Chapter 121 : Chapter 121

Chapter 121 : Twin Venerables

The carriage procession flying the flag of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild cut across the vast earth and increased its speed toward the east, toward Liaoning.

Sitting on the roof of the carriage, I was lost in thought while facing the blowing wind.

The letter tucked in my bosom contained information that the Heavenly Cry Zither, the legacy of the Zither Venerable, had appeared near Liaoning.

-Kukuku, the Zither Venerable's item, you say. He was an old man who hid bone-cutting true qi within that sound. Your ears will sting a bit this time.

-Since his martial arts are based on pure sound arts, if it resonates with the Buddhist Venerable's dharma power, it might produce unexpected results.

I checked my qi center while listening to the advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen.

Having already absorbed four divine items, my martial prowess had risen significantly.

However, as the number of divine items increased, I intuitively felt that I needed a larger 'frame' to weave them into one.

"Young Master, isn't it cold on the roof? Instead of this, please come inside and have some snacks."

Cheon Deung-jin poked her head out the carriage window and smiled brightly.

Although she hadn't undone her cross-dressing, her eyes were intense.

"It's fine. The wind is refreshing."

As I answered briefly, Seol Ye-rin's chilly voice popped out from the opposite window.

"Jin, the Young Master is training. Don't disturb him and sit down."

"Disturb him? Miss Seol. I only intend to assist the Young Master's side."

It had started again.

I pressed my temples.

The battle of nerves between the two women hadn't stopped for a single moment since leaving the Western Regions.

Wi Ji-yeong, who was holding her breath inside the carriage, met my eyes and sent a desperate signal as if saying 'save me', but I turned my gaze away pretending not to see.

What added the peak of tension to the carriage where Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin's battle of nerves was taking place was none other than the Divine Physician's granddaughter, Seong Sang-ah.

Seong Sang-ah fiddled with her teacup between Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin, then opened her mouth in her characteristic languid yet barb-filled tone.

"Everyone has so much heat. They say the night air of the Western Regions is cold, but inside the carriage, it feels like midsummer."

Seong Sang-ah's gaze turned toward my back as I sat on the roof outside the window.

Seong Sang-ah took out a small bottle from her medicine box and smiled brightly.

"The Young Master is currently focusing all his nerves on managing the foreign energies inside his qi center, so wouldn't it be a disturbance if you emit energies like that inside? If you want to assist, you should do it properly."

At Seong Sang-ah's words, Cheon Deung-jin's eyebrows twitched, and Seol Ye-rin's eyes sank coldly.

The two women's gazes landed on Seong Sang-ah simultaneously, but she tapped on the carriage ceiling without a care.

"Young Master, it's Sang-ah. This is a Calming Scent I specially prepared; it will help manage your energy. Would you like to come inside for a moment?"

It was clever.

At Seong Sang-ah's proposal to draw me inside under the pretext of assistance, Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin simultaneously made expressions realizing they had made a mistake.

"Miss Seong, if it is a Calming Scent, I also know the secret prescriptions of the Ice Palace well. There is no need to bother the Young Master....."

"Oh my, Miss Seol. This is a secret prescription acknowledged even by my father, the Divine Physician. It is fundamentally different from the Ice Palace's."

Seong Sang-ah emptied her teacup in a relaxed manner and added.

"And it seems the Young Master's shoulders are a bit stiff, I should release his acupoints."

Releasing acupoints meant physical contact.

A fighting spirit that seemed like it would make a sizzling sound poured out simultaneously from Seol Ye-rin's and Cheon Deung-jin's eyes.

The atmospheric pressure inside the carriage dropped rapidly, causing frost to settle on the floor, and at the same time, the heat of the Fire Spirit began to warm the air.

Listening to this entire conversation from the carriage roof, I swallowed dry saliva.

-Kukuku, this is none other than hell. It would be more comfortable to jump at the Ten Venerables under the Heavens instead.

-It feels like the carriage is going to explode from the mixture of the three women's energies. Please make a decision quickly!

I seriously pondered upon the urgent telepathic messages of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen.

Should I jump off the carriage right now and run to Liaoning alone?

However, my contemplation did not last long.

It was because I began to feel an energy of massive wavelength from behind my back.

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The Loess Plains, the border between the Central Plains and the Western Regions.

Beyond that roughly shimmering horizon, two streaks of destructive qi veins were rushing toward the carriage procession.

Gwak Wi opened his bizarrely twisted lips while controlling his body figure, which shot forward explosively every time he stepped on the ground.

An overwhelming fighting spirit, seemingly capable of crushing a house-sized boulder in a single breath, was pouring down behind his back like a waterfall.

"Jang Wi, can you feel it? I mean that purple flame shimmering on the roof of that carriage."

Jang Wi's voice was like a giant bell ringing through a mountain range.

Jang Wi, who was matching his speed while shaking faintly like a shadow beside him, flicked his tongue like a snake.

"Of course I feel it. Iron, Fighting, Poison, and now Buddhist. The energies of four of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens are mixed in one guy's qi center. It's not just appetizing, it's bizarre."

Dozens of daggers hanging all over Gwak Wi's body let out a chilly metallic sound in response to the change in airflow.

Gwak Wi intuitively felt that his bracelet, a divine item entrusted to Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang, would be vibrating as if screaming by now.

Although they had lent the bracelets to Yong Il-gang as a compass, the senses of the divine items' masters did not miss a resonance even from dozens of li away.

"Chasing the Holy Hand Divine Physician's tokens is important, but retrieving those legacies comes first. Jang Wi, crush the carriage wheels with your ignorant Twin Rings. I will cut off the breaths of the wenches sticking to that guy and scatter his mind."

Gwak Wi's fingertips seeped toward the Twin Rings at his waist.

He had taken the lives of countless experts throughout his life, but it was his first time seeing someone emitting such a foreign yet destructive energy.

The form where Demonic Fire and Dharma Power strangely coexisted was destroying even the common sense of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

"My Twin Rings will confirm if he's a guy who's only loud on the outside or the real deal."

Jang Wi adjusted his grip on the massive steel Twin Rings.

The fighting spirit Jang Wi emitted had already far transcended the realm of ordinary masters and was pressing down on the atmosphere.

In the eyes of the Twin Venerables, Hyeokryeon Yeom appeared less like a great martial artist and more like a massive treasure warehouse full of ripe fruits.

The cold logic of the Murim, that the one who snatches it first becomes the owner, flashed in their eyes.

"Hmm?"

At that moment, they saw the party moving.

"It seems he noticed."

"The brat, he's quick-witted!"

Gwak Wi burst into creepy laughter.

Far away, Hyeokryeon Yeom, who had risen from his seat on the carriage roof, was looking exactly this way.

The two monsters praised as the Twin Venerables exploded toward the carriage, raising loess dust like starving beasts, to usurp the legacies Hyeokryeon Yeom possessed and the Holy Hand Divine Physician's tokens.

