

## With The Gods 81

### Chapter 81

‘But that’s me,’ YuWon thought to himself.

He checked his title, ‘Vice-Lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.’

It was the next highest position in the Cult after the Lord, giving one the power to command players that joined the Cult.

The problem was that the Cult was currently dormant in the Martial Realm.

That meant...

‘They’re finally reemerging,’ YuWon hypothesized.

That was very much in the realm of possibility. The only reason why the Cult had been holed up in Mt. Heaven was due to the Heavenly Demon’s stubbornness to protect the Holy Fire. Now that their long wish had been fulfilled, it wasn’t strange for the Cult to start making moves.

‘And they chose the Grand Martial Arts Tournament as their first stage...’ YuWon thought while recollecting the Heavenly Demon’s face. ‘He’s a sly fox, unlike his appearance.’

The Heavenly Demon was known as the greatest martial arts master in the Martial Realm. Unlike NamGung JinWoon who just barely hadn’t managed to become a High Ranker, the Heavenly Demon had a high ranking even among High Rankers.

He was an incredibly talented martial artist and the leader who created the current Heavenly Demonic Cult.

Yuwon had no way of knowing if the rumors were started by someone within the Cult or if it was planned by the Heavenly Demon, but this wasn’t a bad situation for him.

‘If the Cult has started moving, they’ll become a great help,’ thought YuWon.

The Heavenly Demonic Cult, despite being a singular martial school, was debated as being one of the greatest forces in the Martial Realm.

In a way, YuWon had obtained a backing that was even greater than the one Hoon had.

“Seeing as it’s the first time the Heavenly Demonic Cult is making an appearance, the vice-lord has to be someone really skilled. I wonder if they’re a Ranker or a player. If they’re a Ranker, they won’t be able to compete in the tournament, so I won’t get a chance to face them,” Hargaan blabbered on.

Hargaan had the impression that the vice-lord of the Cult was likely a Ranker, but that was only natural.

The vice-lord had power within the Cult that was second only to the Lord. It was hard to imagine that the Cult would give such a position to a mere player.

“Didn’t you pass the Cult’s test? Do you know anything?” Hargaan asked.

“It’s me.”

“Huh? What is?”

“It’s me. I’m the vice-lord,” YuWon explained nonchalantly.

Hargaan looked stunned for a bit, unable to process what he had heard. But when the gears started turning again and he understood YuWon’s words, his eyes widened.

“You’re the vice-lord?” Hargaan asked in shock.

“Yep.”

“Isn’t the vice-lord a position that’s similar to the vice-head of a noble clan?”

“Something like that.”

Hargaan’s jaw dropped.

He had heard that YuWon was the first person to pass the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.

Hargaan himself had managed to pass the NamGung Clan’s test which was famous for its difficulty, but the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test was known to be even harder.

He knew that YuWon was an amazing guy, but he didn’t know it was to this degree...

“Was that the reward? The position of vice-lord?”

YuWon nodded his head in response.

“Gods be damned...” Hargaan mumbled with regret, his back against the wall.

“Maybe I should have challenged it.”

Unlike YuWon, Hargaan had a lot of interest in factions.

The Heavenly Demonic Cult was undeniably the greatest faction in the Martial Realm. Even if their current finances weren’t stellar, they had multiple Rankers in their midst, and just having the Heavenly Demon, a High Ranker, put them above the NamGung Clan.

And the vice-lord was someone who was able to wield the power to command that organization. To Hargaan, that was the most tempting reward one could possibly obtain.

“Once this gets out of the bag, your value is going to shoot up even higher,” Hargaan commented.

“I have no intention of joining any group.”

“I know that, but the other guilds are going to think differently,” Hargaan said with a smile on his face. “You know, tomorrow’s going to be quite fun.”

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The day of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament dawned.

Yang Wonil, a player of the School of the Sapphire Sword strutted along with his shoulders held high.

‘It’s finally the Grand Martial Arts Tournament,’ he thought.

The head of the Sapphire Sword had high hopes for the tournament.

Not only was it the biggest event held in the Martial Realm, it was an event that was well-known within the Tower.

If a player that was associated with the School of the Sapphire Sword performed well in the tournament, the status of the school would immediately go up within the Martial Realm.

‘I have to get in the good eyes of the head this time around,’ Wonil thought.

For that purpose, he had started climbing the Tower again, reaching the 18th Floor. Considering the rules of the tournament only permitted players under the 25th Floor to participate, he had made it to a pretty high floor.

Also...

‘While at the Sapphire Sword, I honed and sharpened my sword.’

He hadn’t just been killing time by remaining in the Martial Realm. For this day, he had been practicing the martial arts of the Sapphire Sword again and again. And in that process, he had raised his stats, levels, and skill proficiency, making it easy for him to surpass the 15th Floor, which he was previously stuck on.

Clench—

He felt confident.

In this Grand Martial Arts Tournament, even if it wasn’t winning, he had to place high.

And for that...

“I’ll have to at least pass the preliminaries with ease.”

Step, step—

The stage of the tournament was now within eyesight.

Tens of thousands of players were participating in the tournament, and the rules of the preliminaries were simple. Ten players would get on the stage at once, and the last person standing would move onto the main leg of the tournament.

No one knew until the preliminaries started who were in each group of ten.

‘I wonder who’ll be here,’ Wonil thought as he climbed up on the stage.

“Whoooooah!”

“They’re coming!”

“Who’s all here?”

“Didn’t he just get to the 10th Floor?”

“It’s Yang Wonil! The bastard of the School of the Sapphire Sword!”

“Yang Wonil? Where?”

The stage was massive.

It was a special stadium made for the Grand Martial Arts Tournament. And towering above that stadium were seats that could accommodate an audience of a hundred thousand people.

The stadium itself was wide enough where thousands of people could use it at once. Its massive size was also made for Rankers to duel each other on. Built using the technology of other floors, this stadium was one of the greatest architectural works in the Tower.

Wonil puffed up his chest. ‘There are some people that recognize me,’ he thought to himself.

Being called a bastard wasn’t pleasant, but people still knew his name as he had been active in the Martial Realm for quite a while now.

‘I’m finally on this stage.’

He had been going at it for a long time just for this day.

With tensions running high, he looked around.

The player that he was most on guard against was the player from the SeoMoon clan.

‘Even if he just got to the 10th Floor, a Pure-Blood from the SeoMoon noble clan should not be underestimated. If avoidable, I shouldn’t face him directly and work around him,’ Wonil strategized.

Players from noble clans, even if they weren’t players of high floors, still had a certain level of skill.

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Wonil kept SeoMoon Chang in his mind as he turned his gaze.

‘I don’t have any intel on the other guys. Most of them must be nobodies... Huh?’

Wonil’s thought was interrupted as a familiar face came into his line of sight.

It didn’t come to him right away, but it didn’t take long for him to remember who it was.

‘That guy is...’ Wonil recollected.

It was an incident that happened while he was recruiting new players on the orders of the head of the Sapphire Sword.

It was the guy that humiliated him.

‘It’s him,’ Wonil thought with fury in his eyes.

He hadn’t been able to find him until now, yet he had casually run into him at the Grand Martial Arts Tournament.

‘It’s as the old proverb says, ‘enemies are bound to meet head-on on a narrow road.’”

He had been honing his skills while climbing the Tower. Not only was he stronger now, he wasn’t going to underestimate him this time. Wonil was confident he could easily wipe the floor with a guy that had only recently made it to the 10th Floor.

As Wonil was thinking, ‘You’re dead meat...’

“I-It’s Kim YuWon!” someone shouted.

That created an instant commotion, like pouring oil onto a fire.

“Kim YuWon?”

“Huh? Really?”

“Where? Who said that?”

After Kim Yuwon’s presence was pointed out by someone that knew his face, the audience started their search for him.

YuWon was the player who was the center of attention of this tournament, but as he didn’t do much other than climb the Tower, his face wasn’t well-known.

There were even people saying that YuWon might be the greatest player in the history of the Tower because he was setting a new record on every test.

‘I’m fucked,’ Wonil dreaded. Why did he have to end up in this group out of all the possible groups?

He was already thinking he was unlucky to end up with SeoMoon Chang in his group, but he had, in fact, ended up in the same group with the worst opponent possible.

‘Since it’s come to this...’ Wonil thought while glaring at his enemy, ‘I’m going to at least cut you down.’

In fact, it was possible that even if he lost here, things could go well for him if he stood out in the preliminaries since the audience was bound to remember the match where YuWon was present.

[10]

[9]

[8]

[...]

A number that was floating in the air started counting down.

Wonil desperately waited for the number to become one.

Finally, the numbers counted down, and...

[1]

Dash—

Shing—!

Wonil leapt forward and drew the sword on his waist.

“Remember me?” Wonil shouted.

Slash—!

Wonil's sword cut through thin air.

He thought he would cut him down, but his target had managed to sidestep his attack.

His attack missed by a thin margin, so Wonil moved lightly on his feet and continued with his technique.

"I haven't forgotten about the humiliation you presented me that day..."

Bump—

Wonil felt a slight impact on the bottom of his jaw. It didn't hurt much, as if it was a punch from a kid.

'What was that?' Wonil wondered.

He couldn't tell what it was that hit his jaw, so he decided to just ignore it since whatever he was hit by, he wouldn't feel a thing no matter how many times he was hit by it.

Or so he thought...

'Huh?'

No matter how much strength he tried to muster, he couldn't move.

Klang—

His hand gave out, and his sword fell to the stadium floor.

While looking at his opponent's face, he felt a sense of despair. For things to end right when they had only just started...

"My... name is... Yang..." as Wonil tried to say his name...

Thud—

... His body flopped onto the ground.

"So, who are you?" YuWon asked, confused at the guy that suddenly charged at him and got knocked out by a single hit.

This Yang guy spoke as if he had been wronged by YuWon, but YuWon had no recollection of meeting someone like him during any part of the test.

'Did he already faint?' YuWon wondered.

He didn't even hit him hard, so he shrugged it off as someone who was just weak.

And with that, YuWon stopped paying attention to Wonil, who laid on the floor, knocked out and drooling.

There were now nine players left.

With Wonil's surprise attack, people's attention was already centered on YuWon.

"What did he just do?"

"I couldn't even see anything."

“... That guy must be Kim YuWon.”

“Are you sure?”

“I heard the rumors. Black eyes and black hair. Dons the Pyromancy Robe. He matches the description.”

“Then it must be him.”

All the players in the same group were wary of YuWon.

It was only natural, since only one player could make it to the main stage of the tournament. Without taking down YuWon, it was impossible to move further on in the tournament.

“It seems like everyone knows now...” YuWon said.

He had wanted to take it easy in the preliminaries, but he’d changed his mind.

YuWon slowly drew his sword while looking around at the other eight players, saying, “You can come at me one at a time, or you can fight me all at once.”

Shhhnk—

A sharp sound rang out while he drew his blade.

YuWon decided not to avoid the attention he had gathered.

There was a high level of tension filling the stadium.

“Let’s finish this quickly and not drag this out,” YuWon announced.

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Chapter 82

Fwoosh—!

With a swing of the sword, mana was diffused into the surrounding area.

This wasn’t a special skill but instead a simple technique that utilized mana, a form of sword pressure.

“Agh!”

“Kgh!”

“Wh-What skill is this?!”

A few got flung away while the few guys who were a bit skilled managed to defend themselves using a skill. But with a single attack, their formation had been broken up.

Dash—

YuWon started charging towards the players.

“He’s coming toward us!”

“No! He’s already here!”

“To the right!”

“No, he’s left!”

“Which fucking side is it?!”

As if they had made a promise beforehand, the players tried to cooperate with each other, but the results weren’t so stellar.

Pshk—!

“Kugh...!”

Along with a sword slash to the chest, a strong impact flung a player many meters into the air.

Whoosh—

The player came back down, slamming into the ground.

Afterwards, the other players started to shout over one another.

“Over here!”

“It’s not a sword!”

“Then what is it?”

“I don’t know! But it felt more like a blunt object...”

“Is it maybe the flat part of the sword?”

It was absolute chaos.

Almost no one was capable of keeping up with YuWon’s movements with their eyes, but SeoMoon Chang could at least see YuWon’s faintly moving afterimages.

‘Over there,’ Chang thought.

He could see the tip of the sword moving, but he couldn’t react to it.

Fwoosh—!

The sword reached him a beat, no, a few beats faster than he had anticipated.

‘I’m dead...!’ Chang braced himself.

Tap—

It was a light hit, like an adult scolding a child.

Wham—!

“Kgh...!”

A kick launched Chang into the air, and he tumbled across the ground.

He barely managed to stop himself from throwing up all his insides.



“Cough, kgh!”

Chang vomited blood while hacking and coughing then grit his teeth to endure the pain in his chest.

‘That’s at least a few broken ribs,’ Chang thought to himself.

It was impossible for him to continue fighting in this state. Heavens knew if he was still capable of fighting, but he had lost his will.

One had to at least be in the same ballpark for it to be a real fight, so with how large of a gap there was between him and YuWon, it was no wonder he didn’t want to fight anymore.

“U-Ugh...”

“Kgh...”

Players that had been beaten up by YuWon were groaning and rolling on the ground. Half had fainted while the other half were lying down with injuries.

There were no fatalities from what Chang could see.

‘Everyone’s alive?’ he couldn’t believe it.

