

“First he grabbed a mountain of medicinal ingredients from the medical house, and now this. He’s just doing one weird thing after another.”

“I personally don’t think he’s someone the Lords should be mindful of, sir.”

Of course the subordinate thought that. It was natural for players that reached the Martial Realm on the 10th Floor to learn and practice martial arts. Though it was a personal choice to really try and master it, YuWon’s current actions seemed like a complete waste of time.

“Do you think his actions are weird?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I think so as well.”

MuGuek looked at his reflection on the teacup.

“His thoughts and actions are entirely unpredictable.”

He had expected YuWon to train hard inside the training chamber for three months since there was really nothing else he could do. Yet YuWon’s actions continued to defy his expectations.

A faint smile appeared on MuGuek’s face.

“The more he breaks my expectations, the more my hopes for him grow.”

After seeing YuWon up close, MuGuek had gotten a weird weird feeling.

The power that he sensed from YuWon wasn’t all that remarkable. Of course, it was unbelievable for a player that had just arrived on the 10th Floor, but it was nothing compared to Rankers that stood at the top of the Tower.

However...

‘I can see it in his eyes.’

MuGuek could tell that YuWon was sure to become a Ranker one day.

The greater one's goals and aspirations, the further one's eyes were able to see. That's all that MuGuek thought it was when he first saw YuWon, but that was no longer it.

"Let's start right away."

MuGuek got a different feeling from him, seeing him confidently ask for the test against the Fist Lord right away.

'It doesn't seem like he's aiming to become something great, he just already is...'
MuGuek thought.

YuWon wasn't being prideful and overconfident. To him, this was only natural. Compared to the world that he was looking at, the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test was small and insignificant.

This was simply a stop in his long journey, and YuWon was already looking far beyond this test.

"He's looking at a place much higher than here," said MuGuek.

* * *

Another month went by. A total of two out of the three promised months had now passed.

YuWon had only managed to skim through half of the books in the martial arts library by now.

Thump—

YuWon closed the book he was reading.

The guards watching over YuWon expected him to put the book back in its place as he had been doing all this time. But this time, it was different.

YuWon grabbed the book while mumbling to himself, "I found it."

It had been a month since he'd been holed up inside the martial arts library, only eating the grain balls and barely getting any sleep.

YuWon finally exited the martial arts library.

And then, another month passed by.

* * *

"One month inside the training chamber. One month inside the martial arts library.
And then another month inside the training chamber..."

After coming out of seclusion training, the Fist Lord was told the news after he spent a whole day resting.

The Heavenly Demonic Cult was disconnected from the outside world. Nothing of note really ever happened inside the Cult, so the only interesting news was information regarding YuWon.

"Maybe I did all that for nothing."

There was nothing special about the actions that YuWon had demonstrated for the past three months. He consumed elixirs and medicinal herbs, then trained for a month after selecting a martial art from the library.

A month. It was barely enough time to master a martial art, even with the power of the system. He would be like a fledgling that only just learned how to walk. Despite that, YuWon claimed he would block three of his techniques.

“My seclusion training is going to go to waste.”

The Fist Lord donned his martial arts uniform and left his residence.

The stage was going to be the martial arts training ground for sword practice, and the martial artists of the Cult were already crowding around to watch.

“Is it starting soon?”

“It’s going to be a rare feast for the eyes.”

“It’s not everyday one gets to see the skills of the Fist Lord.”

“I heard that that YuWon kid is pretty famous on the lower floors.”

“It’s not just the lower floors. I heard even the upper floors are in a riot with even the major guilds trying to get in contact with him.”

“I’m sure the major guilds already know he’s here.”

“But isn’t he still just a newbie that just got to the 10th Floor?”

“Did you forget what happened to the vice-captain of the Black Tempest Squad?”

“Oh, right.”

The reason why everyone was excited for this test wasn’t just because there hadn’t been a player to challenge the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test in a while. It was because of Kim YuWon, a player that smashed through each floor’s test, dominated the rankings, and set achievements that even the highest Rankers of the Tower couldn’t accomplish.