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Rising from my seat on the carriage roof, my clothes fluttered roughly in the loess wind.

The two trajectories approaching from afar were accompanied by a pressure that shook the earth itself, going beyond simple killing intent.

-Kukuku, they are impatient fellows. They look ready to ram into us without even a greeting.

-Be careful. The energy on the left is cunning like a snake, and the right is heavy like a great mountain. Seeing them travel as a pair, it seems they are the Twin Venerables, who perform the most tricky joint attacks among the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

At the warnings of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I smiled fishily and gripped the Vajra tightly.

The women inside the carriage seemed to have grasped the situation as well, stopping their battle of nerves and sharpening their respective energies.

"Vice Captain! Stop the carriage!"

Simultaneously with my shout, Eun Bin pulled the reins hard.

Screech.

As the carriage stopped with a scream, the Small Snow Squad members instantly formed a formation around it.

"Young Master!"

"Third Young Master, they are……!"

The carriage door opened, and Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah popped out.

Blue cold qi was already hovering over Seol Ye-rin's ice sword, and Cheon Deung-jin's whole body shimmered with the heat of the Extreme Yang Body.

Seong Sang-ah also stared ahead with a cold gaze, hiding lethal needles between her slender fingers.

"The Young Palace Head and Miss Cheon, protect the carriage with the squad members. Miss Seong, prepare for detoxification and healing in the rear."

"Are you going to face them alone?"

At Seol Ye-rin's worry-filled shout, I exploded the energy in my qi center and jumped down to the ground.

Kwa-ang—!

Purple flame and golden dharma power swirled beneath my feet, creating a massive crater.

After absorbing four divine items, I became a body capable of coating the flames with various things.

"I think I know what they are aiming for."

I looked at the carriage where the Divine Physician and Moyong Geum were riding.

The attackers were aiming for two carriages.

Soon, cutting through the loose dust, massive steel Twin Rings flew in while rotating.

Shhhhooooom—!

I struck away Jang Wi's attack, which flew in with the sound of tearing air, with the Vajra.

Clang!

Intense sparks flew, and the surrounding ground sank from the shockwave.

Following that, Gwak Wi's covert daggers rushed in from all directions, aiming for my vital points.

"Kukuku, the brat of the Demonic Cult is quite good! I will split your qi center and take out the legacies one by one!"

Gwak Wi's voice, which had seeped in like fog, rang out from all directions.

Jang Wi revealed his heavy figure and adjusted his grip on the massive Twin Rings again.

"Twin Venerables."

My eyes began to dye purple.

The prayer beads on my wrist shone brightly like the sun, forming a black barrier mixed with demonic qi.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin began to defend the carriage like an iron wall, just as I ordered.

"It feels like a pumpkin has rolled in, vine and all."

I was moving to find the divine items of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens anyway.

But the Ten Venerables under the Heavens appeared directly in front of me.

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Chapter 122 : Sa Ma Clan

Kuwung-!

The massive Twin Rings wielded by Jang Wi crashed against the black demonic qi barrier I had deployed, letting out a roar.

The barrier, a mix of the dharma power's purity and the demonic qi's ferocity, didn't even crack under the blow of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

"How can this be! How can demonic qi and dharma power coexist in one body!"

Jang Wi shouted in shock.

In his common sense, Orthodoxy and Unorthodoxy were like water and oil.

But the brat in front of his eyes was weaving those opposing forces like chains to use as a shield.

"The world always flows into situations that defy common sense."

I smiled fishily and thrust the Vajra forward.

Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art

Demonic Fire Fist Eruption

Purple flame shot out like a lightning bolt from the tip of the Vajra.

Jang Wi hurriedly crossed his Twin Rings to block, but he was pushed back several jang, scraping the ground, by the heavy destructive power contained in the flame.

-Kukuku, watch your back!

As soon as the Sword Venerable's warning fell, Gwak Wi's figure rose like mist from my blind spot.

In his hand were Flying Rings hanging from thin silver threads.

"They say legacies recognize their masters. These items are undeserved for a bastard like you!"

Shushuk—!

Dozens of Flying Rings drew bizarre trajectories, trying to bind my entire body.

But at that moment, a chilly cold soared from my feet.

"Ice Wall!"

As Seol Ye-rin drove her ice sword into the ground, the Flying Rings aiming for my back instantly hit the ice wall and bounced off.

"Don't worry about the back!"

"I'm here too!"

Cheon Deung-jin also whipped the heat of the Fire Spirit like a lash, sweeping through Gwak Wi's hiding spot.

Gwak Wi clicked his tongue and hid himself in the darkness again.

Even under the joint attack of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, our party didn't waver in the slightest.

"These cheeky wenches……!"

Jang Wi adjusted his grip on the Twin Rings again and raised his fighting spirit.

A ferocious aura peculiar to him boiled up from his entire body.

But I fingered the prayer beads on my wrist with a relaxed expression.

"Seeing that the divine items aren't resonating, I guess you don't have them right now?"

At my provocative question, the Twin Venerables' eyebrows twitched.

"Kuhaha! We are no longer martial artists who rely on divine items!"

"This brat, until the end……!"

Jang Wi and Gwak Wi threw their bodies simultaneously.

Massive iron rings crushing from the front and silver trajectories tightening from all sides.

The true joint technique of the Ten Venerables Twin Venerables, the Twin Heavens Ring Calamity, was about to unfold.

***

Woowoong—!

The atmosphere of the plain tore and screamed at the qi horns emitted by the Twin Venerables.

Jang Wi bit his lip, feeling the heavy iron-colored enhanced qi wrapping his entire body.

They were the ones praised as the Ten Venerables under the Heavens for decades, standing at the peak of the Murim.

Yet, they couldn't take down a Demonic Cult brat whose name was unfamiliar.

"Gwak Wi, let's tear that bastard limb from limb."

"You don't need to tell me. The price for daring to mock the Ten Venerables under the Heavens is only death."

Gwak Wi's voice laid down coldly.

The two's true qi intertwined in the air, beginning to form a bizarre shape.

Jang Wi's massive Iron Rings rotated, drawing a destructive trajectory from the front, and dozens of Gwak Wi's silver Flying Rings hid within the shadow of those iron rings.

Twin Heavens Ring Calamity

A technique meaning a ring that traps both heaven and earth simultaneously.

If the frontal destructive power emitted by Jang Wi breaks the shield, Gwak Wi's silver rings dig into that gap and cut the throat.

Countless experts of the Central Plains had fallen, spraying blood before this joint technique.

Kwakwakwakwa—!

Jang Wi kicked off the ground and shot forward.

The massive Twin Rings rolled up loose dust and fell above my head.

It was a strike containing the pressure of a great mountain, not just the weight of a weapon.