This was a tournament where people fought using weapons, so it was inevitable for some to end up dead.

However, it wasn’t by chance that in such a tournament not a single person died.

‘Is he going easy on us?’ Chang wondered, unable to believe it.

People who decided to participate in the Grand Martial Arts Tournament had a certain level of confidence in their skills. In such a situation, Chang had a hard time believing that YuWon went easy on not just one or two opponents but while facing eight of them simultaneously.

That’s when he remembered...

‘Earlier..’ Chang thought back to how YuWon’s sword had a clear shot at his head. He had braced himself for death, but instead of being cut down, he was only kicked.

In the heat of the moment, he thought that the sword must have been a fakeout, and his kick was the real attack, but after thinking things through, those two movements connected too unnaturally.

“Ha... Haha...” Chang was baffled.

This might have just been the preliminaries, but in ‘The Grand Martial Arts Tournament’ YuWon was acting like an adult facing children.

\* \* \*

After his match was over, YuWon waited for Hargaan’s match. Hargaan’s fight was the match after the next.

“Winner, Hargaan!”

“Whooooa—!”

“He’s amazing!”

“He took down everyone by himself...”

“There was another guy like Kim YuWon?!”

Vzzt, vzzt—

There were still remnants of the Hargaan’s electric attack in the arena.

From the AOE electric attack to physical abilities and mana, everything about Hargaan was on a level that was not of a low-floor player.

Even YuWon was impressed, understanding how Hargaan was managing to rise in the rankings with each subsequent floor.

It was an unbelievable growth speed.

YuWon had heard that he had just cleared the 25th Floor, but his skills matched those of high-floor players.

‘His potential might be even higher.’

Hargaan’s mana resembled Zeus’s the most. From his talent at manipulating electricity, along with his skills and appearance, he was a spitting image of Zeus.

‘He’s going to be a force to be reckoned with when he becomes a Ranker.’

YuWon found it worthwhile having waited to see his match, but with that, he got up from his seat. He saw no reason to watch the remaining matches and left.

As he was leaving the first floor exit...

“It’s him!” shouted a faintly familiar voice.

YuWon stared at a man pointing his finger at him.

His face was also somewhat familiar...

“Right,” YuWon finally remembered. “What was your name?”

... But he only remembered the face. He couldn’t remember the name.

The man’s face turned red from feeling looked down upon.

“It’s Yang Wonil!” the man shouted, approaching YuWon, huffing and puffing in anger.

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... Or at least he tried to approach YuWon.

“Wait,” a man standing behind Wonil grabbed him by his shoulder.

YuWon got an uneasy feeling while looking at the man.

‘Is he a Ranker?’ YuWon wondered.

The man's strength was on a completely different level than Wonil. He was almost two meters tall with a muscular build. It was clear that this man was strong.

"I apologize. A disciple of our school was too rude to you," the man said.

"Who are you?" YuWon asked.

"I am the head of the School of the Sapphire Sword. My name is Moon SoBaek."

YuWon had an inkling that he would be no ordinary player. A head of a martial school meant that he should have at least been on the level of a Ranker.

For such a person to come here in person... From YuWon's experience, they usually only had one business.

"I'm not interested," YuWon declined.

"You don't even want to hear what I have to say?" SoBaek asked.

"Are you not here to recruit me into your school?"

SoBaek looked slightly shocked, but that was only for a split second. He immediately returned back to his composed self. It seemed that he had somewhat expected such a response.

"That's right. I heard that you rejected all the recruitment offers from major guilds," SoBaek said.

"Yes."

"To be clear, the School of the Sapphire Sword isn't a guild. We might be a part of the Martial Guild, but we are more of a martial school than a guild," SoBaek tried to persuade YuWon.

YuWon thought his logic was hilarious. Telling someone to join their school without a test is no different than a guild recruitment offer. In essence, it was asking him to be affiliated with them.

"I'm not sure if you're aware, but our Sapphire Sword School has a long history. We might have weakened a bit in recent times, but our school can be said to be the first school to continue on the tradition of the Martial Realm," SoBaek went on a long, noisy sales pitch. "If you join us, we will be able to achieve everything for our school. I realized it the moment I saw you fighting in the arena. The future of our school is..."

SoBaek was taken aback. He didn't expect YuWon to just cleanly cut him off and walk away. He did think YuWon might reject him, but not so firmly and easily. He thought he'd at least get a chance to chat over a cup of tea or something.

"Please wait a moment," SoBaek said while grabbing YuWon's shoulder.

YuWon stared at SoBaek.

SoBaek was no longer smiling, and with the smile gone, it revealed his harsh face.

‘He looks rough,’ YuWon thought, thinking that his face looked like that of a menacing bandit. If he’d had a beard, it would have been the cherry on top.

Mana filled with fighting spirit shimmered around SoBaek.

Yuwon was able to read the anger hiding behind SoBaek’s mana.

“It seems you haven’t fully understood me,” SoBaek spoke.

“What did I not understand?”

“This isn’t an offer,” SoBaek said while tightly gripping his shoulder. “Do you understand now?”

Yuwon looked at the hand on his shoulder.

He had expected such a confrontation to occur at least once, and so he was prepared to have a go in such a case.

“I’m sure you’re well aware of what will happen to a Ranker that messes with a participant of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament,” YuWon said, his tone shifting.

SoBaek smiled slyly at the change in mood. “Of course I do,” he said.

“So you’re not afraid of the NamGung Clan?”

The Grand Martial Arts Tournament was a tournament held by the NamGung Clan, the clan led by the head of the Martial Artists’ Alliance. Cleaning up any incidents that happened within it was the responsibility of the NamGung Clan. Thus, messing with a participant of the tournament was like a direct challenge against the NamGung Clan.

Moon SoBaek, the head of the School of the Sapphire Sword, might have been a Ranker, but his school was still a weak, minor martial school compared to the great NamGung noble clan.

The NamGung Clan had over ten Rankers, and they even had NamGung JinWoon, who was almost a High Ranker.

“Is that why you’ve been acting so cocky? Because you trust the NamGung Clan?”

SoBaek let out a laugh. “The head of the JeGal Clan is my blood brother. Did you really think I’d fear the NamGung Clan?”

Yuwon was wondering why he was being so bold. It turned out that he had a pocket ace.

“Does your blood brother know that his big brother is such a bastard?” YuWon asked.

“Of course,” SoBaek said boastfully. “Now don’t be so prickly. I want to have a good relationship with you. If you take your time to hear me out, you’ll learn that our Sapphire Sword School isn’t such a bad place.”

“I refuse,” YuWon said while grabbing SoBaek’s wrist.

Using force, YuWon tried to push away the hand that was grabbing his shoulder.

SoBaek’s eyebrow twitched from the amount of strength exerted by YuWon.

‘This guy...’ SoBaek thought.

He knew that YuWon was incredibly skilled for a player on the lower floors, but to have so much strength...

‘This won’t be easy,’ SoBaek determined.

Spark, crackle—

SoBaek strengthened his grip, but as he exerted more power, the penalty slowly started up.

Despite that...

‘What the—?’ SoBaek couldn’t believe it.

Little by little, his hand was moving.

YuWon was actually pushing away his hand.

Squeeze—

SoBaek started feeling a bit of pain from how tightly YuWon was holding his wrist.

He couldn’t believe it. He was being conscientious in how much strength he used due to the penalty, but for him to get pushed away...

“No,” YuWon continued, “I only trust myself.”

“Kgh...” SoBaek grunted in pain.

Fwip—

SoBaek quickly broke away from YuWon’s grip.

He could have ignored the penalty and used more of his power, but he didn’t even have time to weigh his options.

Originally, SoBaek thought that he just had to crush YuWon with force since he didn’t have to worry about the aftermath with the NamGung Clan too much.

“So you’re pretty skilled,” SoBaek commented.

It turned out that things wouldn’t be so easy.

Shing—!

SoBaek drew his sword.

It was a blue sword befitting the name of the head of the School of the Sapphire Sword.

SoBaek quickly started assessing the situation, checking if anyone was nearby.

‘The tournament is going full force,’ SoBaek thought. It’d be at least a while before people started leaving the stadium.

SoBaek was relieved, ‘I’m glad I ordered a guy to be on look out just in case.’

From the beginning, he had intended on using force if YuWon didn't listen to him, since as long as he could somehow take YuWon to his school, he'd be able to get YuWon to listen to him one way or another.

'Let's not drag this out...' SoBaek resolved himself.

"Right. Actually, there is one thing."

"What?"

"Something I trust," YuWon said.

YuWon's gaze shifted to behind SoBaek.

Step—

Out of nowhere, a presence could be felt.

There was nothing nearby, but in an instant, a presence grew close to them.

SoBaek felt an odd sensation, as if a ferocious beast was approaching him from behind.

"I thought you were taking too long, sir," a man spoke.

SoBaek turned his head to find a large man had approached them. His outfit and way of speech made him seem like someone from the Martial Realm, but SoBaek had never once seen this man before.

The man looked back and forth between YuWon and SoBaek before asking, "What are you doing here..."

It was the Heavenly Fist Lord, Pung BaekLim.

The man who had fought with YuWon during the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test politely bowed and greeted YuWon, "... Vice-Lord?"

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## Chapter 83

Pung BaekLim's words made Moon SoBaek doubt his ears.

"Vice-Lord'?' SoBaek wondered.

It was a title he was unfamiliar with, and for a moment he thought maybe somehow he misheard 'Vice-Head' as 'Vice-Lord.'

But before that...

'I thought YuWon didn't have a martial school that he was affiliated with...' SoBaek wondered.

Then it hit him, 'Could it be?'

There was only a single place in the current Martial Realm that used the title of 'Vice-Lord.'

A faction that was closer to a religious group than a martial school. Based on Mt. Heaven, it was the faction that could truly claim to be the strongest martial organization.

The Heavenly Demonic Cult.

It was a widely spread rumor that the vice-lord of the Cult was participating in this tournament, and YuWon was the only player to have ever passed the Cult's test.

'Still, there's no way they gave him the role of vice-lord just from passing a lowly test...' SoBaek felt confused.

He wanted to doubt the situation, but he had seen it with his own eyes just now.

Gulp—

SoBaek lowered his sword, and BaekLim glared him in the eyes while walking towards YuWon.

Having gauged the situation, he smacked his palm with his fist.

"Is this a fight, sir?" BaekLim asked.

"We haven't started yet," YuWon answered.

Yuwon was naturally speaking less politely, while on the other hand, BaekLim was now speaking to YuWon with respect, unlike before. They were simply following the rules of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

"What would you like me to do?" BaekLim asked while looking back to SoBaek.

"Should I kill him?"

BaekLim seemed ready to fight, like he was waiting for YuWon's order to drop.

An intense fighting spirit started flowing out from BaekLim's body, and in an instant, SoBaek felt miniscule compared to him.

'He's a Ranker,' SoBaek realized.

And he realized that BaekLim wasn't just an ordinary Ranker but a cut above most Rankers in the Martial Realm.

SoBaek tried to gauge what it would be like to fight BaekLim.

'I have a 90% chance of losing... And even if I did win, that would still be a problem,' SoBaek calculated the various scenarios in his head.

His opponent was a Ranker of the Heavenly Demonic Cult, so even if he won, he'd be making enemies out of them.

In the end, there was only one decision he could make.

"Ahem. I-I apologize," SoBaek let out a fake cough and composed himself while putting his sword back in his scabbard. "I didn't know you were the vice-lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. Had I known you were already a part of a martial school, I wouldn't have approached you."

“We’re not a martial school. Don’t treat us like we’re the same,” said BaekLim.

“A-Anyway...” BaekLim wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead as he turned around and walked away. “Once again, I’m sorry. Farewell then.”

“...”

YuWon watched SoBaek walk away in a hurry.

BaekLim glared at him in discontent.

“Are you going to just let him go?” he asked Yuwon.

“I don’t really know what his deal is, but he’s not what’s important.”

“It seems like the JeGal Clan is backing him.”

“The JeGal Clan, you say, sir...” BaekLim mulled over his words with a slight grin. “Well, we have a dinner meeting with the NamGung Clan after the tournament. I’ll bring it up with them then. If there is foul play going on, it needs to be properly punished.”

“A dinner meeting? With the NamGung Clan?”

“Would you like to join us, sir?”

The NamGung Clan was the place that had become recognized as the greatest martial school while the Heavenly Demonic Cult was holed up in Mt. Heaven.

YuWon didn’t think that the Cult that was just now starting to make moves would meet with the NamGung clan so quickly.

“Was it you guys who spread the rumor?”

“What rumor do you mean?”

“The one about the vice-lord participating in the tournament.”

“Oh, that...” BaekLim started grinning, “The cult members must have blabbered because they’re excited to be able to go out into the Martial Realm again. Those guys are pretty talkative.”

“Was your personality always like this?” YuWon asked.

“I’m always like this when I’m not fighting, sir. Hahahah!” That unabashed laughter was recognizably BaekLim’s trademark.

YuWon shook his head while letting out a sigh.

‘The Heavenly Demonic Cult...’ he thought deeply.

It was a title that was somewhat forced onto him, but in that process he ended up gaining a much greater authority than he had expected.

YuWon contemplated the potential ripple the Cult’s activities would cause.



“I’ll pass on the dinner meeting.”

The meeting was likely just for socialization, and YuWon was not fond of such gatherings.