Because YuWon was the challenger, people of the Cult had high hopes—hopes that he would become the first player to clear the Cult’s test.

If YuWon could clear the Cult’s test and climb the Tower, the revival of the Cult wouldn’t just be a pipe dream.

“Heheheh—”

After listening in on the crowd by increasing his hearing abilities, the Fist Lord let out a silent laugh.

The subordinate that followed behind him remained as quiet as possible, watching his step because the Fist Lord was emanating so much fighting spirit. The subordinate was afraid that if he got too close, the Fist Lord would crush his entire body with a single blow.

“Everyone’s full of expectation,” said the Fist Lord.

It was true. Everyone was indeed betting their hopes on YuWon. Some were even literally betting their points on whether or not YuWon would pass the test.

The Fist Lord found this all distasteful. No matter how great he may have been, how could a brat that just arrived on the 10th Floor be a match against him?

Of course, this wasn't a real match. It was simply to see if he could block three techniques. But, actually, it wasn't quite that simple.

"Why did the Heavenly Demon give such a test..."

He might have shone with potential, but YuWon was still just a player. And a player of a lower floor that had just arrived on the 10th Floor at that. Even though he possessed the skills to take down Cheon JaRyong in an instant, the Fist Lord thought that was far from enough to even block a single one of his techniques.

"It's time, sir," the subordinate alerted the Fist Lord, who had been standing motionless for a while.

This test was so important that it was rumored the Heavenly Demon himself would come to spectate it. So it was inexcusable for even the Fist Lord to be late to this occasion.

"Alright," the Fist Lord said as he started walking again, "... Let's go."

Tmp, tmp—

The Fist Lord finally arrived at the training grounds.

The grounds were completely silent, despite the fact that it was crowded full of people with no room to move.

The thousand martial artists of the Heavenly Demonic Cult were all gathered here. They were all holding their breaths, waiting for the stage to be ready.

"He's here."

"The Fist Lord..."

"Wow. Damn. This is my first time watching him in action."

"Getting to watch a Ranker fight is like a once-in-a-lifetime chance."

"I've seen him fight once before. It was seriously unbelievable..."

A bit of a clamor erupted at the appearance of the Fist Lord.

The commotion made him furrow his brow. Their conversations were so flippant.

But that was to be expected. Half the players here were from the outside. There were players like JaRyong and HaMuk that were born inside the Cult, but a large portion weren't. It was hard to expect loyalty to the Heavenly Demonic Cult or a sense of respect towards the Heavenly Demon from them. They were simply here to watch a good fight.

The Fist Demon got on the stage.

Yuwon had yet to arrive.

"Is this all?" the Fist Lord said.

It was a rhetorical question. He had eyes. He could see that the thousand people here were everyone in the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

“... The Cult truly has become weaker.”

Due to the organization being cut off from the outside, the number of players that joined decreased, and naturally the amount of people leaving increased. If it weren't for the authority of the High-Ranker the Heavenly Demon, they wouldn't have even lasted this long.

However, a single person wasn't enough.

“You're here,” said MuGuek, while approaching the Fist Lord. He had been waiting there for a while now.

The Fist Lord took a look around the training grounds, looking at the Cultists that had gathered. He asked, “Did we really have to make such a big deal out of this?”

“This test has not only caught the attention of the Martial Realm, but also various guilds in the Tower. It can't hurt to make it a big occasion.”

“You're such a loyal dog.”

Among the Four Lords, MuGuek, the Sword Lord, was the most clever out of all of them.

He had given permission for people to spectate the test through the martial artists of his Cult and even spread some rumors himself.

Among the martial artists of the Cult, quite a few of them had a connection to outside martial schools. So the fact that YuWon was taking the Cult's test was a perfect signal to use to alert the revival of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

“Now, the best thing that could happen here would be him actually blocking three of your techniques.”

“Sorry, but that won't happen.”

“True. This is a test.”

The Tower's system was not to be underestimated. If the Fist Lord purposely let YuWon pass, the test would be counted as invalid, and the test would be substituted with a different test of a similar difficulty. So going easy on YuWon here was pointless.