"Die, brat!"

The moment Jang Wi's roar burst out, Gwak Wi also pulled the silver threads from within the shadows.

Silver trajectories poured down like rain from all directions around me.

If I blocked the front, my whole body would be hacked to pieces, and if I tried to dodge, I was destined to be crushed by Jang Wi's iron rings.

But an unbelievable sight unfolded before the Twin Venerables' eyes.

I didn't dodge.

Instead, taking a step forward, I held the Vajra in reverse and kicked the ground hard.

'I know various martial arts.'

First.

The martial arts of the Demonic Cult possessed me through the memories of my past life.

Second.

The martial arts of the North Sea Martial Gods obtained by meeting the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen in the North Sea Ice Palace.

Third.

'Obtained by acquiring the divine items of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.'

The martial arts of the Four Venerables.

Hwaruru—!

Flames wrapped around my entire body.

The foundation was still the Extreme Yang Body.

The flames wrapped my body soon.

Kuwuwung—!

Created a domain.

A massive vortex mixed with purple, gold, green, and colorless energies soared from beneath my feet.

The moment Jang Wi's iron rings touched that barrier of energy, their speed dropped rapidly as if they had fallen into a swamp.

Gwak Wi's flying rings were also swept away by the intense wave of true qi, losing their trajectory and starting to dance in the air.

"T-This can't be……!"

Jang Wi's eyes were dyed with shock.

Not only was his full-powered strike blocked from the front, but the sensation of his internal organs twisting from the backflowing energy was transmitted.

Gwak Wi also felt a creepy fear.

His killing intent hidden in the fog was being thoroughly dug up before the resonance sound of the four divine items I emitted.

"M-Monster."

"I expected something since you're called the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, but were you just guys playing ring toss?"

My cold sneer was heard from beyond the curtain.

The Twin Venerables intuitively realized.

That the ones being hunted here today might not be Hyeokryeon Yeom, but themselves.

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The Small Snow Squad members and the women, who were building a desperate defensive line around the carriage, held their breaths for a moment at the unrealistic spectacle unfolding before their eyes.

In the middle of the plain thick with rising loose dust, a massive pillar mixed with purple and gold soared as if to pierce the sky.

Standing expressionlessly within that brilliant yet ferocious radiance, Hyeokryeon Yeom already looked like he wasn't human.

"……Was the Captain that strong?"

The sword gripped by Baek Mu-yong trembled minutely.

He was the one who had watched my growth most closely while going through the Southern Barbarians and the Western Regions, but he couldn't help but shudder at this overwhelming majesty that crushed the Twin Venerables' joint attack head-on.

The spirit wave I emitted wasn't simply a release of true qi, but it turned the earth itself into my domain.

Seol Ye-rin, standing at the entrance of the carriage, subtly put strength into the hand holding her ice sword.

A strange possessiveness flashed in her transparent eyes along with awe.

'Amazing…… Just where is the Third Young Master's end?'

Seol Ye-rin's heart, colder than the eternal snow of the North Sea, was melting helplessly before that hot flame.

It was a joyous thing that I became stronger, but the stronger I became, the more she felt the distance growing.

She couldn't help a corner of her chest becoming cool.

Cheon Deung-jin also stared at my back, entranced.

The hot blood of the Extreme Yang Body boiled as if resonating.

"Why Father trusted the Young Master and entrusted me to him…… Now I know for sure."

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lip watching the evil energies scattering before my attack.

The weight of the name Ten Venerables under the Heavens felt as light as a mere feather at my toes.

Even Seong Sang-ah, who was observing the battle situation most cool-headedly, shone her eyes while covering her lips with her slender fingers.

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By the time the explosive wave of true qi subsided, the plain had been brutally dug up as if a giant beast had clawed through it.

At my toes, walking slowly out of the domain I unfolded, were the Twin Venerables who used to command the Murim, crushed on the floor along with their pride.

Jang Wi's massive iron rings were crumpled beyond recognition, and Gwak Wi gasped for breath with the acupoints of his entire body twisted.

Their dignity, called the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, was in tatters like clothes burnt by fire.

I brought the tip of the Vajra to the nape of Jang Wi's neck.

"The ring toss is over. Now you have to answer my questions."

"Keuheuk..... A brat of the Demonic Cult..... Daring to do this to us."

Jang Wi spat blood-mixed saliva and glared, but as strength was applied to my toes, he stuck his head in the ground with a scream.

My eyes were shining coldly like emotionless gems.

"Do you know the name Seol Cheon-u?"

Flinch.

The Twin Venerables also reacted to the name Seol Cheon-u.

"You know."

"...I don't."

"Why did that person called the Ice Emperor distribute divine items to the Ten Venerables under the Heavens?"

At my question, Gwak Wi burst into bizarre laughter.

Although defeated, madness still lingered in his eyes.

"Ice Emperor..... you say. If you mean that arrogant man who handed us these divine items, I can't forget when he came to find us. Do you know what he said while entrusting the divine items to us? He said, 'The day the balance of the world collapses, the true owner will appear and retrieve these'."

My brow narrowed. Seol Cheon-u was a person from hundreds of years ago.

He absolutely couldn't have handed over the divine items.

"He entrusted..... the divine items? Where did he go?"

"I don't know..... He said he would head to the place closest to the sky, not the center of the Central Plains. He said he would appear again when the Ten Venerables under the Heavens all gather in one place, where he sleeps. But brat, do you think that's possible?"

"Who knows."

"Kill me!"

"I intended to do so anyway."

Before Gwak Wi's shout ended, I swung the Vajra and destroyed their qi centers.

The Twin Venerables, who could no longer live as martial artists, screamed in despair, but I didn't even look back.

"The place closest to the sky....."

At that moment, the Divine Physician got off the carriage.

"Hmm? Were they the guys aiming for my tokens?"

Come to think of it, I also heard that the Twin Venerables came aiming for the Divine Physician's tokens.

"Do you know them?"

"What token were these guys aiming for again....."

Rummaging through the token bundle, the Divine Physician took out a token as if he found it.

My eyes fixed on the token the Divine Physician took out.

Tied to an old leather strap, it seemed to have withstood the wind and waves of a long time, but the pattern engraved on its surface was emitting a strange light of wisdom.

"This pattern is....."

My brow trembled.

Engraved on the token was the shape of a black lotus blooming.

Among the countless sects of the Murim, only one place used this symbol, a family of shadows that worshipped gloomy and powerful strength.

"It's the token of Sa Ma Gang, the Clan Head of the Sa Ma Clan."

At the Divine Physician's words, my eyes began to sparkle.

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Chapter 123 : Liaoning

The dust on the Loess Plains subsided, and only the groans of the Twin Venerables, whose qi centers had been destroyed, scattered in the wind.

I stared intently at the black lotus patterned token given to me by the Divine Physician Seong I-han.