“Just make sure you properly take care of the head of the School of the Sapphire Sword and his blood brother,” YuWon instructed.

BaekLim bowed after receiving YuWon’s orders, “As you wish, sir.”

“Let’s go.”

“Yes, sir.”

Yuwon walked ahead while BaekLim followed behind.

The greatest organization in the Martial Realm, the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

Yuwon had decided to freely wield their power to its full extent.

\* \* \*

In a tall, five-story building located next to the stadium...

At the most expensive lodging in the area where you could see a view of the massive stadium outside the window, the Heavenly Demon Cheon MuJin was waiting for YuWon.

“Good job,” MuJin told YuWon.

“What did I do to warrant a ‘good job’?”

“Aren’t you on your way back from the preliminaries?”

“Did you watch?”

“No. I knew you were going to win, so I didn’t see the need,” MuJin said while preparing tea. “Am I wrong?”

Yuwon picked up the teacup as MuJin poured him some tea.

The weight of the tea felt like it was a thousand pounds. The flowing tea imbued with MuJin’s mana was like a waterfall.

It was a simple but hard test.

Yuwon responded, “Perhaps,” while enduring it by imbuing the teacup with his own mana.

Sweat started to run down YuWon’s forehead with his lukewarm response.

It was like a large waterfall was falling down into a single point.

Crack—

A small fracture appeared on the teacup.

As YuWon thought, ‘I can’t let it break...’

Fss, fss—

Mana started to flow out from Kyneē.

There was a brief second of stability, before he felt like darkness was consuming his entire body.

Plop—

The final drop of tea fell into the teacup, and the cup almost shattered.

“I see,” MuJin said.

To normal eyes, one would have just thought it was a scene of someone pouring tea, but for YuWon, enduring this moment was harder than any fight he had experienced so far in this life.

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MuJin continued, “Why are you participating in something like the Grand Martial Arts Tournament? Your skills don’t belong in a children’s fight.”

“I need the prize.”

“Are you talking about the Great Scarlet Medicine Ball?”

“Yes,” YuWon explained while staring at the cracked teacup, “I’m a bit short.”

He had reached 99 Arcane Power.

How would things have been different if he had 100 Arcane Power?

Not only would it not have been so hard for him to endure MuJin’s tea pour, the teacup likely wouldn’t have cracked.

“Don’t get caught up by numbers... is the advice I wish I could give, but I know that’s not possible.”

“Unlike you, Lord, I’m not a true martial artist. As long as I have the system, numbers are important.”

“I understand. So that’s why you need the Great Scarlet Medicine Ball?”

“It’s not guaranteed that consuming it will push me over, but it is quite possible.”

YuWon had to overcome this hurdle as quickly as possible, as that was the ‘first condition’ that he had imposed on himself.

“The Great Scarlet Medicine Ball is definitely a good elixir. It being the prize is a large reason as to how the Grand Martial Arts Tournament became such a big event,” MuJin spoke while nodding his head, having now understood YuWon’s motivations.

MuJin took a sip of his tea.

Parched from having used a good amount of power, YuWon drank from the cracked cup before asking, “I’d like to know what brings you here, Lord? I thought the Heavenly Demonic Cult didn’t leave Mt. Heaven.”

“I thought it was about time we started our activities.”

“Activities? What kind of activities?”

“Accepting new cultists, conducting tests, expanding our faction, firmly implanting our influence. Stuff like that.”

“What about Mt. Heaven?”

“We’ll go back and forth a lot. Technology has advanced a lot in recent years, so it’s quite easy to travel.”

MuJin had decided to be active in the Martial Realm, which was a resolution that would overturn the order and power dynamic of the Martial Realm in an instant since MuJin could be described as being the essence of the Cult itself.

“What do you mean?”

“I said it before, but I’m not suited for the role of vice-lord because I have no intention of being tied down to a single place.”

“I know.”

“I won’t be fulfilling my responsibilities while taking advantage of my power. The cult members will probably voice strong opposition.”

“I am the ‘Heaven’ of the Heavenly Demonic Cult. Since I’ve acknowledged you, no one can oppose your will,” MuJin said with a calm voice.

He spoke nonchalantly as if he was talking about undeniable facts, like the sun rising in the morning. Because to MuJin, this was the natural order.

“I could potentially ruin the Heavenly Demonic Cult,” YuWon warned.

However, that wasn’t the only thing YuWon was concerned about.

Yuwon said, “I’m an enemy of Olympus.”

“Olympus?”

“Yes.”

Yuwon explained his relationship with Olympus, from rescuing Hephaestus to fighting an Olympian Ranker.

MuJin nodded along while listening to YuWon’s story. “I see. The ‘Gigantomachy,’ you say...”

Having been holed up in Mt. Heaven for a long time, MuJin had not experienced the Gigantomachy, but the tale was so famous, even he had heard of it.

“So you’re trying to stop that?” MuJin asked.

“Something like that.”

“So in the end, you’re going to fight.”

MuJin’s expression did not change. He was not phased by the potential threat of having to fight a giant enemy like Olympus.

“Are you okay with all this?” YuWon asked.

“You shouldn’t avoid setting sail just because you’re afraid of the tempest. There’s no choice but to just face it.”

This was good news for YuWon, but he couldn’t understand. Technically speaking, he was an outsider to the Cult, yet MuJin was far too easily agreeing to a path that would be difficult for even blood relatives to face together. And he was going to take the Cult along with him.

“If you can’t understand, just remember this. Nothing else matters. There’s only one thing you need to keep in mind as the Vice-Lord,” MuJin spoke, explaining the reason why he had called YuWon here today. “Starting now, you are the Heavenly Demonic Cult.”

\* \* \*

As the preliminaries of the tournament were ending, night had descended, and the ball began.

“This year’s Grand Martial Arts Tournament is another success. And it’s booming more than it ever has!”

“That’s because of all the promising people in the next generation. From an Olympian prince to a descendent of Asgard, an angel of Zion, and...”

“There’s also Kim YuWon.”

Everyone was busy talking about the tournament while sharing drinks.

At the ball, members of the Martial Artists’ Alliance chatted while congratulating themselves on successfully finishing the preliminaries without any problems.

This was a gathering of the leading figures of the Martial Realm, so most of the Rankers of the Martial Artists’ Alliance were all in one spot.

“He was really amazing. I finally get why everyone can’t stop talking about Kim YuWon.”

“Same here. I heard he’s not affiliated anywhere. If only I could have him join our Divine Martial School...”

“Now that I think about it, which martial school’s test did he take?”

“The Vice-Lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult,” a man said in a sharp tone.

People turned their heads in the direction of the voice to find a man drinking by himself off to the side.

“Head of the Sapphire Sword School?”

“It’s been a while. But just now...”

“Yeah. What did you mean by the ‘Vice-Lord’?”

It was already well known that YuWon had passed the Heavenly Demonic Cult's test, but just passing the test and being the vice-lord of the Cult were two entirely different matters.

Being the vice-lord would make one the successor of the Heavenly Demon. It was a position equal to a vice-head of a clan.

It was hard for people to believe that he would have been given the role of vice-lord just from passing a test.

"I saw it with my own eyes, a Ranker of the Cult calling him the vice-lord," SoBaek said.

"Did something happen?"

That was the question SoBaek had been waiting for.

He paused to finish his drink, after which he said, "While trying to greet a promising up-and-comer, he drew his sword on me, telling me to not approach their vice-lord."

"Oh my..."

"How could they do something like that...?"

"They couldn't even let you say hi to him?"

People started to voice their dissatisfaction. The mood started to ripen, and SoBaek listened closely to what people started to say.

"That's just how the Evil Cult is. It was like this long ago. The Martial Artists' Alliance and the Evil Cult are fated to never get along."

"You're right. I mean, those cultists have such rotten personalities."

"I'm not familiar with it. What did the Heavenly Demonic Cult do?"

"This happened long ago, but since olden times, they..."

The public opinion of the Cult wasn't favorable.

To people who had been wielding political power in the Martial Realm for ages now, the existence of the Cult posed a threat.

On top of that, the older generations who had presided in the Martial Realm for a long time did not hesitate to call the Heavenly Demonic Cult the 'Evil Cult' instead.

SoBaek had to hold back his smirk, speaking with as calm a voice as he could, "As you know, Kim YuWon is the strongest contender to win this tournament."

"Ahem..."

"That won't do..."

"How dare a vice-lord of the Evil Cult..."

Opposition broke out from everywhere. The resentment towards the Cult had not yet cooled in the Martial Realm.

“Why don’t we do this then?” SoBaek spoke.

“What do you have in mind?”

“Do you have a plan?”

A few of the Rankers of the Martial Realm leaned in to hear what he had to say.

SoBaek composed himself despite his excitement, saying, “In the main stage...”

#### Chapter 84

After the preliminaries of the tournament ended, a two day break was given for the main stage of the tournament.

During that time, players of the Martial Artists’ Alliance held their own meeting, similar to the ball held by the seniors of the Alliance.

“Did you hear the news?”

“What news?”

“Of course I have. How could you not? It was passed onto every player who made it to the main stage.”

Over a hundred players, the next generation of the Martial Realm, were gathered in a single place, eating food and socializing by a lake. They were all talented people who managed to get past the preliminaries.

“The rules of the main stage suddenly changed. Has that ever happened before?”

A message was sent to players that passed the preliminaries relaying the new rules of the main stage and how the winner would be determined.

“It’s definitely not common, but it was decided by vote among the elders, so I’m sure there’s a good reason.”

“Really?”

“No. I don’t think that’s it,” one of the people in attendance said while shaking his head. “I think this is related to the rumor that the vice-lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult is participating in the tournament.”

“Oh. That...”

“I also heard about that.”

“Some were saying that the vice-lord of the Cult is Kim YuWon.”

“Is that true?”

“I don’t know, but he is the only one to ever pass the Cult’s test, so it’s possible...”

“But still. Would they have given him a position as high as the vice-lord?”

“It adds up. It can’t be a coincidence that they left Mt. Heaven as soon as they got the first person to ever pass the test.”

“You have a point...”

The people who were thirsting for gossip didn’t pass up on the opportunity to talk about YuWon and the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

“Then will the winner of this tournament end up being a member of the Cult?”

“What a flashy comeback.”

“I bet they were waiting for this.”

“Do you think that’s why they gave him the role of vice-lord...?”

“How shameless.”

They were players of the Martial Realm, and the Grand Martial Arts Tournament was a major point of pride for these players. But the Heavenly Demonic Cult was the only organization on the 10th Floor who wasn’t a part of the main society of the Martial Realm. There was not a single person there who would have been happy seeing a member of the Cult become the winner of the tournament.

Everyone’s sights shifted to the speaker.

It was Hoon, who was enjoying drinks with his party.

Hoon said while turning his head, “Did the Heavenly Demonic Cult break the rules? Or did they use any underhanded tactics outside the arena?”

There was not a single response, which was a given.

What YuWon, the Vice-Lord of the Demonic Cult, had shown were indomitable skills, not some cowardly tactic.

There was nothing to say in response.

After looking around the crowd, waiting for a response, Hoon clicked his tongue and spoke again, “Unless that is the case, you can’t ostracize someone just for not being a part of the central Martial Realm. That is neither fair nor just.”

“If you don’t like it, then just stay out of it,” said a voice familiar to Hoon.

Hoon turned his head to see another rising star of the Martial Realm like him, a player of the Zhuge\* Clan. He was also the one who first brought up the Demonic Cult at the party.

“Zhuge JinCheon,” Hoon said.

“Didn’t you hear me? If you’re scared, chicken out,” JinCheon said.

With a pretty face and snake-like slender eyes, JinCheon gave off a creepy vibe the longer you looked at him.

Hoon did not avoid eye contact with JinCheon.

They had never been on friendly terms ever since they were kids, but as they grew up, it only became worse, and now the two were nearly enemies.

“What, are you telling me to stay out?”

JinCheon looked around his surroundings rather than giving a verbal answer.

There was already quite a large group of people gathered around JinCheon.

‘So they’ve already colluded,’ Hoon thought to himself.

It seemed that even before this preliminaries afterparty, there had been talks led by JinCheon, and this place was just a place for him to gather more people.

‘His objective is probably Kim YuWon,’ Hoon continued his train of thought.

It was a longstanding, stubborn belief throughout the Martial Realm that there could not be a winner from the Heavenly Demonic Cult in the Grand Martial Arts Tournament.

This belief, of course, wasn’t shared just among the younger generation.

‘The adults changed the rules, and the kids will work together to stop the Vice-Lord of the Demonic Cult. Is that their plan?’ Hoon hypothesized.

And it was likely the center of this scheme was JinCheon.

Hoon couldn’t believe that they would go so far to defeat a single player. And the fact that the rules of the tournament changed meant that more than half of the guild was on the same page.

Despite that...

Regardless of their schemes, Hoon wasn’t really all that concerned. Before the tournament even started, the winner had already been determined.

‘I don’t really need to worry,’ Hoon thought, resuming drinking, not seeing a need to waste his time on them anymore. ‘They’re going to get torn to pieces anyway.’

\* \* \*

The main stage of the tournament got delayed by a day, which naturally caused complaints.

“Why the hell are they running a tournament like this?”

“Do they think that the visitors have nothing better to do?”

“The Martial Realm is so washed up.”

“I’m going home.”

But on the other hand, there were also positive responses.



“I’m okay with this.”