“Not just that, I don't intend on introducing him to the Heavenly Demon if he can't even pass the test with own strength.”

“Is that really your only reason?” asked MuGuek.

The Fist Demon huffed in response, “I'll at least try and not kill him.”

Tmp, tmp—

The crowd split, and from within the crowd, a person walked into the training grounds.

Yuwon, who had just exited the training chamber, had arrived at the stage of the test.

“You’re late,” said the Fist Lord.

“I thought I got here just in time? Also...”

The promised time was noon. The sun was currently right above their heads, so it was true that he’d arrived just in time.

“... The main character is supposed to show up last.”

YuWon put the sword on his waist into his inventory and instead pulled out 「Edge of Nightfall.」

“That’s a bizarre sword you have right there.”

After seeing that the stage was set, MuGuek stepped far away.

The training ground was hundreds of meters wide. It was the perfect location for a fight.

“Let’s see how much progress you’ve made in three months.”

Fwooo—

The Fist Lord started emanating fighting aura, and with that, a message popped up for YuWon, the participant of the test.

[The test will now begin.]

[Please dodge or block three techniques from ‘The Fist Lord Pung BaekLim.’]

The test had now started.

Watching the Fist Lord get into position, YuWon raised his sword. He was as tense as he could get.

YuWon said, “You’re going to regret it...”

Three techniques.

The first of three.

“... Giving me three months.”

The Fist Lord, Pung BaekLim, swung his fist.

Chapter 59

Crash—!

It felt as if the sound came first, but no actual sound was heard. It was an instinctive feeling. A spine-chilling, destructive fighting spirit.

Flash—!

A bright light filled YuWon’s eyes.

[Heavenly Destructive Lightning]

Everything where YuWon was standing was completely eradicated.

Crash—!

The imaginary sound from earlier could actually be heard this time.

YuWon looked at the spot where he had been standing just a second ago.

With a flash of blue lightning and the force from the punch, an area dozens of meters wide had become a dug out pit.

‘It would have been bad if I got caught up in that.’

A terrifyingly destructive technique. YuWon couldn’t believe this was the first technique.

“So you dodged it.”

Vzzt, crackle—

Lightning mana was encircling the Fist Lord’s fist. In the martial realm, they called it ki.

“Good judgment. If you’d tried to block it instead of dodging it, you’d have been dead meat,” said the Fist Lord.

YuWon believed him. In fact, YuWon would have been lucky if there was even a piece of his flesh left. Most players would have been burnt to ashes with no recognizable remains of them left over.

‘To be able to display this much power on the 10th Floor, this is crazy,’ thought YuWon.

This might have been a test, but for the penalty to be decreased to this extent on the 10th Floor, YuWon couldn’t help but think that the test’s difficulty made no sense.

‘Two left.’

YuWon had managed to survive five bouts against Chryses, a Ranker just like the Fist Lord. However, the penalty and the restriction of power was much stronger for Chryses, not to mention the fact that he was injured from his fight against Hephaestus.

This situation was different. The Fist Lord was many times stronger in comparison to the worn-out Chryses. And thanks to this being a test, his penalty and restrictions were weaker.

“If you can, I’d like to see you try dodging it again,” said the Fist Lord.

Earlier, he had swung his left fist. This time he swung his right fist, but very slowly.

The speed at which the Fist Lord was extending his arm was almost enough to make YuWon yawn. However...

‘It’s accelerating,’ YuWon noticed.

The slow-moving fist almost seemed like a lie as it started moving so fast that one almost couldn’t see it anymore.

[Hundred-Step Lightning Fist]

Rumble—!

The earth shook. The area that this second punch destroyed was even larger than his first. It was as if thunder and lightning rained down from the skies.

Crumble—

After having used his second technique, BaekLim squinted his eyes.

Once again, YuWon had moved ahead of time and escaped the range of his attack. This time it was much closer, but this was clearly something that wasn't possible just by being quick-footed.

'He moved before I even extended my fist,' the Fist Lord thought.