-Kukuku, the Sa Ma Clan, you say. Isn't that the main family of Sa Ma-ui, that venomous snake of a Strategist for the Demonic Cult Leader?

-You must be careful. They are members of the Demonic Cult but also a family of shadows that has built an independent force. The Dark Venerable's legacy they guard is much trickier to handle than other divine items.

My eyes gleamed with interest.

Sa Ma Clan.

Even in the memories of my past life, they were the most shrouded group within the Demonic Cult.

Even the Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Hwi used to keep their main family in check at one time.

To think the token of such a Sa Ma Clan Head was in the hands of the Divine Physician, fate was truly strange.

"Let's return to the carriage for now."

At my single word, the Small Snow Squad members moved in perfect order.

The Twin Venerables, who had become cripples, were abandoned there.

Survival on the plains for those who had already lost their martial prowess was a matter to be left to the will of the heavens.

Inside the carriage, which began to move again.

Contrary to the storm-like battle outside, the air inside had sunk heavily in a different sense.

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah.

The gazes of the three women scanned my entire body.

My martial prowess, which had crushed two of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens without a single scratch, made them feel something beyond awe.

"Young Master, please have a cup of tea here. You must have used a lot of energy."

Cheon Deung-jin held out a teacup with a bright smile.

As expected of the daughter of the Potala Palace Lord, Cheon Jeok-pa, firm trust and affection toward me were burning like flames in her eyes.

Then Seol Ye-rin intervened with a voice harboring a cold chill.

"Jin, stability comes before tea for the Young Master right now. It would be better for me to check his pulse with the true qi of the North Sea."

As Seol Ye-rin's hand tried to head toward my wrist, Seong Sang-ah snapped her medicine box shut and smiled languidly.

"Both of your devotions are extreme. However, checking the patient's condition first is proper etiquette. Releasing acupoints is my specialty."

At the restarted battle of nerves, Wi Ji-yeong curled up in the corner of the carriage, and I swallowed a hollow laugh and changed the subject.

"You must have heard what the Twin Venerables said. The words left by Seol Cheon-u."

At my serious voice, the women's gazes changed.

I didn't forget to add the story about the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u.

"So he was a North Sea Martial God."

"He said he would appear at the place closest to the sky on the day all Ten Venerables under the Heavens gather."

I nodded at Seong Sang-ah's summary.

"The place closest to the sky..... Where could that be?"

"At first I thought it was the Potala Palace, but there were no traces of the Ice Emperor there. Then it could be the peak of Mount Kunlun, or perhaps a place we don't know."

"Could it be..... the highest place in the North Sea Ice Palace, the Eternal Snow Mountain?"

At Seol Ye-rin's question, I looked out the window instead of answering.

"Eternal Snow Mountain?"

"It is the highest mountain in the North Sea."

"I haven't been there."

Seol Cheon-u's arrangement was calling me across hundreds of years.

Gathering the divine items wasn't simply to become stronger.

A stepping stone to find the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u.

"Then are we returning to the North Sea again now?"

At Seong Sang-ah's question, I fiddled with the token in my bosom and shook my head.

"No, it's not time yet. Although there is a possibility that the Eternal Snow Mountain of the North Sea is the place Seol Cheon-u mentioned, the premise of 'the day all Ten Venerables under the Heavens gather' was attached. I currently have four divine items. I haven't even gathered half yet."

My gaze headed beyond the window, deep into the east of the Central Plains.

"To complete the board laid out by the Ice Emperor, I must chase the whereabouts of the remaining divine items. For now, we go to Liaoning as planned."

At those words, Moyong Geum, who was running alongside the carriage, brought his horse closer as if he had been waiting.

His face was glistening with awe for me, who had just crushed the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

"A wise judgment, Master! Liaoning is not only the base of our Moyong Clan, but also a gathering place for information connecting Hebei and Shandong. Clues about the Heavenly Cry Zither, the legacy of the Zither Venerable, are definitely there as well."

Moyong Geum was already treating me not just as a simple VIP, but as someone he had to serve with the fate of his family on the line.

"As soon as we arrive in Liaoning, I will open the family's secret library as well as provide the Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron twin swords I promised. I will mobilize all connections of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild to find the whereabouts of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens!"

"Thank you."

After answering Moyong Geum, I climbed up to the carriage roof again and sat cross-legged.

I had to manage the enlightenment gained from the battle just now.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist.

Energies with four different properties were swirling inside my qi center.

Especially the 'black barrier' created by mixing the Buddhist Venerable's dharma power and the Demonic Cult's demonic qi was solid enough to surprise even myself.

-Kukuku, as the divine items increase, your body is becoming a single 'vessel'.

-Be careful. The next divine item, the Heavenly Cry Zither, is an item that handles Sound Arts. The moment the harmony of energies breaks, the four forces inside your body might run wild.

I slowly steadied my breathing while listening to the advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen.

At that moment, the voices of the women were heard from inside the carriage again.

"Young Master, you must receive my assistance when we go to Liaoning. A unique Fire Qi unknown to outsiders flows in the Sa Ma Clan. It is safe only if I, with the Extreme Yang Body, am by your side."

At Cheon Deung-jin's bold claim, Seol Ye-rin's voice became even colder.

"Jin, Liaoning is close to the North Sea and has frequent sea breezes. The martial arts of the Ice Palace are suitable for managing cold. I will guard the Young Master's side."

"Oh my, everyone has no regard for the Young Master's health. If the climate of the Central Plains changes, he will suffer from sleep disorders first; it will be hard to endure without my Calming Scent, you know?"

As Seong Sang-ah's relaxed laughter was added, the carriage became an invisible battlefield once again.

I let out a deep sigh on the roof.

Balancing between these three women was tens of thousands of times more exhausting than dealing with the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

I decided to move to the carriage where the Divine Physician was riding.

Lightly throwing my body from the carriage roof, I stepped on the footboard of the carriage the Divine Physician Seong I-han was riding and seeped inside soundlessly.

Unlike the previous carriage where the women's fierce fighting spirit boiled, a strange silence hovered here along with the bitter scent of herbs tickling the nose.

"Oho, Third Young Master. You managed to escape that hot bed of thorns?"

Seong I-han, who was sitting back leisurely organizing his medicine cabinet, burst into hearty laughter.

Moyong Geum, who was organizing letters beside him, jumped up in surprise as soon as I entered.

"Master! What brings you to this humble place yourself?"

"I needed some time to think quietly for a moment."

I sat down and cast my gaze toward Seong I-han.

"Elder, about that token you showed me earlier. You said the Sa Ma Clan Head owes you a debt; do you know anything more about that place?"

Seong I-han stroked his white beard and narrowed his eyes.