“The Martial Realm seems like they want to change, shaking up the tournament like this.”

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“I think this is going to be fun.”

“A battle royale... That is certainly different.”

The main stage of the tournament had been changed to a battle royale. It was a format where, rather than people fighting one on one, all the players would get in the arena all at once and fight simultaneously.

The preliminaries were set up so ten players would fight at once, but ten wasn’t that big of a number considering the size of the arena. In fact, their fights were underwhelming compared to how large the area really was.

So the main stage of the tournament went from a traditional 1V1 format to a battle royale where a large number of players would fight at once.

On the morning of the match, Hargaan had barged into YuWon’s lodgings unannounced.

YuWon was shocked to find Hargaan laying on the floor, snacking on some beef jerky.

“Why are you here? What about your teammates?” YuWon asked.

“They went out to have fun. Trying local cuisine. Seeing the sights. They decided to go nuts since today’s the last day.”

“Are they not competing in the main stage?”

“Yeah. They all decided to pass. They said there’s no way they’re going to win. It’s pretty wise of them.”

Unlike most people, Hargaan’s teammates knew about YuWon, and they had been closely watching Hargaan grow, so it wasn’t a shock that they decided to give up now.

On top of that, they didn’t need to seek sponsorships since they were already a part of Olympus as Hargaan’s teammates.

“It’s almost time.” Hargaan got up after having checked the time on his player kit.

“Let’s go already.”

He looked excited.

‘I guess it’s about time for a rematch,’ YuWon thought while looking over at him as they left for the stadium.

Despite not having seen most of the preliminaries, YuWon didn’t rate the skills of the other players that high.

There were some names of people he knew because they would become Rankers in the future, but most of them were only so-so. The only really notable name among them was NamGung Hoon.

As for Hargaan, he was strong enough to be considered the true cream of the crop among them.

Hargaan was silent the entire trip to the stadium, which was off considering his normally talkative personality.

However, YuWon didn't think Hargaan's behavior was strange. He knew that Hargaan was slowly preparing himself.

"There sure are a lot of people here," Hargaan remarked after seeing the massive crowd at the stadium.

Not only were all the seats full, they even set up massive video screens outside, so people who weren't able to make it inside the stadium could still spectate.

"Don't be surprised by just this. On top of these screens, the main stage will also be broadcasted by the player station," Hoon said while approaching YuWon and Hargaan.

Seeing YuWon for the first time in months, Hoon walked up for a handshake, "It's been a while. You remember me, right?"

"You have a face that's hard to forget," YuWon responded.

Hargaan was shocked to see Hoon and YuWon greeting each other.

"Wait, you know this guy?" Hargaan asked YuWon.

Hoon of the NamGung Clan was pretty famous among the players. That fame was bolstered by the fact that the Grand Martial Arts Tournament was hosted by the Martial Artists' Alliance, which was led by the head of the NamGung Clan.

Yuwon nodded in response, "We took a test together."

"We were enemies though."

Hargaan remarked with fascination after hearing Hoon's explanation, "I'm surprised you're alive."

To some, being told that they should have died from meeting someone as enemies might have been insulting, but Hoon took no offense.

Hargaan was right. Had YuWon fought him seriously, he would not be present today.

"Name's Hargaan. I'm sure you've heard of me, but I'm the great successor of Olympus."

"I've heard quite a few people claim to be the successor," Hoon retorted.

Hargaan's boasting was popped like a balloon, but instead of taking offense, Hargaan burst out into laughter. "My family is a bit of shitshow." Hargaan was only half-joking.

Hoon knew he shouldn't laugh, but he couldn't contain it all.

This friendly banter didn't last long.

“—Attention all main stage participants. Please enter the arena now.”

The announcement that could be heard even outside the stadium made Hoon's expression freeze.

“It's nice seeing you again, but it seems like we won't have long to talk,” Hoon told Yuwon.

“Is there something you need to tell me?”

“I'm not all that worried, but I thought you should still know.”

“Know what?”

“Be careful just in case.”

With his cryptic warning, Hoon turned around and went inside the stadium.

“Huh? What's he talking about?” Hargaan asked YuWon, brimming with curiosity.

But YuWon was also just as lost, though he decided not to dwell too much on it. He figured he would find out soon enough in the arena.

“Let's go in,” Yuwon said while marching ahead.

Step, step—

The two headed inside the stadium and saw the massive stage filled with countless participants.

‘There sure are a lot,’ YuWon thought.

There had to be at least a few thousand people. The arena that looked bare when only ten people were standing on it now looked cramped.

Everyone in the arena was a skilled player that had made it through the preliminaries where only one in ten people made it out. With over a thousand of such players, it was truly a sight to behold.

Ssk, ssk—

YuWon noticed some discrepancies, but it was nothing major as it was just the ‘gazes’ of people.

“Be careful just in case.”

YuWon had a hunch of what Hoon's concern was.

‘So that's what it is,’ YuWon thought.

He smirked a bit.

If it weren't for Hoon's warning and the sudden change in the rules, YuWon would have just brushed the gazes off. But once he focused in on the gazes, it was easy to notice the fighting spirit in their eyes.

A little over 100 players of the Martial Realm, or more specifically, players of the Martial Guild were showing hostility towards YuWon.

## Chapter 85

“It’s finally starting.”

“What a spectacle. To gather all these players to fight at once.”

“This Grand Martial Arts Tournament is going to be remembered for a long time.”

“They should just take this chance to permanently change the rules.”

“What a great idea!”

Within the stadium, in a room that only special guests were invited to, the entire arena was easily visible.

This was a place that only the Rankers of the Martial Realm who were holding the event could enter.

“You did something great, sir,” someone complimented the head of the Zhuge Clan.

“That’s right. We almost handed over the honor of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament to the Evil Cult,” someone else chimed in.

“That would have been especially bad considering how much interest there is this year’s tournament.”

“Haha! This is a great blessing for the Martial Realm!”

NamGung JinWoon wanted to cut his ears off from hearing all this bullshit, but he tried his best to hold himself back.

Zhugue Jing was the head of the Zhuge Clan and the general of the Martial Guild.

With snake-like slanted eyes and a face covered in wrinkles, he was smiling at the barrage of compliments.

“Haha. I didn’t do anything. This is all thanks to the Head of the Sapphire Sword School,” Jing said.

“That’s certainly true.”

“He did contribute greatly.”

“When the match is over, I’d love to visit the School of the Sapphire Sword.”

“You’re welcome anytime. Hahah!” SoBaek, the Head of the Sapphire Sword, said to everyone present.

Knowing SoBaek had a close relationship with the Zhuge clan, JinWoon closed his eyes and thought, ‘They’re all rotten to the core.’

He knew that the Martial Realm had been slowly festering for a while now, and every time he acknowledged that fact, he felt like he lacked greatly.

Zhuge was always at the center of the corruption, and despite being second-in-command in the Martial Guild, he had managed to amass greater influence than the NamGung Clan.

That was when it finally came to JinWoon. The Martial Realm had become a place where one's way with words had become more important than one's skill with the sword.

But...

'The reason the Martial Realm became this way is because I am lacking,' JinWoon reprimanded himself.

JinWoon then decided to use this tournament as a turning point for the Martial Realm.

Slide—

The door opened.

People were surprised, having thought that all the invited Rankers were already in attendance.

"Who is it?"

"Are we missing anyone?"

"I thought everyone was here..."

The room with a premiere view of the arena was an exclusive space for the Martial Guild, the host of the tournament. So unless you were someone related to the Martial Guild, you could not enter.

The Rankers in the room stared at the man that entered the room.

The man asked after looking around the room, "Am I too late?"

"No, you're just in time," one of the people in the room greeted him. It was JinWoon, who had been sitting in the corner sullenly.

He got up from his spot to greet the latecomer.

Jing stared at JinWoon thinking, 'What is he up to?'

JinWoon was the man that had made the NamGung Clan into what it was today. He was definitely not to be underestimated. And the guest that had just arrived was someone he had invited in secret.

"Who are you?"

"You look like you're from the Martial Realm, but..."

The Rankers of the Martial Guild inspected the man. He was clearly no ordinary fellow. He only looked 40 years old, but if he was indeed a Ranker, he couldn't be judged purely on appearance.

If he was a somewhat well-known Ranker, at least one or two people in the room would have known his face or name. But not a single person there recognized him, which meant that he was a nobody.

'At best he's probably a martial arts expert from the boonies.'

‘What is he trying to do by inviting such a man?’

‘Wrong move, JinWoon.’

These were the thoughts running through the heads of the Rankers who felt unthreatened. This was an inevitable reaction as the power dynamic within the Martial Guild had already shifted.

Jing smiled slyly at JinWoon as if to say, ‘We are at an age where words triumph over the sword.’

As the saying went, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” And over half of the Martial Guild had now sided with Jing.

“I’m sorry for the late introductions,” the late guest started introducing himself with a gentle smile. “I came here because I was invited by the Head of the NamGung Clan. My name is Cheon Mujin.”

“Cheon Mujin...?”

“Wait a second. Could it be?”

“The Heavenly Demon...?”

Everyone’s eyes widened, and the mood suddenly died off.

A few Rankers went as far as to shift their hands towards the swords on their waists.

“You will die if you draw that,” Mujin spoke while staring at SoBaek.

SoBaek had subconsciously grabbed the hilt of his sword.

“I can promise you that,” Mujin threatened.

Gulp—

SoBaek felt prickles in his throat while trying to swallow spit. His spine felt chilly, and the air was so tense, he felt like he was suffocating.

SeBaek brought his hand back down.

MuJin smiled. “Smart choice.”

Step, step—

MuJin walked through the crowd, only speaking again after reaching the window from where the entire arena was visible.

“From what I heard, it seems that the Vice-Lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult would have won. That would have been a real shame now,” Mujin said, taking a jab at them.

The gazes of the Rankers shifted away.

They didn’t know why JinWoon had called MuJin here, but they knew that MuJin wouldn’t let things stand now that he knew what had happened.

“What’s wrong?” Mujin asked unexpectedly. “Do I seem angry?”

“Hahah! There must have been a misunderstanding. Not at all. Why would I be angry? Because...” Mujin said while looking down at the arena, spotting YuWon, “your hard-schemed plan is going to crumble.”

\* \* \*

The main stage of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament.

It was a battle royal where thousands of players fought on stage at once.

As time went on, the tension in the arena thickened.

YuWon glanced sideways and looked at Hargaan, who had been staying quiet with his eyes closed for a while now.

Hargaan was preparing for the real fight.

[Soon, the main stage of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament will commence.]

A message appeared midair.

A few players locked eyes with YuWon.

They had been keeping their eye on YuWon as if they had some sort of arrangement.

‘What a mess,’ YuWon thought, noticing one of the faces. ‘JinCheon. He must be the main perp.’

Zhuge JinCheon was one of the genius players of the Martial Realm, along with Hoon.

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YuWon remembered that he had become a Ranker in the future, but he also remembered him for having a rotten personality.

[10]

As the countdown started, Hargaan suddenly said to YuWon, “I’m telling you this now, but you’re the only one who’s a match for me, so don’t you dare lose to someone else.”

YuWon could immediately recognize the sentiment in Hargaan’s eyes.

Rivalry.

With his friend and goal in front of him, Hargaan was burning with motivation more than ever.

‘I finally understand how he climbed so high so quickly,’ YuWon thought.

Hargaan’s future had changed completely, and this change came from more than just the Tutorial’s result. After having been the greatest all his life, he had been greatly stimulated by the appearance of a goal to surpass.

[...]

YuWon felt obligated to respond.

He drew a crude-looking sword on the ground and said to Hargaan, “That’ll never happen.”

And he thought that Hargaan shouldn’t lose to anyone else either.

The numbers finished counting down.

[START.]

Dash—

The tension that was at its peak snapped, and people started moving one by one.

Klang, klang—!

Wham—!

Blast—!

Boom!

“Die!”

“Why the fuck are you going off on me?”

“That’s just how the main stage is supposed to be, man! You need to fight ASAP to get noticed as much as possible...!”

“And that’s how you get knocked out faster!”

The first to move were the greedy players, the players that had already given up on winning and were focused on trying to appeal to the guilds within the audience.

On the other hand, most of the players aiming for victory stood aside and assessed the situation.

‘There’s nothing to gain by wasting my stamina from the get-go,’ one of them thought.

But once the fighting picked up, it was only a matter of time until things devolved into pandemonium.

Thousands of players became tangled up with one another.

And amidst them all...

Whoosh—!

A knife flew towards the back of YuWon’s head.

Kkkrrr—

The knife was flung aside and scraped the floor.

YuWon turned around to see a man wielding a sword shimmering with a faint color.

[Arcane Sword,] or as they called it in the Martial Realm, [Ki Sword.]

“I know it’s not just you,” YuWon said while looking up.

YuWon’s blade drew an elegant curve and blocked the spear coming down at him from above.



Klang—!

The attack had quite the force behind it, but the one that was shaking wasn't YuWon, who had blocked the attack. Rather, it was the spearman who had attacked him.

Kling—!

After his ambush failed, the spearman quickly jumped back to create some distance.

YuWon stood in his spot while looking around.

Even YuWon was aware of the bad blood between the Cult and the rest of the Martial Realm. Though it was now only remembered through records, it was both history and legend in the Martial Realm.