It felt as if YuWon was anticipating his movements.

That was when...

Fsss—

YuWon's eyes changed to red.

And it was no normal shade of red. Seeing how they changed suddenly, the Fist Lord could tell that this wasn't a normal phenomenon.

'It must be because of a skill,' he thought.

A skill that could read his attacks. He guessed that it must have been at least an A-rank skill because how else could he have avoided two of his punches?

"No wonder he was so confident," the Fist Lord remarked.

With such eyes and the ability to move that fast, it shouldn't be hard to dodge three attacks, no matter how destructive the attack might be. BaekLim finally understood why YuWon had wanted to start the test right away.

He scoffed. "How absurd."

Rumble—

Above Mt. Heaven, dark stormy clouds started to form. The peak of Mt. Heaven was above the clouds, so this was no natural phenomenon.

From Pung BaekLim's hand, blue lightning was gathering, and his surroundings were starting to spark.

"At the top of this Tower is a world you have no clue about," BaekLim spoke.

MuGuek, who was watching over the fight, clicked his tongue. He could tell that the aftershocks of the attack were going to go beyond the training grounds.

"I'll have to do something about that," MuGuek said.

"Let me," the Spear Lord said while getting up from his seat. He started preparing so BaekLim's attack wouldn't have an effect outside the arena.

YuWon could also tell this third technique was going to be completely different than the previous ones.

'I won't be able to dodge this,' he thought.

He guessed that the power of this attack would be less than the previous two because even BaekLim shouldn't be able to output enough power to completely annihilate this entire area. They might have been in the middle of a test, but as someone who wasn't even a High Ranker, the Fist Lord shouldn't have permission to use that much power.

'So in exchange for having a wider range, the attack should be that much weaker..'

Stomp—

YuWon planted his two feet firmly into the ground.

Spark, crackle—

The power of the 「Dark Divine Crystal」 traveled from his hand into his sword.

On top of that...

[Your arms have been imbued with the power of a Giant.]

[Partial Gigantification will occur.]

Crack, crack—

Both his arms became strengthened by [Gigantification.]

YuWon clenched his sword with both hands. He enchanted the sword with the energy of the 「Dark Divine Crystal,」 making the already black sword an even deeper shade of black.

Seeing YuWon's actions brought a smile to BaekLim's face. "So you plan on blocking it," he said.

YuWon's instincts told him that this attack would be unavoidable.

BaekLim had assumed that with eyes like that, he would have focused on dodging, so this was an unexpected call by YuWon. BaekLim thought that it would have been the right decision... if he hadn't been facing him. The attack he was about to use could neither be dodged nor blocked.

Rumble—

[Lightning Storm of Genesis]

The dark clouds parted and...

Crash—!

Lightning and thunder rained down upon the arena where YuWon and the Fist Lord stood.

* * *

Dense smoke filled the arena, mixed with kicked-up dirt and rubble.

Fsss—

Crackle, crackle—

The electricity that didn't dissipate traveled along the smoke.

The audience was speechless at the sight of the monstrous destructive force.

“So this is... a Ranker...”

“I can’t believe it...”

“And this is with him still being somewhat restricted by the penalty.”

“What is his true power even like then?”

“I... I almost... d-died...”

The people closest to the fight took a step back after seeing the scorched earth right in front of them.

Had the Spear Lord not blocked the attack, they would have ended up getting caught in the Fist Lord’s lightning strikes.

“So?”

“What’re the results?”

The dense smoke finally parted.

The first person to be visible was BaekLim. His smile and the expression of interest on his face was no longer there. In fact, it was plainly visible to everyone that he was in shock.

“...He blocked it,” said BaekLim.

He’d had a feeling that YuWon did, but it was now confirmed as YuWon was unveiled amidst the parting smoke.

[You blocked 3 techniques from ‘The Fist Lord – Pung BaekLim.’]

[You have passed the 2nd test of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.]

A message popped up.

Yuwon rubbed the back of one of his hands. Because he blocked the attack head-on, the electricity that he wasn’t able to stop or brush off ended up partially paralyzing him.