"You mean that friend Sa Ma Gang. He puts on an air of dignity on the outside, but in reality, he's an eccentric human with one foot in the shadows. But he is a man who repays

debts definitely. If you have that token, a bloodless entry up to the entrance of the Black Lotus Cave, the forbidden area of the Sa Ma Clan, will be possible."

"Black Lotus Cave....."

"The Sa Ma Clan is also the root of the Demonic Cult Strategist Sa Ma-ui. Wouldn't you know better?"

I nodded. The face of the Demonic Cult Strategist, Sa Ma-ui, flashed through my mind.

The most trusted strategist of the Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Hwi, and at the same time, the person to be most wary of.

The Sa Ma Clan was a supply route in the Central Plains and a massive information network he left to support the throne of the Demonic Cult.

"I know the Strategist Sa Ma-ui well, but I don't know much about Clan Head Sa Ma Gang."

At my words, Seong I-han tilted his head.

"Is that so? Sa Ma Gang suffered from qi deviation while practicing poison arts in the past. I had quite a hard time fixing that. I received that token then."

I stared at the Loess Plains flowing past the window.

The fact that the Sa Ma Clan's token was in the Divine Physician's hands, I couldn't rule out the possibility that they tried to draw me into their territory through the Divine Physician.

'Would it have been better to stop by the Demonic Cult first?'

No.

I shook my head.

Hyeokryeon Mu and Hyeokryeon Hwi.

As long as those two were in the Demonic Cult, what would happen if I returned was obvious.

There was a high possibility of fighting over the position of Young Cult Leader.

Even though I entered as a live-in son-in-law of the Ice Palace, Hyeokryeon Hwi was always keeping a close eye on me.

'By the way, I wonder if Elder Brother returned safely?'

Hyeokryeon Hwi wouldn't be aiming for Eldest Brother's life yet.

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At that time, the second son of the Demonic Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Mu, was sitting in a pavilion with good scenery in Jiangnan of the Central Plains.

Beside Hyeokryeon Mu, who was leisurely tilting a wine cup while wearing a silk robe, lay a famous zither cherished by Central Plains experts, and on the table, a map marked with famous restaurants and scenic spots of Jiangnan was spread out instead of the Demonic Cult's affairs.

As if uninterested in the Cult Leader's orders or power struggles, Hyeokryeon Mu had left the Hundred Thousand Mountains under the pretext of touring the Central Plains for several years.

But it wasn't simple tourism.

"Young Master, news has arrived from Hebei."

Below the pavilion, a man dressed as an ordinary innkeeper knelt.

He was a member of the Roaming Shadow Squad, Hyeokryeon Mu's personal intelligence organization.

"Speak. What kind of trouble has my youngest brother caused this time?"

Hyeokryeon Mu asked with a charming smile on his lips.

The intelligence network Hyeokryeon Mu built while touring the Central Plains was moving more astutely than the Black Shadow Unit, the official organization of the Demonic Cult.

"Third Young Master Hyeokryeon Yeom pacified the Western Regions and suppressed the Ten Venerables Twin Venerables in a single breath on the plains of Hebei. He is currently heading to Liaoning with the Holy Hand Divine Physician."

Hyeokryeon Mu's wine cup stopped.

"……The Twin Venerables? The Ten Venerables under the Heavens alone?"

Putting down the empty wine cup, he burst into a low laugh.

"Hahaha! Hyeokryeon Hwi will grab the back of his neck when he hears this news."

Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes narrowed.

"Where is the Strategist?"

"Strategist Sa Ma-ui is currently crossing over to the Central Plains."

"To think the Strategist would really move just because a problem arose in the Sa Ma Clan."

Hyeokryeon Mu stood up from his seat and secured the jade sword at his waist.

"I guess the tour ends here. Since Liaoning isn't that far, as a brother, I should at least show my face."

As Hyeokryeon Mu snapped his fingers, the Roaming Shadow Squad members guarding the surroundings of the pavilion instantly disappeared into the shadows.

"Let's go. To Liaoning. I must confirm with my own eyes how much the monster of our family has grown."

Chapter 124 : Chapter 124

Chapter 124 : Sacrifice

Leaving the rough dust of Hebei behind, the carriage procession finally arrived in front of the magnificent gates of Liaoning Castle.

As befitting the heart of massive logistics connecting the Central Plains and the North, the entrance to the castle gate was crowded with merchant guilds and martial artists flocking from all over.

"We have finally returned to my hometown, Big Brother!"

Moyong Geum shouted with emotion, poking his head out of the carriage window.

I looked down at the panoramic view of Liaoning while undoing my cross-legged posture on the roof.

The salty smell blowing from the sea and the noise of the bustling marketplace.

However, beneath that peaceful scenery, the energy of sharp metal and a gloomy killing intent laid low were mixed together.

The place the procession headed to was the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild, which occupied a massive space in the center of Liaoning Castle.

Arriving at the main gate of the guild ruled by Moyong Geum's father, Moyong Jae, a middle-aged man with a neatly trimmed beard was waiting with guild members to welcome us.

It was the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild Leader, Moyong Jae.

"Welcome, Third Young Master! And my proud son!"

Moyong Jae ran over and burst into hearty laughter even before I got off the carriage.

Although he was a thorough merchant, thanks to his connection with the Ice Palace Lord Seol Baek-ho and the monopoly rights to the Ice Palace's cold iron brought by his son, he was treating me more than just a VIP.

"Elder, it's been a long time. Thank you for coming out to greet us like this."

"Hello."

"Nice to meet you."

"The Divine Physician Elder has also come."

Moyong Jae looked back at the Divine Physician.

"It's been a long time."

"It's been a long time, Elder."

The Divine Physician seemed to be acquainted with Moyong Jae as well.

After exchanging greetings with the Divine Physician, Moyong Jae exchanged greetings with my party.

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, Seong Sang-ah, and the Small Snow Squad members.

"Unpack your belongings first."

"Yes, thank you."

As soon as we unpacked in the accommodation guided by Moyong Geum.

Moyong Geum visited my room carrying the promised item.

Moyong Geum's escort warrior Jang Baek-rim carefully put down a heavy wooden box.

"Big Brother, you've waited a long time. We selected only the purest lumps among the cold iron brought from the North Sea, and the best master craftsmen belonging to our guild forged these."

As the box opened, a cool radiance with a blue tint filled the room.

Flash!

[Blue and Red Twin Swords]

Inside the box lay two swords.

One was a Blue Sword harboring cold ice qi, and the other was a Red Sword specially treated to withstand my Demonic Fire.

As I gripped the hilts, a sensation cold like ice yet heavy flowed into my palms.

-Kukuku, not bad. With these swords, they should be able to withstand your maddened demonic qi and dharma power to some extent.

At the Sword Venerable's praise, I lightly swung the sword.

Swish- A sound of tearing air finely split the air of the reception room.

"The swords are excellent. Thank you, Moyong Geum."