Ssk—

Ssk—

One by one, players of the Martial Guild that were spread out across the arena slowly started shifting closer to YuWon.

Because things had devolved into chaos so quickly, most wouldn't notice how unnatural of a sight this was.

'So this is why they changed the rules,' YuWon thought.

He didn't know who came up with this idea, but it was a simple and effective plan. In a fight between thousands of people, there would naturally be fights where one person faced off against multiple people. And against a skilled opponent like YuWon, it was quite natural for people to team up.

"There's nothing to feel bad about," YuWon said while imbuing his sword with mana. "You guys are all small fry anyway."

Vwooom—

YuWon's sword was imbued with a much darker color than any of the Martial Realm players' swords in front of him.

With an energy longer than a meter shooting out from the sword, JinCheon was shocked.

'So he's a bigshot for a reason, huh,' JinCheon thought.

He wondered how high YuWon's Arcane Power was to have such a large Arcane Sword.

'It's got to be at least over 60,' JinCheon estimated.

YuWon was clearly beyond the skills of a lower floor player.

'But... it's not as great as rumored,' JinCheon thought.

The YuWon in the rumors was like an insurmountable wall. It was to the point that some were going as far as to say that YuWon might already be reaching the level of a Ranker. But now that he was going face-to-face against YuWon, JinCheon realized that YuWon was great, but not that great.

'This is doable,' JinCheon thought with a glimmer in his eyes.

He finished calculating everything, and now that he was sure, it was time to enact his plan.

Fwip—

JinCheon flicked his fan to open it, signaling the attack.

The countless players that had been on standby rushed towards YuWon.

“Now!”

“Jump him...!”

That’s when...

Crash—!

... A golden electric attack rippled through.

The players of the Martial Guild that were charging at YuWon were knocked back and scorched black.

In an instant, an empty circle was created around YuWon with YuWon being the only one unaffected by the attack.

“Hey, weaklings!” shouted Hargaan.

He was the source of the electric attack, and he was baring his teeth at JinCheon and the other players around him.

“Do you guys have no shame?” Hargaan asked.

Chapter 86

The powerful impact of Hargaan’s electric attack silenced the arena.

“What was that?”

“Hargaan?”

“Why’s he acting like that?”

The players around the arena continued to move while watching Hargaan growl at the players around him.

They wanted to know what Hargaan was up to, but they were too busy crossing swords to be in any position to spectate him in peace.

Klang, klang!

Blast, boom—!

Swords and spears clashed around the arena amidst a flurry of skills exploding in chaos.

JinCheon folded his fan back up, staring at Hargaan with a serious look on his face.

“Can I take it that you’ll be assisting Kim YuWon?” he asked.

Hargaan raised an eyebrow and responded, "So what?"

"My clan was thinking that we could form a good relationship with you."

"I don't know who's brain that came from, but that's a pretty stupid thought," Hargaan scoffed.

JinCheon's face soured.

This was an idea from the general of the Martial Artists' Alliance, Zhuge Jing. And as a strategist, he was the one who had been leading the organization from the shadows.

JinCheon couldn't stand for his father, who he believed to be great and intelligent, to be insulted like this.

"What's wrong, pussy?" Hargaan asked.

"How can you say something so tasteless...?"

"It's because you guys act with no taste that I'm speaking in terms you can understand," Hargaan said while looking around.

He displayed clear hostility at the players that had been charging at YuWon just moments ago.

"Wh-What's up with this?"

"How are we supposed to fight against someone like that?"

"He's a real monster..."

These players lost morale after seeing Hargaan's big attack.

The mood had dampened, which was bad progression for JinCheon.

"W-Weren't we told that YuWon and Olympus were clearly enemies?" someone quietly blurted out.

But with his good hearing, Hargaan heard what the guy muttered.

Yuwon also heard it. He thought, 'So the Zhuge Clan even has ties with Olympus.'

This was new information for YuWon.

He was aware that there was a power struggle in the Martial Artists' Alliance between the NamGung Clan and the Zhuge Clan, but he didn't know that Olympus had a hand in it as well.

It became apparent to YuWon that one of the reasons they decided to go forward with this plan was because they thought Hargaan would also fight against YuWon.

"... There's so much rot," Hargaan said bitterly. However, this wasn't a comment directed towards the Zhuge Clan but towards Olympus.

"Don't pay attention to unimportant details. Rather, decide now. Will you stand with or against YuWon?" JinCheon said.

JinCheon's words made YuWon glance over at Hargaan's back.

They were currently in the middle of not just any public space but participating in the Grand Martial Arts Tournament. There were eyes of countless audiences directed at them, and on top of that, the tournament was viewable from anywhere anytime through the player kits. So whatever action Hargaan took right now, Olympus would find out.

With YuWon being an enemy of Olympus, helping YuWon would be opposing Olympus's will.

"You members of the Zhuge Clan always talk too much," Hargaan said while slamming his fists together. "Why don't you cut the useless chit-chat and fight me instead? Because I already made my decision long ago."

"... I see," JinCheon said while reopening his fan. "I shall now face him. Quickly take down YuWon and come help me," he said to the others.

Wind started to blow around JinCheon.

"Will you be okay?"

"You're going to be going against Hargaan..."

JinCheon's comrades voiced their concern.

"I know that. I've also heard a lot about him," JinCheon said.

He could tell from the attack just now how strong Hargaan was. He was stronger than any other player he had seen up until now.

YuWon was called the greatest player, but having seen Hargaan in the flesh, he deemed Hargaan to be a step above YuWon. Despite that...

"But I am Zhuge JinCheon," he said confidently, assuring his comrades.

That's right. He was one of the genius players who was set to lead the Martial Realm along with Hoon.

And JinCheon's confidence rallied the rest of his men.

But then...

Flash—

Vzzt—

In an instant, Hargaan was in front of JinCheon.

"Who did you say you are?"

"...!"

Boom—!

Vzzzzzt—!

A punch flew at JinCheon, and he was knocked dozens of meters back. He couldn't even let out a proper scream as he flew through the air.

Spark, crackle—

His body was electrified and scorched.

It all happened in an instant.

JinCheon tried his best to hold up his unsteady body. He gave his all to not lose consciousness.

'What... in the world...' JinCheon thought.

His mind and vision were hazy as he looked at Hargaan.

He knew that a direct Pure-Blood of Olympus would be powerful, especially considering how Hargaan was the son of Zeus, the King of Olympus. It was only natural for Hargaan to be amazing.

'Still...!' JinCheon thought while gritting his teeth. 'There's no way there can be this great of a difference.'

His pride had been hurt. At first, JinCheon thought it wasn't possible, but then his subconscious shouted at him, 'There's no way to win against this guy.'

"You should know your place, you nobody," Hargaan spoke while hitting his fists together.

He had called JinCheon a nobody despite being from the Zhuge clan.

"Don't you dare try anything cunning," Hargaan threatened JinCheon while walking closer to him.

Hargaan glanced over at YuWon to signal him.

Step—

"We should continue where we left off," YuWon said while approaching the players of the Martial Realm that were circling him.

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YuWon had decided to take care of the annoying small fry before the real fight.

\* \* \*

"I-I give up!"

"M-Me to!"

"I give up as well!"

"Well I'm not giving—ahhhhh!"

The main stage event was starting to reach its climax.

As time went on, their staminas wore out, and more players were forfeiting from injury. There were also players who refused to give up until the end, losing their lives.

And in the midst of this chaos, JinCheon shouted while raising both his hands, “I lost!”

Fwoosh—

Hargaan’s fist, which had been traveling rapidly towards JinCheon’s face, halted. He wasn’t the type who would continue attacking an opponent that lost the will to fight.

Relieved at seeing Hargaan stop his attack, JinCheon said while letting out a sigh of relief, “It’s my loss. I give up.”

“So you’re forfeiting?”

“That’s right.”

The fight hadn’t gone on for that long. With his skills, all he could do was stop a few of Hargaan’s punches. And even then, had Hargaan been serious, he probably wouldn’t have managed to block a single one.

“... If you hadn’t stepped in, we would have been successful.”

“Do you really believe that?” Hargaan asked, looking at YuWon flying around amidst the Martial Realm players. “Do you really think that you would be the difference in being able to defeat him?”

JinCheon remained silent. His silence was louder than words.

“Although...” Hargaan muttered while staring at YuWon.

He was confused by YuWon taking them down one at a time by swinging his sword around.

‘I don’t think his skills should have gotten worse. Is he maybe conserving his strength?’ Hargaan wondered.

It had been a while since the two had seen each other.

After the Tutorial and the events of the 1st Floor, Hargaan went through explosive growth. And he assumed the same would have happened to YuWon, considering he was now even rumored to be the strongest player ever.

‘In that case...’ Hargaan thought while stepping towards YuWon, ‘I’m going to draw it out of him.’

Most of the Martial Realm players that were being a nuisance had been taken care of.

Seeing how climactic the mood of the main stage had become, Hargaan thought this should be good enough of a stage.

Stomp—

With each step Hargaan took, the ground caved in under his feet.

Yuwon, who was swinging his sword, put his sword down after noticing Hargaan approaching him.

“Are you going to start now?” YuWon asked.

“I’ve waited long enough,” Hargaan answered.

His face was ecstatic.

Vzzt—

A powerful current of electricity started enveloping Hargaan, as if he was ready to explode.

“There’s nothing sweeter than picking a fruit that’s perfectly ripe,” Hargaan said.

YuWon could tell how much Hargaan had been looking forward to fighting him again. And now, no longer able to wait, Hargaan was getting closer to him.

YuWon thought, ‘There are still quite a lot of them left, but...’

It didn’t matter to him whether the true final fight happened now or later.

Before getting in formation, YuWon decided to say, “Let me ask you two questions first.”

“Two whole questions?”

“You’ve waited a long time, so it’s not like it’s gonna kill you to wait a bit longer.”

Hargaan nodded, “What are they?”

“First off, are you not going to regret your decision just now?”

Hargaan had helped YuWon, an enemy of Olympus, and fought the Zhuge Clan, a clan allied with Olympus. That was showing blatant opposition against Olympus.

“Does that mean...?”

“Of course I don’t regret it.”

YuWon got the answer to his first question.

“And what’s your second question?”

Hargaan started getting more pumped up, knowing that they would be going at it at any moment now.

YuWon was also getting just as pumped up.

“My second question is...”

Vwoom, vwoom—

A beautiful-colored mana started enveloping the ash-colored sword.

“Did you already forget how I flung you away with a single punch?”

Remembering that incident made a vein pop up on Hargaan’s forehead.

“Of course I remember.”

There was no way Hargaan could forget it. It was the first time he had ever lost to someone who wasn’t a Ranker, and the shock of that moment was still as clear as day in his mind.

“I’ll ask you something now,” Hargaan said, now at a spitting distance from YuWon.  
“Do I seem like I’m the same as I was back then?”

“No,” YuWon answered.

YuWon’s answer eased the tension on Hargaan’s face, but that didn’t last long.

“You seem even smaller,” YuWon continued.

“... Fine.” Hargaan’s electricity shot up into the sky. “Let’s go then.”

Fwip—

Hargaan got ready to swing his fist.

YuWon’s sword and Hargaan’s fist were in reach of each other.

YuWon didn’t try to create distance, nor did he try to evade Hargaan’s attack. He planned to take Hargaan’s full electric punch head on.

Vwoom, vwoom—!

YuWon prepared his [Arcane Sword,] which let out small vibrations.

Crash—!

The sword and fist clashed together, sending out a loud ring across the arena.

Crack—

From the impact, a tiny fracture appeared on YuWon’s sword.

‘This thing must be at its limit,’ he thought.

Chapter 87

There’s an expression that goes, “There is always a higher sky.”

Rumble—

Crash—!

That was what was going through the minds of the players participating in the Grand Martial Arts Tournament.

“Wh-What in the world?”

“Are both of them really players?”

“Are we sure they’re not Rankers?”

“G-Get out of the way! Or you might get caught up—”

“H-Huh?”

“Ahhhhh!”



Crash—!

Vzzzt—

The lightning unleashed from Hargaan's fists spread out across the arena, hitting the players nearby.

The range of his attacks was so big, it was hard to gauge. Even people who thought they were a good distance away ended up getting caught in Hargaan's attacks.

"I give up!"

"Me too! Damn it, I can't be here anymore!"

"I forfeit as well!"

"How in the world do they expect us to fight and win against monsters like them?"

The stage was no longer a place for other players.

All eyes focused on the fight between YuWon and Hargaan, many seeing what happened to the people who got caught up in their fight, which caused more players to start forfeiting.

'So it's finally the real finals,' Hoon thought.

Even Hoon felt miniscule compared to those two.

He was bewildered, 'Hargaan... I've heard his name a lot, but to think he'd be at this level...'

The best Hoon could do was muster up his ki to shield himself from the stray sparks of lightning.

Hargaan was a genius that Hoon was frequently compared to. Because of that, he'd heard of him time and time again, and before he knew it, he had developed a rivalry against Hargaan.

But Hargaan's skills in person were far greater than what he had heard.

'Even if I had multiple clones of me, we wouldn't be able to win against him.'

With YuWon around, Hoon thought he'd just have to aim for second place, but it appeared that he overestimated himself.

'But...'

Hoon's gaze shifted from Hargaan to YuWon, who was barely stopping Hargaan's attacks.

'... Did he really defeat a Ranker with those skills?'

\* \* \*

Boom—!