But that was it. YuWon had managed to block three techniques from the Fist Lord without any major injuries, even though the Fist Lord had given it his all.

‘So this is the power of combining martial arts and skills,’ YuWon thought.

Yuwon had only ever properly seen it a few times before.

The techniques that BaekLim displayed were no ordinary techniques. He was a martial artist who was born inside the Heavenly Demonic Cult, but like YuWon, he was a player and a Ranker that climbed the Tower. Naturally, he’d have dozens, if not hundreds of skills that he’d learned from the time that he’d spent climbing the Tower and mastering mana. And the three techniques that he’d used were the result of harmonizing the skills he’d mastered.

Tmp, tmp—

“I thought that you might be able to block it,” BaekLim said while walking towards YuWon. He no longer saw meaning in using large techniques from a distance. “But I didn’t expect you to come out this unscathed.”

The way BaekLim looked at YuWon changed. And the air around him started to change as well...

Vzzt, crackle—

Though it was faint, it was a sign of the penalty enacting itself. It meant that BaekLim was preparing to use his maximum power.

“Do you want to continue?” BaekLim asked.

YuWon had cleared the test. If YuWon refused, BaekLim had no right to forcefully continue it, and he’d then face the full effect of the penalty every time he attacked YuWon, not to mention that he’d be going against the Heavenly Demon’s will.

However...

[Would you like to continue this test?]

YuWon was very much willing to agree with the Fist Lord’s wishes.

“Of course,” YuWon said.

YuWon had yet to put away his sword.

BaekLim smiled wide. He looked at YuWon, his eyes filled with fighting spirit.

“If that’s the case...”

Bang—!

BaekLim smashed his two fists together, scaring the audience with the resulting thunderous sound.

“Let’s keep playing.”

Spark, crackle—

YuWon thought maybe this would be how Hargaan would be like when he eventually became a Ranker. The electricity that flowed from his fists felt like it would burn him just from being too close.

BaekLim no longer intended on judging YuWon while being restrained by the restrictions of the test. He intended to exchange hits with YuWon, not caring about the number of techniques used.

“Now, why don’t you attack fir—” BaekLim trailed off. As he was about to let YuWon have the first move, his face that had been full of excitement soured.

Crackle, flicker—

The electricity flowing around him started to waver.

BaekLim could see a faint heat shimmering right before YuWon’s eyes. It was some sort of physical manifestation of internal energy, no, mana.

Though it was half-baked, BaekLim could tell what it was right away. No, he could feel what it was.

“You...” BaekLim said, pointing towards YuWon, his hand wavering ever so slightly.

“How are you able to use the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit...?”

“It’s a bit lacking to call it the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit just yet,” YuWon boldly responded. “This is still nothing more than the shape of its base form.”

“Shape?”

“Shaped, also known as materialized mana. It’s a thing that has a will of its own,” YuWon said, looking at the heat shimmers that were forming around him. “This is merely a shell of the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit, and an incomplete one at that.”

The heat shimmers moved in a way that seemed like they were protecting YuWon, as if they actually had a will of their own.

Seeing this, BaekLim instinctively recoiled.

Crackle, crackle—

The electricity weakening around BaekLim was a sign of him wavering.

The BaekLim that looked like he was ready to punch YuWon at any moment suddenly seemed to have lost his morale.

‘Luckily, it appears to be effective,’ thought YuWon.

Pung BaekLim, the Fist Lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. He and the rest of the Four Lords were people that were born and raised inside the Cult where they had also learned martial arts. With exceptional talent for martial arts, they were among the few players that became stronger not by leveling up, but by training their martial arts. And that is how they had become Rankers, by mastering the martial arts of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

‘The Heavenly Demon’s Spirit is the root and foundation of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. It’s the materialization of the martial arts mastered by the Heavenly Demon, Cheon Mujin,’ YuWon thought.

Tmp—

Yuwon took a step towards Pung BaekLim.

Yuwon could feel BaekLim’s instinctive repulsion against the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit,] even if it was incomplete. He could feel BaekLim’s energy wavering.