"Don't mention it! Compared to the money earned thanks to Big Brother, this isn't even a repayment. But Big Brother....."

Moyong Geum's complexion darkened.

"Currently, the atmosphere in Liaoning is not good. There is intelligence that my half-brother Moyong Cheong is secretly contacting the Saphaeryeon to solidify his position as the Young Clan Head. Moyong Cheong is extremely wary of Big Brother entering Liaoning."

My eyes sank coldly.

"Moyong Cheong, you say. That guy who called the Ice Palace barbarians?"

"Yes. He will try to stop Big Brother from finding the Heavenly Cry Zither, the legacy of the Zither Venerable, under the protection of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild. Perhaps he is leading the clan's warriors and coming here right now."

Just like last time, it seemed Moyong Cheong was reacting most sensitively to Moyong Geum's movements.

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North of Liaoning Castle, the Moyong Clan, where heavy stone buildings boasted their majesty.

In the middle of its training ground, a man emitting chilly sword qi withdrew his sword.

It was the Young Clan Head of the Moyong Clan, Moyong Cheong.

Moyong Cheong's face was rough and cold like the sea breeze of Liaoning.

Thick veins stood out on the back of his hand wiping away sweat drops, and his eyes were sharp like a hawk eyeing its prey.

"……You say they arrived at the guild?"

At Moyong Cheong's question, the retainer kneeling down bowed his head further.

"Yes, Young Clan Head. The carriage procession led by Young Master Moyong Geum entered the guild headquarters a little while ago. As rumored, Ice Palace warriors and unidentified experts are accompanying them in large numbers."

A fishy sneer hung on Moyong Cheong's lips.

"That fool-like bastard. He finally dragged a bloodline of the Demonic Cult into the middle of Liaoning Castle. It is clear that the clan elders have been blinded, intoxicated by the poison of money brought by Geum."

To Moyong Cheong, Moyong Geum was the shame of the clan.

An illegitimate brother who joins hands with barbarians while rummaging through ledgers, abandoning pride as a martial artist.

However, whenever he felt his position within the clan shaking due to the massive financial power that illegitimate child brought in, Moyong Cheong's insides burned black.

"What about news from the Saphaeryeon side?"

"They are also keeping a close watch on the Third Young Master's appearance. They promised that if the Young Clan Head purges the impure elements for the honor of the clan, the Saphaeryeon would also gladly support from behind."

Saphaeryeon.

Moyong Cheong knew well enough that joining hands with them, who aimed for hegemony over the Central Plains Murim, was a dangerous gamble.

But to remove the massive variable called Hyeokryeon Yeom and put the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild in his grasp, their power was needed.

"Rumors are rife that the Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult defeated the Ten Venerables Twin Venerables. But this is Liaoning. A land where Moyong's sword qi dwells."

Moyong Cheong picked up the heavy great sword hanging on the wall.

Now, while the Clan Head who valued the clan's laws was absent, was the opportunity.

"Summon the clan's elite warriors. We will raid under the pretext of searching the guild's warehouse. If that Demonic Cult bastard resists, I will charge him with the crime of disturbing the peace of Liaoning and cut his head off on the spot."

Fierce fighting spirit poured out from Moyong Cheong's entire body.

He already knew about the existence of the Blue and Red Twin Swords that Moyong Geum gifted to Hyeokryeon Yeom.

Embezzling the clan's iron to make weapons for a Demonic Cult bastard.

That alone was sufficient justification for Moyong Cheong to attack Moyong Geum.

"Let's go. I will personally confirm how great that so-called live-in son-in-law's assets are."

Moyong Cheong led dozens of warriors and left the main gate of the Sword Training Hall.

With every step he took across the main road of Liaoning heading toward the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild, chilly killing intent scraped the floor.

A twisted sense of justice, mixed with arrogance to prove the legitimacy of the Moyong Clan and inferiority toward his brother, was pressing heavily on the night air of Liaoning.

***

In the inner hall of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild, I placed the newly received Blue and Red Twin Swords on the table.

Although it was before Moyong Cheong's killing intent crossed the guild's threshold, my senses were already scanning the entire Liaoning Castle.

"I know Moyong Cheong is coming, but I'll deal with that later. What's urgent right now is the exact location of the Heavenly Cry Zither."

At my words, Moyong Geum nodded and took out a small whistle from his bosom.

"I have prepared it. Liaoning is the land of our guild, but it is also the land of those who have planted eyes and ears in every alley. If it is information Big Brother is looking for, they will be the fastest as expected."

As Moyong Geum blew the whistle shortly twice, the guest room window opened soundlessly, and a middle-aged man with a shabby impression seeped inside.

It was Cho Gun, a typical informant of the Rogues' Guild.

"Young Master Moyong, did you call?"

The Rogues' Guild informant glanced at me, flinched at that extraordinary energy, and bowed his head.

I tossed a silver tael onto the table.

"Heavenly Cry Zither. I heard rumors it entered Liaoning Castle. Where is it now?"

The informant quickly pocketed the silver tael and lowered his voice.

"Indeed, as expected of a noble person, you have a big hand. The Heavenly Cry Zither is currently kept in the Sound Gathering Pavilion (聚音閣) built on a coastal cliff at the northern end of Liaoning Castle. Originally, it was a place managed by the descendants of the Zither Venerable for generations."

At the words 'descendants of the Zither Venerable', I made an expression as if it was unexpected.

I didn't know there would be a place managed by the descendants of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens for generations.

"Sound Gathering Pavilion, you say. Was it just left alone?"

At my sharp question, the informant answered while breaking out in a cold sweat.

"That's right. The Sound Demon Blood Group, a subordinate organization of the Saphaeryeon, has already occupied the pavilion. They are frantic to pluck the strings of the Heavenly Cry Zither to extract a specific melody. Rumor has it that the sound is the key to opening an underwater cave in the sea off Liaoning."

At the words 'underwater cave', I felt the divine items inside my qi center resonating minutely.

In the journey to go to the 'place closest to the sky' left by the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, a secret hidden under the sea.

I wondered what kind of contradictory device this was, but if it was the Ice Emperor's arrangement, nothing was impossible.

-Kukuku, do not be certain of anything yet.

-Be careful. The Sound Demon Blood Group I know are cruel people who use Sound Arts. The vicinity of the Sound Gathering Pavilion has already become a Forbidden Area where hallucinations are constantly heard.

Listening to the telepathic messages of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I stood up from my seat.

At that moment, from the direction of the guild's main gate,

"Moyong Geum! Hand over the Demonic Cult's snitch right now!"

Moyong Cheong's shout rang out like thunder.

It seemed a troublesome guy had visited.

"Big Brother, what will you do? The Rogues' Guild guy is prepared to guide you to the back path to the Sound Gathering Pavilion but....."