Hargaan's punch made YuWon slide a ways back.

YuWon's sword was ringing in agony, unable to absorb the entire attack. Scorch marks started to cover the blade.

Bang—!

Hargaan didn't stop his movements.

Spark—

Hargaan moved like golden lightning, instantly appearing next to YuWon.

His Dexterity stat had to be incredibly high because his movements were so fast, it was hard to believe he was still a player who was far from becoming a Ranker.

Vwoom—

Crash—!

Hargaan narrowed his eyes. YuWon did not get pushed back this time.

“You’re pretty strong,” Hargaan said.

“You’re so nice with your compliments.”

“But it looks like your sword is about to break.”

It was now plainly visible that YuWon’s sword was on its last legs. There were fractures running across the entire blade of the sword, looking like a piece of glass that would shatter upon touch.

Spark, crackle—

“I don’t understand. What have you been doing all this time?” Hargaan asked.

Vzzzzzzt—!

Golden lightning enveloped all of Hargaan’s body.

At the same time, the tip of YuWon’s sword moved.

Pshk—

Flash—!

Light exploded from the two.

Crash—!

The sound of thunder echoed.

Hargaan stepped back, feeling a warmth on his shoulder.

Drip, drop—

Blood flowed down from his shoulder, hitting the ground. It looked like a pretty deep wound.

“Hmm...” Hargaan muttered.

He grabbed his wound with his hand and saw his palm get drenched in blood.

Hargaan tilted his head up to look at YuWon, who was now flowing with electricity.

The one who took more of the hit in the clash just now wasn’t Hargaan.

Vzzt, vzzzzzt—

A current was running through all of YuWon’s body. There weren’t a lot of people in the world who could survive taking an electric attack of this caliber head on.

“Are you alive?” Hargaan asked.

With a nonchalant look on his face, YuWon raised his head and answered calmly, “... Of course.”

“I thought that’d be the case.”

Hargaan raised his fist again.

He was wounded, but YuWon should have been the one who took greater damage.

‘His physical abilities are above mine,’ Hargaan thought.

Hargaan himself possessed excellent physical abilities. Because his Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution stats were high, he was confident in combat even without the use of mana.

But if you looked at only physical abilities, YuWon’s were far greater than Hargaan’s.

‘On the other hand, my Arcane Power is much greater,’ Hargaan thought.

That was the core of his strategy.

‘Also...’ Hargaan glanced at the sword that looked like it was on the brink of shattering. ‘Let’s start by first breaking his weapon.’

Once he’d decided on his objective, his movements became more decisive.

Hargaan quickly closed the gap between him and YuWon again.

His fists weren’t aimed at YuWon’s body. It was clear what he was going for as he pummeled YuWon’s sword.

Bam, blam—!

Crack—!

As if he was boxing, Hargaan threw a flurry of punches, cracking the sword more and more.

‘Almost...’

Hargaan started putting more force behind his punches.

‘Now.’

His eyes flashed while he stretched out his right arm.

With a flash of blinding light, lightning exploded out from Hargaan’s fist.

Flash—

CRASH—!

It was such a loud and blinding attack, even the audience members who were sitting far away couldn’t see what happened.

But Hargaan was having an electrifying time fighting YuWon.

Shatter—!

The sword broke apart like glass shards, scattering all over the place.

Hargaan was sure of his victory.

“I did it...” he breathed out.

With a calm voice, YuWon complimented him, “That was great.”

The sweetness of victory quickly faded as Hargaan sensed that something was wrong. He should have been the one with the clear upperhand, yet YuWon thought he did great?

Hargaan stared at him as YuWon threw aside the hilt of the broken sword without a second thought.

And in that moment...

Vwoooooom—

YuWon’s mana started to push away Hargaan’s electricity.

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“Wh-What the...?” Hargaan was bewildered.

He wondered if this was what the Giants might have looked like. YuWon suddenly looked enormous in front of him.

“Do you remember,” YuWon asked, clenching his fist, “how I sent you flying with a single punch before?”

His fist contained much greater strength than before.

Whoosh—

As Hargaan perceived the punch flying towards him...

Wham—!

... He felt an impact against his face, and his consciousness started to fade away.

‘Fucking... hell...’ Hargaan thought.

Whoosh—

Boom—!

Hargaan’s body flew into the air, and he shot across the arena.

Thud, thump—

Hargaan rolled and tumbled across the stage, eventually flopping onto the ground.

One was only able to see that Hargaan was still alive because he was trembling and twitching slightly.

“Huh?”

“What the—?”

“What just happened...?”

The players still in the arena were confused.

“The match isn’t over,” YuWon said while motioning his hand at them. “I ain’t got all day, so let’s get going.”

\* \* \*

YuWon picked up the sword hilt off the ground.

[Broken Nameless Sword]

▷ Classification: Weapon

▷ It’s a sword made from various materials. Its mana conductivity is terrible, but the blade is well-sharpened. It could be useful for butchering.

▷ Currently broken.

It was the sword he had commissioned from Hephaestus. Not only did it not have a name, it was useless in almost every manner.

There was only one positive thing about it.

‘It really has the worst mana conductivity,’ YuWon thought.

This was the first time he had used it because the 「Nameless Sword」 wasn’t an item that was usable in combat.

He originally intended on using it only until it broke.

The reason he had it made was because there was no better item to use to practice controlling Arcane Power.

Also...

‘That should have been good enough to fool them.’

Due to its effect of repressing Arcane Power, to the audience, YuWon and Hargaan’s skills should have looked like they were on par with each other.

There were quite a lot of players and Rankers from Olympus in the audience, and a few of them were Rankers that YuWon might have to fight one day.

Considering how many eyes had gathered to watch the Grand Martial Arts Tournament, simple acting wasn’t enough to fool Rankers.

‘Though I am a bit concerned about that last punch...’

It was an attack YuWon had launched because he thought he shouldn’t drag out the fight any longer with a broken sword.

YuWon raised his head to the screen above the arena.

He could see that he was being shown on the screen, standing in the center of the arena. And on that screen, text popped up.

[WINNER]

YuWon then looked over at the players passed out across the floor of the arena.

[KIM YUWON]

Because he had fought using the minimal amount of mana possible, he was drenched with sweat.

Hoon, rather than fighting YuWon, chose to forfeit. He said that it was because they had already faced off before, but YuWon guessed that it had more to do with how ashamed he was of the actions of JinCheon and the players of the Martial Guild.

“> The winner of the 834th Grand Martial Arts Tournament is player Kim YuWon!”

The MC of the tournament was the 10th Floor’s Lackey.

They appeared while dancing in midair.

The Lackey was a wooden doll wearing a tuxedo, which didn’t really fit the Martial Realm. And on top of the Lackey’s head was a small wooden box.

The Lackey floated over to YuWon and asked him a question.

“> How does it feel to be the winner?”

“It was fun,” YuWon answered.

“> Is that all?”

“Yep.”

A short and sweet answer.

The Lackey had experience emceeing the Grand Martial Arts Tournament multiple times now, but even they had a hard time proceeding with such a lackluster response.

“> Ah, yes. Thank you for your answer. Well then, shall we present you with the prize?”

It was the long-awaited moment.

Yuwon nodded his head and held out his hand. It was as if he was motioning the Lackey to give him his prize already and scram.

Click—

The tiny wooden box opened, and despite being a good distance away from the box, a strong, bitter scent pierced YuWon’s nose.

It was a familiar scent to him.

‘The Great Scarlet Medicine Ball.’

Inside the wooden box was a tiny, red medicine ball.

As one of the items that represented the Martial Realm, this elixir was said to cost an astronomical amount of money and take a long time to produce. It was a heavenly treasure that every player and Ranker desired.

“> Yes. As you all are aware, the prize is the Great Scarlet Medicine Ball. The makers of the Medicine Ball, the Shaolin Temple, said that this one came out especially well...”

“Thanks. I’ll make sure to put it to good use.”

Click—

YuWon closed the wooden box and put it in his inventory. After this short exchange, YuWon turned away. He had no intention of listening to the chatterbox of a Lackey anymore.

‘It’ll take some time to digest it.’

The 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 was slightly bigger than he remembered, and to absorb all the Arcane Power held inside it, it would take at least a few days.

‘As for over there...’

YuWon’s eyes turned to a section of the audience.

‘I can probably leave them be.’

Cheon MuJin was on his way to settle things with the Martial Guild.

NamGung JinWoon had reached out to the Heavenly Demonic Cult first, and the Cult had accepted his hand.

As these were the two highest Rankers in the Martial Realm, YuWon had nothing to worry about. MuJin alone was strong enough to wipe out all the Rankers of the Martial Guild by himself.

‘If the Heavenly Demonic Cult joins them, the Martial Guild’s strength will basically double.’

The Martial Guild would become a guild that controlled an entire world as well as possessed a High Ranker. With the Heavenly Demonic Cult on their side, they would no longer be a mid-sized guild. They would then have the size and resources to push them into the territory of the large guilds.

‘That’s not bad.’

YuWon had only thrown a small stone, but the ripples it caused were about to bring great change to the world of the 10th Floor.

The Martial Guild and the Heavenly Demonic Cult were two groups that had fought on the forefront of the war against the Outers. So their group becoming larger and more powerful was highly beneficial.

Step, step—

YuWon hurriedly walked faster.

It was now time for the 20th Floor. It was a world that rivaled the Martial Realm in size inside the Tower, and it was a floor where the tests started getting significantly harder.

YuWon had a lot of things he had to prepare for everything he wanted to do in that world.

‘To start with...’

YuWon looked at the small wooden box in this hand.

‘I’m going to achieve my stat goal.’

## Chapter 88

The winner of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament had been decided.

The room was so silent, it was suffocating. Everyone was busy gauging Cheon MuJin’s mood.

Zhugue Jing was racking his head harder than everyone else present.

‘Why did Hargaan do that?’ Jing wondered.

Hargaan was most definitely a member of Olympus. As Zeus’s son, there was no clearer indication of his affiliation and status.

And YuWon was labeled internally by Olympus as an enemy.

The only crossing point they should have had was that they were part of the same round of the Tutorial, but that wasn’t enough to explain the relationship between the two.

“And with that, that’s one big task finished,” JinWoon’s voice cut through the thick air.

Everyone’s eyes turned towards him, and few people let out an awkward laughter.

“Ha... Haha... Y-You’re right.”

“This tournament was also very successful.”

“It was a feast for the eyes.”

“What great prosperity for the Martial Guild. Hahaha!”

It was a much more exaggerated reaction than usual.

The people who were worried about the Vice-Lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult just moments ago were now saying that YuWon’s victory was good for the Martial Realm.

It was such blatant hypocrisy, it was funny.

MuJin was expressionless as he watched this unfold.

“Now, that leaves the next big task...” JinWoon said while shifting his gaze towards Jing and SoBaek.

SoBaek averted his eyes, while Jing stood even more upright.

“What do you intend to do by roping in the Evil Cult?” Jing asked.

The atmosphere in the room that was starting to relax a bit tensed back up.

Jing and JinWoon stared each other down.

The Rankers around them became uneasy. They knew the two didn’t get along, but never had they had a direct confrontation like this.

““Roping in the Evil Cult’... That’s not a very nice way to put it, General.” JinWoon berated Jing.



“Am I wrong?” Jing retorted.

JinWoon responded, “They’re not the ‘Evil Cult’ but the ‘Heavenly Demonic Cult.’ And I’m not roping them in. I requested an alliance with them.”

“Do you mean to say—” Jing tried to speak.

But JinWoon cut him off, “It’s better than roping in Olympus, isn’t it?”

JinWoon’s accusation made the people in the room clamor.

“What?”

“Olympus?”

The air in the room had turned heavy and cold, and the room was now filled with mana exerted by JinWoon.

“Matters of the Martial Realm should be resolved by us, the people of the Martial Realm. Or do you intend to hand this world over to Olympus?” JinWoon said in a sharp tone.

His respectful mannerisms had all but disappeared, and he was now being verbally aggressive.

JinWoon shouted, “You should be ashamed, Zhuge Jing!”

Fwoooo—!

JinWoon’s energy filled up the entire room.

The lion that was pretending to be docile since becoming the head of the Martial Artists’ Alliance had reawoken and was now roaring.

Jing was one of the top five most skilled people in the Martial Guild. So he wasn’t someone that could be intimidated just by pressure exuded by another.

What Jing was truly afraid of right now wasn’t JinWoon.

‘He’s been a bystander all this time. So for him to make a move now...’ Jing thought.

JinWoon’s behavior changed with the arrival of the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

‘Does that mean he knew all along?’ Jing speculated.

Jing thought it might have been possible that JinWoon might not only have known how he and Olympus were connected, but JinWoon might even have evidence to back it all up.

There was only one reason why JinWoon had been biding his time, and that was because over half of the Martial Guild had been siding with Jing, so he wasn’t confident that he could win a full-on frontal confrontation. But now...

‘With the Heavenly Demonic Cult and the Heavenly Demon on his side, the power dynamic has crumbled,’ Jing thought.

Not to mention, JinWoon held the moral high ground.

Jing's shoulders slumped. 'It's over,' he thought.

Seeing Jing not put up a fight, the Rankers that came with him also lowered their heads. They instinctively felt that now that the NamGung Clan and Demonic Cult were cooperating with each other, the Zhuge Clan no longer had a place to stand.