‘If this was the real Heavenly Demon’s Spirit, I would be able to make him obey me with just a single sentence,’ thought YuWon.

The Heavenly Demon had absolute power and authority inside the Heavenly Demonic Cult, and the reason why he was worshipped as a god lied here—the martial artists of the Heavenly Demonic Cult could not defy the Heavenly Demon no matter what.

‘I can only hold the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit for three, four minutes at best.’

Vzzt—

Yuwon walked closer to BaekLim while extracting as much power out of the 「Dark Divine Crystal」 as possible.

‘Since I don’t have too much time...’

“As you asked, I’ll make the first move.”

Chapter 60

Rumble, crash—!

Boom—!

As the fist and sword clashed, the blastwave and mana rippled out in all directions.

The Fist Lord Pung BaekLim’s fist was wavering. Currently, he was fighting YuWon with all he had.

“Fight fairly, YuWon!” shouted the Fist Lord.

This was due to the faint energy of the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] that was emanating from YuWon.

“But I’m not doing anything underhanded, sir,” replied Yuwon.

Vzzzt—!

The energy of the 「Dark Divine Crystal」 fired out of YuWon’s sword as he pushed away the Fist Lord. And in that short instance, they traded blows.

[You blocked The Fist Lord Pung BaekLim’s 47th technique.]

Naturally, messages regarding the continuation of the test popped up in front of YuWon.

That’s right. This was a test. A test where YuWon had to block only three techniques.

Everyone in the Heavenly Demonic Cult had thought this was an impossible test, yet despite that...

“Is that the real Heavenly Demon’s Spirit?”

“It seems so.”

“It doesn’t even have a proper form, but...”

Yuwon was putting up an even fight against the Fist Lord.

“... How?”

“I heard he spent a whole month in the martial arts library. He must have obtained it there.”

“Is that where the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit is?”

“That’s nothing more than the bare-minimum form, but even if it’s just the shell, it’s still the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit.”

It wasn’t hard to figure out where YuWon had obtained the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit.] His whereabouts the past three months were no secret. However, that didn’t mean YuWon’s achievement was easy to discredit.

“This is just the second test, yet he’s managed to get his hands on the Heavenly Demon’s Spirit...”

The Sword Lord shivered, watching the energy radiating off of YuWon. He couldn’t believe this was a player that had just now reached the 10th Floor.

Other players, even with the help of the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit,] would have barely managed to stop three techniques from the Fist Lord. Actually, it was hard to even be sure of that.

The [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] might have had an absolute advantage over the martial arts of the Heavenly Demonic Cult, but this was nothing more than a shell of the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] at its most basic level. On the other hand, the Fist Lord was a Ranker who had been to the top of the Tower.

Despite that, YuWon was currently using that [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] to fight on equal footing with the Fist Lord.

“It’s quite possible...” the Sword Lord said while watching YuWon dash towards the Fist Lord, “that he might actually be worthy.”

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

Proofreader – BringTheRayn

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* * *

Crash—!

Another attack was traded.

Yuwon winced at the pain in his wrists. It was truly an awe-inspiring brute force.

[You blocked The Fist Lord Pung BaekLim’s 59th technique.]

Thwump—!

The Fist Lord was flung back as far as YuWon was. He had become weaker due to the influence of the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit,] but as time went on, his attacks were intensifying.

‘Is he getting used to it?’ thought YuWon.

Even for the Fist Lord, this was the first time he had fought against the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit.] It was only natural for him to be caught off-guard and fumble while reacting to it at first because, even for him, overcoming the uncomfortable feeling of aiming an attack at the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] was no easy task.

However, if that was the only factor, it didn’t explain how quickly the Fist Lord was becoming stronger.

‘It’s either that or my Heavenly Demon’s Spirit is weakening.’

It was most likely a combination of the two.

Vzzt—

A spark flew off of the Fist Lord's body that wasn't from his attack.

'The penalty,' YuWon thought.

YuWon could instinctively feel the next attack was going to be a big one. So he stopped himself mid-swing and tightly gripped his sword with both hands. On top of that, he activated [Gigantification] and maximized the power output of the 「Dark Divine Crystal.」

Flash—!