As Moyong Geum asked with a tense expression, I strapped the Blue and Red Twin Swords back to my waist.

"What back path. The front gate is noisy, I can't just leave."

My eyes flashed purple.

"Geum, you take the Rogues' Guild guy and draw a detailed map of the Sound Gathering Pavilion. I will go and exchange greetings with your older brother."

I turned around and stepped outside.

The fighting spirit of Moyong Cheong felt from behind seemed ready to bring down the guild's walls already.

As the first testing ground for the Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron Twin Swords I just received, there was no better sacrifice than a Young Clan Head steeped in arrogance.

Chapter 125 : Chapter 125

Chapter 125 : Rogues' Guild

Kwang—!

The heavy main gate of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild fell backward with a sound like a scream.

Through the thick dust, Moyong Cheong, carrying a great sword on his shoulder, strode in confidently with dozens of warriors.

He seemed to have already half lost his reason.

"Moyong Geum! You bastard son, you've finally gone crazy! Daring to embezzle the clan's cold iron and offer it to a bloodline of the Demonic Cult? Today, I will prove with your blood that the clan's laws are still alive!"

At Moyong Cheong's roar, the guild workers scattered in panic.

Moyong Geum broke out in a cold sweat while hiding the Rogues' Guild informant behind him, but the figure standing in the middle of the yard with hands behind his back didn't even flinch.

"Your greeting is on the rough side."

I threw a word indifferently and raised my head.

My gaze, shimmering purple, clashed head-on with Moyong Cheong's fighting spirit.

Flinch-

Facing me, Moyong Cheong flinched for a moment, but perhaps trusting the number of people behind him, he drew his great sword.

Soon, Moyong Cheong rushed in, scraping the ground with his great sword.

As if his position as Young Clan Head wasn't just for show, the enhanced qi he emitted carried quite a heavy pressure.

But I only placed my hands on the hilts of the twin swords at my waist, not even taking a stance.

"That sword met the wrong master."

My hand moved like lightning.

Clang—!

What was drawn first was the Blue Sword, harboring ice qi.

In an instant, white frost settled on the guild's yard.

Since I had received Extreme Yin Qi through Seol Ye-rin before, emitting ice qi through the Blue Sword was possible for me too.

As the blade of the Blue Sword lightly struck the side of Moyong Cheong's great sword, the heavy trajectory of the great sword soared into the air like a sheet of paper.

"W-What?!"

Flustered, Moyong Cheong tried to hurriedly pull his body back, but I had already dug into his bosom.

This time, the Red Sword in my right hand was drawn, emitting purple flames.

"Purgator"

Kwareung—!

Purple flames exploded along the trajectory of the Red Sword.

Moyong Cheong instinctively blocked by raising his great sword, but the destructive power of the Red Sword, refined with Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron, exceeded imagination.

Crack, snap!

"M-My sword!"

Cracks began to form like spiderwebs on the great sword, which he took pride in as a famous sword of the Moyong Clan.

I lightly tapped Moyong Cheong's wrist acupoint with the Blue Sword.

The great sword fell to the floor from Moyong Cheong's numb hand.

"Keuheuk!"

I drove the pommel of the Red Sword into Moyong Cheong's chest just like that.

Thud—!

"Uwaaagh!"

Moyong Cheong, who flew backward like a cannonball, stopped only after crashing into a stone statue in a corner of the guild.

The warriors who followed him froze like statues upon seeing their Young Clan Head defeated miserably in just two exchanges.

I lightly shook off the Blue and Red Twin Swords once and put them back into their sheaths.

"The sword resembles its master's nature, ignorant. It only knows how to put weight behind it, not how to read the flow."

I approached Moyong Cheong and bowed my head.

A cold voice settled in the ears of Moyong Cheong, who was trembling in fear.

"So let's continue the story we were talking about earlier."

At my words, the Rogues' Guild informant who was behind Moyong Geum slowly poked his head out again.

***

Cho Gun was an informant who had rolled in the Rogues' Guild Liaoning Branch for ten years.

Having grown up in the gutters of back alleys, he prided himself on not blinking an eye at the battle of nerves of most experts.

But now, he felt his crotch getting chilly as he sat on the floor without realizing it.

'.....He's not human. That's a monster wearing a human mask.'

Moyong Cheong, the Young Clan Head of the Moyong Clan who had been emitting spirit as if to plow the earth just a moment ago, was embedded in a stone statue like a piece of meat after just two flashes.

Moyong Cheong, who would be sad to be called third in martial power in Liaoning, couldn't even protect the wrist holding his sword, let alone launch a proper counterattack.

Cho Gun swallowed hard and stared at the toe of Hyeokryeon Yeom's shoe that approached his feet.

As Hyeokryeon Yeom's eyes turned downward, a pressure as if a giant mountain range was crushing him wrapped around his entire body.

"Ah, yes..... T-That is....."

Cho Gun barely squeezed out a trembling voice and continued.

"I mean the Sound Gathering Pavilion. The Sound Demon Blood Group bastards who occupied that place are no ordinary folks. Their captain, the Heavenly Sound Witch, is a vicious one who makes a hundred strong men go crazy and bite each other with just the sound of a zither."

There was no change in Hyeokryeon Yeom's expression.

He just fiddled with the handles of his newly worn twin swords.

Even that indifferent touch sounded like a warning to Cho Gun that he could cut his throat at any time.

"I heard they are trying to open an underwater cave. Then do you also know what is inside that cave?"

Cho Gun scanned the surroundings.

The warriors brought by Moyong Cheong were already suppressed by Hyeokryeon Yeom's spirit, holding even their breaths.

Cho Gun recited very low, as if whispering in Hyeokryeon Yeom's ear.

"According to legend..... that cave is a tomb where something is imprisoned. The Sound Demon Blood Group is trying to wake up that sleeping something and offer it to the Saphaeryeon. That's why they are trying to create a specific resonance by plucking the strings of the Heavenly Cry Zither."

Hyeokryeon Yeom's eyebrow twitched minutely.

A tomb and a sleeping power.

-Kukuku, a tomb, you say. The probability that there's something else other than the Ice Emperor's legacy is higher.

-If resonance starts through the Heavenly Cry Zither, the entire Liaoning Province might be engulfed in hallucinations. We might not have much time!

The purple flames emitting from Hyeokryeon Yeom's entire body began to thicken further.

Cho Gun intuitively realized.

That the night of Liaoning would now be stained with blood and screams.

Watching Cho Gun's pupils trembling finely, I stared quietly at Cho Gun.

Eyes that showed a strange vitality when pouring out information even while terrified.

Judging from my experience of handling countless spies in the Demonic Cult in my past life, this guy wasn't a snitch moved by money.

'An informant of the Rogues' Guild Liaoning Branch, he'll be useful.'