It was now the age of the NamGung Noble Clan and the Heavenly Demonic Cult.

"Sorry to butt in while you're cleaning house, but I need to ask a question," Mujin said after looking around the room full of Rankers. "Who is Moon SoBaek?"

\* \* \*

With Hoon's help, YuWon rented the NamGung Clan's training chamber.

Just like the training chamber at Mt. Heaven, this was a facility that couldn't be opened from the outside.

Yuwon rented this place for ten days.

This training chamber required a large amount of money to rent for even one day, but YuWon didn't have to pay any points.

Hoon told YuWon, "Don't look down on the NamGung Clan. Such a benefit should obviously be provided to the winner of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament." Great pride for his clan could be heard in his voice.

Returning to the large manor of the NamGung Clan, YuWon had a flashback of his old memories.

'It looked so big back then,' YuWon thought.

It was the first place he had seen that looked like a palace after he entered the Tower. Back then, YuWon's dream was even to become a Ranker of the NamGung Clan.

'But now... it looks so small.'

In the enormous Tower, there were many castles far greater than the manor of the NamGung Clan. Olympus, Asgard, and the Heavenly Realm each had a palace that was the size of a small nation.

Yuwon entered the training chamber and closed the steel door that was about 50cm thick.

Step, step—

Yuwon's footsteps echoed inside the chamber.

All sounds were cut off from the outside thanks to the training chamber having been created with a mix of onyx steel.

Click—

Yuwon opened the wooden box right away, and a bitter scent hit his nose right away.

It was the scent of the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball.」

[Great Scarlet Medicine Ball]

▷ An elixir that is created once every three years at the Shaolin Temple. It is created using hundreds of ingredients and a special recipe known only to the Shaolin Temple.

▷ When consumed, the user will gain a large amount of Arcane Power.

The description wasn't all that special. In fact it was similar to most elixirs.

The important detail was that it was made with 'hundreds of ingredients.'

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'As time goes on, the production method improves, and the value of the Great Scarlet Medicine Ball increases.'

Only one was made every three years, but this wasn't a tactic to artificially increase the value of the medicine ball. It was because the entirety of the Martial Guild and the Shaolin Temple had to work together just to barely create one.

In fact, sometimes they were unable to procure the necessary ingredients, so the prize of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament would be substituted for something else.

YuWon picked up the medicine ball with no hesitation.

'It's a 50/50 chance.'

His Arcane Power was almost at 100, so it was unsure if even the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 could raise his stat at this point.

It might only have been 1 point, but going from 99 to 100 was no easy task.

"Well, I have nothing to lose."

He wasn't too attached to it since it wasn't difficult for him to get this item.

YuWon put the medicine ball inside his mouth.

Gulp—

The 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 had a strange feel to it. Even though it was hard like a rock, as soon as it entered his mouth, it melted like a soft jelly. And after fully melting into a liquid, the medicine ball had a refreshing coolness to it as it went down his throat.

Fssss, fss—

A highly dense, clear mana started to enter YuWon's body.

This was the first time YuWon was able to get the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 because in his previous life, he had only managed to get second place in the tournament.

"The Great Scarlet Medicine Ball has a completely different effect depending on who consumes it."

“The people of the Martial Realm say that how you control ki and your breathing and cultivation technique are important, but what really matters is your focus.”

“Like how you can contain more mana?”

YuWon recollected what his friends who had taken the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 told him.

The core part of their message was the same—to ‘contain’ it.

YuWon sat down on the floor in a comfortable position, and he started to contain the energy of the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 that had entered his body.

But as soon as he did that, the energy of the medicine ball started to revolt inside his body.

\* \* \*

Drip—

Sweat glistened on YuWon’s forehead, and his blood felt like it was reversing in flow like turbulent waves.

It felt like the energy would immediately leave his body if he lost focus for even a second.

‘Calm down,’ he told himself.

The more will YuWon exerted, the more the energy fought back.

At first, he struggled to manage it. With each little bit of energy he felt leaking from his body, he almost wanted to cry from how wasteful he thought it was. But as time passed, YuWon began to get a handle on containing the energy.

Fshhh, fshh—

The waves that were rampaging inside his body started to die down a little.

The medicine ball turned into Arcane Power and flowed through his body, but despite it becoming calmer, YuWon could not say the power was his yet.

‘The first step is finished.’

The first challenge was to endure the power of the melting medicine ball and make sure as little of it leaked out as possible.

The second challenge was to make the contained mana into your own.

‘It’ll take a while...’ YuWon thought while his brows furrowed, ‘for me to absorb all of this.’

That was when...

Fsss—

... The medicine ball started to change within his body. The now liquid medicine ball unleashed pure mana at a rapid rate, and the mana flowed slowly like water and was absorbed into YuWon's body.

Twitch—

It was the start of the second step.

Fss, fsss—

YuWon's body started to quickly absorb the energy of the medicine ball.

‘What's going on?’

Until just a moment ago, he was having trouble and barely containing the energy of the medicine ball so it wouldn't escape. But now that the medicine ball had fully melted into mana, he didn't need to exert any more force.

It was as if the mana was obeying YuWon and becoming his of its own volition.

It was something he felt everytime he consumed an elixir, but the [Master of Mana] skill had the ability to increase the effect of an elixir to the max. Thanks to that, it accelerated the process which would normally have taken much longer.

‘If that's the case...’

YuWon braced himself as he pushed mana through his blood vessels.

Fsss—

‘I have no reason to do this slowly.’

The mana was waiting for him to make it his, and YuWon wanted exactly that. Not a single drop of mana was wasted anymore.

YuWon sat still and enjoyed the pure, high-density mana filling up his body.

Around the time the majority of the mana had been absorbed, YuWon thought, ‘So was it just not possible?’

He had obtained a larger amount of mana through the 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball」 than he expected, but there was still no notification of his stat increasing.

‘Did I fall short?’

While having only 99 Arcane Power, he now had more mana, but this meant that he ultimately failed to reach 100 Arcane Power.

‘If even the Great Scarlet Medicine Ball can't do it, then next...’

As YuWon planned his next course of action...

[Your Arcane Power increased by 1.]

[Your Arcane Power reached 100.]

[An innate skill has been awakened through this achievement.]

A new level of senses opened up for YuWon's body.

His eyes flashed and his senses expanded.

'I did it.'

There was no guarantee that two players would obtain the same power even if they reached the same level of stats. But the awakening of an ability through stats was a player's innate skill.

Even if power was lost by returning to the past, the power didn't disappear completely. And the innate skill that YuWon had before returning to the past was a skill that was compared to OhGong's [Golden Cinder Eyes.]

[You obtained Sensory Field.]

YuWon's eyes opened.

His eyes had turned red. It was the [Cinder Eyes.]

And along with it, an ultimate sensory skill that represented YuWon, [Sensory Field,] had been activated.

With that, YuWon's broken wings had mended and began to grow again.

## Chapter 89

The world of the 20th Floor was massive. Ironically, it was also a cramped place.

The world itself was large, but there wasn't much space that people could live in. With 90% of the world being ocean, unless you were an aquatic race, you couldn't live on the 20th Floor.

Of course, that didn't mean that the remaining 10% of the land was abandoned. In fact, it was the exact opposite.

Despite it being only 10% of the world, the land was still expansive and bountiful, so the world progressed greatly.

The Marine Kingdom, Portuga.

In that kingdom, there was a legend...

"He who finds the 'Stone of the Sea' will become the god of the sea..."

On Neptu, one of the twelve islands of Portuga and the smallest of the islands, there was neverending fighting.

"... What an attractive legend. To be able to become a god just by getting your hands on it," the person continued.

A dozen players were threatening a large boy and girl. The two were over two meters tall, and they were trembling while walking back into a wall.

"P-Please don't hurt us..."

“Wh-What did we do wrong? Why are you doing this to us?”

“Hah! ‘P-Please don’t hurt us... W-We didn’t do anything wrong...’ Hehehe.”

“You should be ashamed of how cowardly you guys are for your size.”

“Are all Giants li’l chickens like them?”

“It’s hard to hide yourselves now that you’ve grown quite big, isn’t that right?”

“These li’l assholes probably aren’t even ten years old if we go by human age.”

“Really? But they’re this tall?”

“These creepy buggers grow to be at least four meters tall. Blegh.”

“You guys should have been good while Asgard was still helping you guys out. So why did you guys go and pick a fight with them...”

Asgard and the Giants were originally on friendly terms. But after some Giants started working together with the Demons, Asgard cut ties with them. And ever since, these situations had become common.

All sorts of crass comments were showered upon the two Giants.

The two players walked further back into the corner, cowering in fear.

“You know the legend I was talking about earlier?” a red-haired man that was leading the group asked while walking closer to the Giants.

“Wh-What legend?” one of the Giants asked in response.

“The one about the Stone of the Sea,” the red-haired man spoke. “Where is it?”

The Giants looked at the emblems on the players’ chests. They were drawings of a red-maned wolf.

They were members of the Crimson Wolf Guild, a guild infamous in the lower and middle floors.

“Do you really believe such a childish rumor?” the Giant boy asked.

The red-haired man scoffed in response, “Of course I don’t, but it’s still the most plausible rumor.”

“And do you know who the source of that rumor is?”

“Isn’t it Olympus? They’re as reliable of a source as it gets.”

“Then I’m sure you also know the relationship between us and Olympus?”

“We know. And that’s exactly why we’re doing this,” the red-haired man said while reaching for his knife. “Olympus will give zero fucks about us killing Giants.”

The 20th Floor was a world under the jurisdiction of Olympus. Over half of the Bureau were Rankers and players of Olympus, and whenever incidents involving the Giants occurred, they covered up most of them.

This could only happen because Olympus wanted to eradicate the Giants.

“If you don’t want to die, then tell me already. Where is the Stone of the Sea?” the red-haired man threatened the Giants.

“I told you, we don’t have anything like that!” one of them shouted.

The other Giant followed up with, “That’s a fake rumor spread by Olympus to get rid of our people!”

Despite the Giants’ strong objections, nothing was going to change.

Displeased from not getting the answer he wanted, the red-haired man picked his ear, saying, “Oh, really?”

He then turned his head back towards his comrades.

They were fellow guildmates that had been with him for a long time now, and each could tell what the others were thinking just by the look in their eyes.

“Well, let’s see if you guys can still keep saying that later on.”

Shing—

Shnnk, shank—

The players started to prepare their weapons and skills.

The surrounded Giants grit their teeth. They knew that these guys wouldn’t listen to them no matter what they said.

The red-haired man instructed his men, “Don’t kill them. Just cut off their limbs one at a time. Then they might change their minds and—”

“What are villains doing, roaming around such peaceful times?” a voice interrupted him.

\* \* \*

The red-haired man was named Horang, an executive of the Crimson Wolf Guild. He turned his head, glaring, and saw that a man was walking into the alley.

““Villains?”

“Who’s this asshole?”

“He doesn’t seem to know where he shouldn’t stick his nose.”

“Don’t you know who we are?”

The Crimson Wolf Guild was composed of players from the 20th to the 50th Floors. And because the guildmaster was a decently high-ranking Ranker, they were well-known on the lower floors.

“Are you going to just let him go?”



“It’ll get annoying if we kill someone that’s not a Giant, especially with how vigilant Asgard has been lately.”

“Those motherfuckers are always acting like they’re goodie two-shoes.”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

The group had decided to ignore him, knowing that it was just one guy, but then the voice got even closer.

“I’m not playing. I’m the real deal.”

Ssk—

YuWon cut through the group, saying, “and I have business with them too.”

“What?”

“Is this son of a bitch also after the Stone of the Sea?”

“Hey, be careful.”

The members of Crimson Wolf became more alert watching YuWon walk through them. Even an idiot would realize that someone so bold had to have good reason to be so confident.

“Which guild are you from?”

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“Tell us. But whichever guild you’re from, this isn’t right, man.”

“There are rules even among us...”

“Wait,” Horang stopped his guildmates and just watched YuWon approach the two Giants.

‘This guy. He looks familiar...’ Horang thought. He’d definitely seen this face somewhere before.

That’s when it hit him.

“Hey, is he...”

“Are you thinking the same thing I am?”

A few of the guild members started whispering. They seemed to be on the same page as Horang.

“Kim YuWon,” Horang said to YuWon. He spoke in his deepest voice and with the scariest glare he could muster. “Am I right?”

YuWon nodded his head.

After the Grand Martial Arts Tournament, the number of people who recognized his face greatly increased.

Horang was one of them.

“Does that mean we can just talk this out?” YuWon asked.

“You may be pretty skilled for the 20th Floor, but that ain’t nothin’. I get that you’re amazing and all, but we cleared the 20th Floor long ago,” said Horang.

The majority of the players in the Crimson Wolf Guild were players of the 25th Floor and above.

And Horang, being an executive, was a player of a floor much higher than 20. So to him, even if YuWon was the winner of the Grand Martial Arts Tournament, he only saw YuWon as a player of the 20th Floor.

“No,” YuWon said, turning to face the Crimson Wolf Guild while standing in front of the Giants, “I don’t believe in anyone.”

Horang furrowed his brow as he locked eyes with YuWon.

It was just one guy. A player who only just arrived on the 20th Floor.

Despite that, Horang couldn’t look down on him. That’s how much weight the name “Kim YuWon” carried lately.

Horang thought, ‘There has to be a reason why he’s acting so cocky.’