Crash—!

The sword rang from the heavy impact.

“Kgh...”

Yuwon's wrists ached again. Had he been using an ordinary sword, it would have been shattered into pieces.

'I should thank Ahjussi,' YuWon thought.

Whirr, whirrrr—

At the same time, three [Mana Blasts] appeared around YuWon and the Fist Lord.

The Fist Lord had known that YuWon was preparing a [Mana Blast,] yet he still ran at him, not caring about it.

[Colossal Fire x Mana Blast]

Boom, kaboom—!

Fire rained down upon the Fist Lord.

YuWon widened the gap between them by a few steps.

The Fist Lord's body was very lightly scorched.

“You're really sturdy,” remarked YuWon.

“Be proud of the fact that you even managed to hurt me this much,” the Fist Lord snapped back.

Fwoo—

With just a swing of his hand, he blew away the fire YuWon started with the [Mana Blasts.] It was clear that he wasn't a Ranker just for show.

Unless the Fist Lord excessively exerted his power and got greatly impacted by the penalty, it wasn't possible for YuWon to do proper damage against him by just using mana.

'If only the Heavenly Demon's Spirit was slightly more complete...'

YuWon shook his head while thinking of a few hypotheticals. His opponent wasn't a brand new Ranker like Chryses.

To begin with, fighting the Fist Lord wasn't a part of YuWon's plan.

Tak, tak—

The Fist Lord patted down his clothes, more bothered that his martial arts uniform was scorched over his actual body.

"I can't believe this," the Fist Lord spoke in a baffled tone. "For me, Pung BaekLim, to be unable to defeat a greenhorn that just arrived on the 10th Floor."

His words came from a place of pride over his skills, but anyone would have felt that way if they were in his shoes.

The players of the Tower called the players that haven't been able to overcome the roadblock that is the 10th Floor 'newbies.' And technically YuWon was a newbie, even if he was on his way to clearing the 10th Floor.

In a fight between a newbie and a Ranker, the result was obvious. That was why this test had the hidden piece the [Heavenly Demon's Spirit,] as well as a limit of three techniques. Despite that...

"This kind of put a dent in my self-esteem," the Fist Lord said while laughing out loud. Unlike earlier, this was a genuine laugh.

YuWon got into a stance. He didn't have any more time to play around.

"The Heavenly Demon's Spirit must be running out, seeing as how you're rushing," the Fist Lord said.

Of course the Fist Lord knew. It wasn't a big secret. No matter how much of a genius YuWon was, it would be an impossible task for anyone to use the [Heavenly Demon's Spirit] perfectly after having spent only a month learning it. So, naturally, it wouldn't be possible to hold the technique for a long time.

"Come at me with all you've got," said the Fist Lord.

Fortunately for YuWon, the Fist Lord's personality worked to his favor. He was a man that didn't know how to dodge. This was the reason why YuWon had picked the Fist Lord over the long-reaching Spear or the pretty standard Sword and Dao Lords.

The Fist Lord wanted to defeat YuWon before his [Heavenly Demon's Spirit] ended. He thought that would be the only way to recover at least a little bit of his pride.

Thump—!

The Fist Lord jumped.

YuWon in turn moved like a dancer.

Thud, crash—!

"I don't know where you learned such a thing, but that is also excellent!" the Fist Lord shouted while throwing out punches to break through YuWon's defenses.

As their duel went on longer, bigger beads of sweat ran down YuWon's forehead. And the [Heavenly Demon's Spirit] that was being maintained behind him started to become fainter.

YuWon was at his limits.

'It's over,' he thought.

Fsss—

The shape of the [Heavenly Demon's Spirit] behind Yuwon disappeared. And at the same time, the force behind the Fist Lord's punch changed.

Blast—!

It was an impact that felt like it could instantly snap his sword in half.

Krrrrk—

YuWon's body was pushed far back.

[You blocked The Fist Lord Pung BaekLim's 89th technique.]

The Fist Lord must have noticed the disappearance of the awkward feeling. He stopped for a second, opening and closing his fist, measuring his strength. Soon after, a smile came to his face.

"Finally, things get to be fun," said the Fist Lord.

"But things just became un-fun for me."

"Hahah! We're just getting started. Don't get wimpy on me now!"

Whoosh—

The only thing YuWon could see was the punch coming towards him.

He swung his sword, cutting in right between his face and the Fist Lord's fist.

Boom—!

YuWon flew back a distance of ten steps. For a second, he felt his body leave the ground.

"Hmm..."

YuWon noticed the clear difference. It was evident to him how much the Fist Lord had been bothered by the [Heavenly Demon's Spirit.]

'He's like a completely different person,' he thought.

YuWon had to make a decision, stat. A full-frontal fight was no longer an option.

[Cinder Eyes]

Fwoosh—

YuWon focused on maximizing the power of [Cinder Eyes.]

Whoosh—

He could see it. The Fist Lord's punch headed straight at him.

YuWon dodged the punch and tried to swing back, but...

‘I don’t have enough time,’ he thought.

Crash—!

He saw a punch coming in from the left. These movements were much more rapid than earlier.

YuWon felt a chill down his entire spine. He knew that if he took even a single hit, it would be bad.

Although he did have a pretty high Constitution, compared to his Strength or Arcane Power, it wasn’t all that impressive.

Just two hits. That’s all it would take for YuWon to be pummeled completely.

‘And that’s only if I manage to block it using Gigantification.’

YuWon looked at the Fist Lord’s eyes. He watched his eyes and his two hands and his feet. He tried to not miss a single movement of his muscles.

“Are you only going to dodge now?” said the Fist Lord.

He looked like he didn’t care either way. To begin with, it was nonsensical that YuWon was fighting him toe-to-toe. And now that the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] had worn off, the Fist Lord was confident that YuWon was no longer going to fight him head-on.

“Alright. Fine. Let’s see how long you can keep this up.”

Vzzzt—

Accepting the penalty, the Fist Lord continued to gather his ki. Large sparks flew around his hands while the martial arts training grounds started to become filled with his electric ki.

“Fist Lord!”

“This is beyond what is allowed in the rules—”

The Dao and Spear Lords tried to stop the Fist Lord, but the Sword Lord held them back.

“Let’s just watch.”

“But...”

“Even the Heavenly Demon is simply spectating.”

With that, the Dao Lord and the Spear Lord finally noticed Cheon MuJin, the Heavenly Demon, watching the fight from the sidelines.

This was, of course, not the only reason why the Sword Lord stopped the other two. “The one taking the test doesn’t want it to stop either,” he said.

This test was being held because of YuWon. He was the examinee, and he had in fact already passed the test. The only reason this fight was continuing was because he had chosen to. If he wanted to give up, he could at any moment. But...

‘The fact that he hasn’t means that he still has something up his sleeve,’ the Sword Lord thought.

The first three techniques were dodged or blocked. After that, he fought head-on using the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit.] And now that the [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] had worn off, this would be the best opportunity to properly check his skills.

‘To neither be surprised nor afraid despite facing the power of a Ranker...’ the Sword Lord pondered while looking at YuWon’s eyes. ‘He really is indeed...’

Rumble—!

The sound erupted from the fist that had gathered as much electric ki as it could.

The Fist Lord took a step towards YuWon, his fighting spirit at its peak.

Stomp—!

With a single step, he dug a hole into the ground.

At the same time, YuWon started walking towards the Fist Lord.

‘He’s not avoiding me?’ the Fist Lord thought in surprise.

The [Heavenly Demon’s Spirit] had already worn off. YuWon no longer had a way to defend himself. He had assumed with how much power he had gathered, YuWon would naturally try to dodge it, but instead, Yuwon walked into his attack range.

Smirk—

The Fist Lord could feel it. This was a short yet much longer duel than he had originally anticipated. But all things must come to an end.

“Alright,” the Fist Lord said. “Let’s end this.”

To that end, the Fist Lord shot out a single punch.