With YuWon’s skills, he should have been able to join any large guild at any time he wanted.

Horang continued thinking, ‘We shouldn’t lose to the skills he showed at the tournament. But what if he has comrades nearby? Or what if he’s being escorted by someone from the Heavenly Demonic Clan?’

It was well-known that YuWon was the Vice-Lord of the Demonic Cult.

So even though it seemed like there was no one else nearby, it was still a risk to fight him with only this many people on their side.

‘It’s a shame that we have to let go of some Giants, but...’ Horang thought it was risky with only twelve people, so he took his hand off his hilt and turned around.

“We’re leaving,” Horang said.

“But, sir!”

“He’s completely alone!”

Horang shook his head. “We’re turning back, and that’s final.”

As a leader, Horang did not change his mind after making a decision. So his companions, after a bit of hesitation, left as ordered.

“You’re lucky,” Horang growled, “if it weren’t for the Heavenly Demonic Cult, I would have torn you to pieces right here.

YuWon looked at him who was looking back with bloodlust. Horang’s eyes had turned yellow. His glare was fierce and sharp, like that of a wild beast.

‘He’s not a normal guy,’ YuWon sensed from the intense mana Horang was radiating.

It was strange to YuWon. He thought, ‘Why isn’t a guy like this better known?’

YuWon was familiar with most Rankers, and Horang was no ordinary player. With a fairly high position within his guild, he should have had the skills to become a Ranker.

“Uh...” a loud voice spoke from behind YuWon.

He turned his head.

It was the girl Giant. It seemed that she had tried to speak quietly, but a Giant’s voice was much louder than a human’s voice.

The Giant girl said, “Thanks for saving u—”

“What if I hadn’t saved you?” YuWon cut her off. “Were you just going to take it?”

“What?”

“You’re two Giants. You shouldn’t be afraid of guys like these.”

The Giants were a strong race. Born with dominant strength, they were on par with Demons and Draconians.

The Giant girl mumbled, unable to give a proper answer.

The Giant boy cut in, “You must know Giants pretty well.”

He was now much more alert, having realized that YuWon knew Giants better than the average person.

YuWon nodded his head. “A little bit.”

“Who are you with? Olympus? Or Asgard?”

“Big brother, I don’t think we should be so rude to someone that helped us.”

“He’s still a human. There’s no way he helped us without expecting something in return,” the boy defended his actions to his little sister.

“But still...”

“He’s right,” YuWon nodded.

YuWon looked straight into the eyes of the Giant boy who was a good two or three feet taller than him.

“I didn’t help you guys for no reason,” YuWon continued.

“So are you after the Stone of the Sea as well?”

“That’s right.”

The 「Stone of the Sea.」 It was an item that all players that visited the 20th Floor dreamed of.

As an item known to turn one into a god, despite its existence being unproven, countless players and Rankers searched for it.

YuWon was no different, except for one thing.

‘The Stone of the Sea is real,’ YuWon knew.

Unlike the others who were on a wild goose chase, YuWon knew the truth and how to find it.

“Damn it, why don’t you believe us?! We don’t know where it is!” The cries of the frustrated boy rumbled in the alleyway.

The towering boy’s muscles twitched as he told YuWon, “Listen to me. We really don’t know. We don’t even know if the Stone of the Sea is real, and even if it does exist, we don’t know where it is!”

“I know that,” YuWon said.

“What?” The boy was confused.

“You guys don’t know where it is, so of course you guys don’t have it,” YuWon explained.

The boy furrowed his brow as he asked, “Then what business do you have with us?”

“I have business with a Giant that you guys know.”

“A different Giant?”

“Urpha.”

The two made surprised faces at the name YuWon brought up.

The Giants in front of him were only a few decades old. In human terms, they were only elementary schoolers. YuWon had no business with these kids.

“I’d like to meet

Chapter 90

The names of the Giant siblings were Buar and Nwiar. Buar was the older brother of Nwiar and had a rougher personality than his little sister. Nwiar was more docile in comparison, but she still had her guard up as well.

Their answer to YuWon’s request was a firm ‘No.’

“How long are you going to follow us?”

Step, step—

YuWon followed the two circling around the back alley.

This game had been going on for hours.

“I’m sure eventually you’ll go back to your people,” YuWon answered.

“We’re going to lose you before that,” Buar told him.

“I thought you weren’t going to fight me?”

Buar was ticked. How could someone be so annoying?

“Or are you unable to fight?” YuWon followed up.

“I can fight,” Buar said bitterly.

“Big brother,” Nwiar stopped Buar. She was worried that Buar might end up snapping and throwing a punch.

Buar huffed a bit, staring down at YuWon, before he turned his head and continued to walk.

‘He’s holding back,’ YuWon observed.

Giants were naturally strong, but unfortunately they had a lot of enemies.

With Olympus and Asgard, two of the top guilds in the Tower, as their enemies, Giants always had to watch their actions. If they caused any trouble, it would give Olympus an easy excuse to exterminate them by claiming Giants were dangerous.

‘He’s young but quite mature,’

The two siblings were big for their age.

They were at an age where they might have had trouble controlling their emotions, yet Buar only growled while Nwiar tried to pretend like she didn’t care about YuWon.

“What do I have to do for you guys to help me out?”

“The Elder doesn’t just meet anyone. Go back.”

“I’m not just anyone.”

“All humans are the same. That’s what we were taught.”

They had a deep distrust of humans.

This was a unified belief among Giants due to the long pain they had suffered at the hands of humans.

“So fuck off before you get hurt. Like you said, if we wanted to, we could easily crush a hoard of guys like you,” Buar threatened.

He was one of the Giants that not only didn’t trust humans but despised them.

YuWon wasn’t going to get anywhere with just words.

“Is that right? Well then...” YuWon spoke, deciding he had to be more assertive. “Do I just have to beat you?”

“You’re welcome to test that theory out,” YuWon taunted, extending his hand.

Buar started to hold out his hand as well, as the two stared each other down.

Nwiar quietly observed because she could tell that the two weren't going to fight just yet.

Grab—

Squeeze—

Despite having a hand that was many times bigger, Buar was surprised when he grabbed YuWon's hand.

'What's this?' Buar thought to himself.

YuWon's grip strength was impressive, able to hold up against a Giant.

They had only just grabbed each other by the hand, but Buar now understood why YuWon was acting so cocky.

'I've heard his name quite a few times... but what is his strength stat?' Buar wondered.

Buar himself was a player, so he was familiar with YuWon.

He started to feel competitive. His pride wouldn't let him lose against a player that had just reached the 20th Floor.

"Then let's start—"

"Wait, big brother!" Nwiar stepped in.

Buar looked over at his sister, annoyed at the interruption.

"Don't worry. We're not fighting. We're just going to do some friendly arm wrestling," Buar explained.

"I can see that, but this is urgent."

"What is it?"

"It's a message from Elder Urpha."

Nwiar's words made Buar immediately let go of YuWon's hand.

YuWon's interest also piqued at the mention of the person he'd been searching for.

"You messaged him?" asked Buar.

"Yeah. I thought I should at least let him know what's going on," said Nwiar.

"And what did he say?"

"Well..." Nwiar said timidly, turning her head to YuWon. "The Elder's looking for you."

\* \* \*

YuWon followed Buar and Nwiar.

The entire walk, Buar looked unhappy.

“What does the Elder want with a guy like him?”

“He is pretty famous.”

Urpha was one of the oldest Giants. He was not old nor ill, but he had been alive long before the days of the Gigantomachy, though he did not directly take part in it. And nothing was known about his whereabouts.

“I’m sure the Elder has his reasons.”

“Hmph...”

Because it was Urpha himself who called for YuWon, the two had no choice but to lead him through the forest.

It was the only forest on the 20th Floor, a place known as the ‘Giant Forest.’

Fweet—!

Buar whistled hard with his fingers as soon as they arrived at the forest.

After a moment, the ground rumbled and a pack of beasts appeared.

“Woof, woof—!”

“Woof!”

It was a pack of five wolves, but they were no ordinary wolves.

‘Big Wolves.’

Big Wolves were humongous beasts that were more than two meters tall and ten meters long, and their presence was how this forest earned its moniker.

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The animals that resided in the Giant Forest were anywhere from a few times to dozens of times bigger than their normal counterparts.

The wolves were growling and barking.

“Thanks in advance.” Buar signaled with his hand and some of the wolves became docile and lowered themselves.

Buar and Nwiar got on top of two of the wolves, but the other wolves were still on alert against YuWon.

“Grrrrrr—”

They glared at YuWon, their guards up.

Buar told the wolves who were baring their fangs, “He’s not food, stop—”

“Down,” YuWon signaled the wolves looking at him.

In an instant, the wolves who were looking at YuWon lowered their bodies.

“Arf, arf—”

The Big Wolves lowered their tails, and they even stopped baring their fangs and claws. They seemed to have lost their will to fight, afraid of YuWon.

‘What the...?’ Buar thought, feeling whiplashed.

YuWon’s eyes had turned red, so Buar could tell that he was using some sort of special skill. But he still couldn’t believe that YuWon was able to dominate the Big Wolves with just his gaze.

‘Is it some hallucination skill? Or perhaps a druid’s taming skill?’

Whatever the case was, it was clear the Big Wolves had surrendered to YuWon.

The Giant Forest of the 20th Floor was an area that was off limits. It had a hunting ground that was dangerous for a player of the 20th Floor to challenge. In fact, that was the case even for players of much higher floors.

Even Buar, a Giant, had a hard time taming his Big Wolf.

YuWon replied while petting a Big Wolf with one hand, “These guys are pretty smart.” He turned his head to look at Buar and continued, “Unlike someone.”

“What?” Buar was stunned.

“Let’s go already. We even found a ride,” YuWon said while hopping onto the back of a Big Wolf.

Buar was ticked, but he held back and commanded his wolf by patting it on the back, “Let’s go.”

“Woof, woof—!”

The Big Wolf started to sprint forward.

Buar turned his head back and saw that the Big Wolf Yuwon was riding was keeping up well.

YuWon and Buar locked eyes, not avoiding each other’s gazes.

Buar felt his blood boil.

‘I want to fight him,’ he thought.

Having been born a Giant, he was full of memories of players picking fights with him, but not once did he consider any of them a real opponent. It was like watching a small chihuahua bark. You let them yap and even bite you sometimes because they were harmless.

Buar lived his entire life holding back, telling himself that he shouldn’t fight. Yet for some reason, he couldn’t do that with YuWon.

He hadn’t felt this great a desire to win in a while.

“Big brother,” Nwiar said, having noticed what Buar was thinking, “You can’t.”

Her firm tone made Buar turn his head forward again.

“... I know.”



During the rest of their trip, Buar used that time to calm himself down.

In the end, they arrived at a large tree.

“This is the place,” Buar said while getting off the Big Wolf.

Nwiar followed his lead and also dismounted her wolf.

YuWon looked up at the massive tree that sprouted all the way into the clouds.

‘Adam,’ YuWon thought.

“What do you think? Isn’t it amazing?” Buar said with pride. “It’s a tree that never burns or falls. The old folks call it a branch of the World Tree, but I don’t really know much about that.”

This was something that YuWon already knew because Adam was famous among Rankers. As the tree where the first Giant was said to have been born, Adam was a treasure of the Giants.

‘A tree that never burns...’ YuWon mulled over that statement..

He could clearly remember Adam burning down during the second Gigantomachy. It wasn’t just the tree, but the entire Giant Forest had been reduced to nothing.

“What are you doing? Get down already,” Buar hurried YuWon.

After taking in the scenery, YuWon got off and followed Buar to a large tunnel near the roots of the tree.

“You better start watching how you act from this point forward,” Buar warned Yuwon.

Stomp—

“If you’re not careful, you might get stomped to death.”

YuWon nodded his head at Buar’s warning.

After the Gigantomachy, the Giants’ opinion of humans hit rock bottom. They were taught to avoid trouble and fights for the safety of their kind, but exceptions existed, and not all Giants were well-behaved like Buar and Nwiar.

“Follow me.”

Stomp, stomp—

There was no natural light under the tree, but there were shining crystals embedded all over the place, lighting up the inside as bright as day.

This was the home of the Giants.

“What’s that?”

“A human?”

“They’re with Buar and Nwiar.”

“Is it a guest?”

“No way. A human guest?”

The Giants they walked past all whispered as they looked at YuWon.

Most of them had powers close to that of a Ranker. And every single one of them was on guard against YuWon.

“Ignore them,” Nwiar quietly whispered to Yuwon. “You’re a guest of the Elder, so you have nothing to be afraid of.”

It would be natural for anyone to be afraid in this situation. He had entered a Giants’ den, and there was no Giant that would welcome a human with the current circumstances.

“Hey, Buar,” a Giant that appeared to be around the two siblings’ age approached them.

He had wide shoulders and sharp eyes.

“When did you get back?” the Giant asked Buar.

“Just now,” he answered while stepping in front of YuWon.

It was as if he was trying to hide YuWon with his size.

He asked with a smiling face, “How’s climbing the Tower? I heard you climbed quite high.”

“I’m on the 49th Floor now.”

“That’s pretty fast. Did you come back to rest?”

“Yeah, and to say hi to the Elders.”

“Really?”

The conversation up until now felt like just formalities.

The Giant then peeked his head around Buar and glared at YuWon, “Now... What’s with this ant?”