If the Sa Ma Clan's token was the key to shaking Sa Ma-ui's roots, this informant named Cho Gun was the thread to navigate through the complex maze called Liaoning.

Guys who know the value of information and ride the boundary of life to sell that information become more capable than loyal dogs if recruited well.

I withdrew the shimmering purple fire qi and instead took out a heavy gold nugget from my bosom and tossed it at Cho Gun's feet.

"Hiiik!"

Cho Gun stepped back in surprise, but as soon as he saw the nugget emitting a golden light on the floor, he instinctively swallowed his saliva.

"This is an advance payment. Guide me to the fastest way to the Sound Gathering Pavilion. And from tomorrow, I want to use the Rogues' Guild's information network in the way I want."

"W-What do you mean by that? This humble one is just an informant who came to deliver information at Young Master Moyong's call."

"It means stand behind my shadow, not Moyong Geum's. Report everything happening in Liaoning to me first. Whether it's the Sa Ma Clan or the Saphaeryeon, even the number of times they breathe."

I added in a low voice to Cho Gun, who couldn't even grasp the gold while terrified.

"If you become my enemy, you'll end up like that stone statue just now, but if you become my person, your rank in the Rogues' Guild will change. What will you do?"

Cho Gun looked alternately at Moyong Cheong groaning stuck in the stone statue and the gold at my feet, then as if determined, banged his head on the floor with a thud.

"Master! This Cho Gun will become Master's loyal dog from today and fetch all sounds of Liaoning! I will become ears not for the Rogues' Guild Liaoning Branch, but only for Master!"

It was a satisfactory reaction.

As expected, money that cannot be refused was great.

I turned my head to look at Moyong Geum.

He was making a blank expression while watching Moyong Cheong's miserable defeat and the process of recruiting the Rogues' Guild informant.

"This guy will take charge of the map and guidance. You reorganize the guild and assist Miss Seol and Miss Seong. I will go to the Sound Gathering Pavilion alone."

"Big Brother! It is dangerous alone. The Sound Arts of the Sound Demon Blood Group are....."

"I'm not alone."

I lightly tapped the Blue and Red Twin Swords at my waist.

The advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, and the weight of the Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron that was just starting to get used to my hands, felt reassuring.

Above all, I was too curious about the something said to be sleeping in the underwater cave.

Vibrations as if calling me were being transmitted little by little through the divine items.

"Cho Gun, guide me. Before the night of Liaoning gets deeper, I must cut the strings of the Sound Gathering Pavilion."

"Yes! Master, this way!"

Cho Gun took the lead excitedly and crossed the guild's wall.

Just as I was about to cross the wall following Cho Gun, a chilly cold, hot heat, and a strangely sharp scent of medicine caught my ankle from behind simultaneously.

"Going alone. I will pretend I didn't hear what you just said."

Seol Ye-rin blocked the front while adjusting her grip on the ice sword.

A stubbornness colder than the blizzard of the North Sea lingered in her eyes.

She usually respected my decisions, but she didn't seem to have any intention of sending her lover alone before the foreign threat called Sound Arts.

"Miss Seol is right. The Sound Arts of the Sound Demon Blood Group aren't solved by blocking your ears. Since the waves ringing the eardrums must be canceled out with the heat of the Extreme Yang Body, I have to be by your side."

Cheon Deung-jin also took the spot next to me while shimmering red energy.

The gazes of the two women clashed with a spark in the air, but a strange alliance was formed under the justification that they couldn't send me alone.

As I rubbed my brow as if troubled, this time Seong Sang-ah approached with a languid smile and tapped my sleeve.

"Young Master, you seem to have forgotten, but didn't you say that place is perfect for falling for hallucinations right now? It's a perfect place to go crazy and bite each other, yet you say you'll go without the Clear Mind Pill I prepared and cotton balls to protect your ears. As the granddaughter of the Divine Physician, I cannot permit this."

Seong Sang-ah was already taking out a purple bottle from her medicine box and shaking it.

Her eyes were soft, but inside contained a firmness that couldn't be refused.

"It is because it's dangerous. Sound Arts are a martial art that even I have never perfectly countered. If you ladies get swept up, I won't be able to concentrate....."

At my persuasion, Seol Ye-rin took one step closer.

"Then all the more reason we should go. We can do better at clearing out the small fries around and disturbing the sound field so the Third Young Master can concentrate. Do you not trust us?"

"That's right! While the Young Master solves the secret of the underwater cave, we will deal with that woman called the crazy witch or whatever."

At Cheon Deung-jin's spirited shout, I eventually raised the white flag.

If I insisted further here, another storm would rage in the guild yard before we even got to the Sound Gathering Pavilion.

-Kukuku, it's not luck with women but trouble with women. But what those wenches say isn't wrong. Sound Arts are easier to counter with numbers.

-If the energies of the three women combine, we should be able to break through most Sound Arts.

As even the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen chimed in, I was about to make a decision.

"Then what should we do?"

The Small Snow Squad members asked me.

"You guys, go visit the Rogues' Guild for a bit."

At the word Rogues' Guild, Wi Ji-yeong tilted her head.

"Rogues' Guild?"

"I think I'll need quite a bit of information in the future."

Since I bribed Cho Gun with gold, I thought it would be good to find out where within the Murim I could acquire information about the Ten Venerables under the Heavens and the Demonic Cult.

Chapter 126 : Chapter 126

Chapter 126 : Heavenly Sound Witch

At my instructions, the eyes of Wi Ji-yeong and the other members of the Small Snow Squad sparkled.

This was because it was their first time experiencing the information network of the Central Plains directly.

“Understood, Captain! Even if we have to raid the entire Liaoning branch of the Rogues' Guild, we will scrape up all the necessary information!”

At Wi Ji-yeong's spirited reply, I added in a low voice.

“Raiding is not the goal. Go to the place Cho Gun guides you, identify their communication network, and plant the eyes of the Rogues' Guild in advance along the route we will move. Do not spare gold if necessary.”

I already knew. When the sacred objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens began to resonate, not only the Saphaeryeon but also my brothers from the Demonic Cult would swarm into this Liaoning.

To grasp their movements a step ahead, the information power of the Rogues' Guild, which reached to the very bottom of the Murim, was essential.

After sending the Small Snow Squad members to the base of the Rogues' Guild, I turned to look at Cho Gun as the commotion in the yard settled down to some extent.

“We are leaving now. Lead us by the most secret path to the Sound Gathering Pavilion.”

“Don't you worry, Master! This Cho Gun will take you to an underground waterway entrance that even the rats of Liaoning don't know about.”

Cho Gun took the lead and climbed over the back wall of the merchant guild.

I checked the feel of the Blue and Red Twin Swords at my waist and took flight. Seol Ye-rin, Seong Sang-ah, and Cheon Deung-jin followed behind me.

Liaoning Castle, where the shroud of night had settled, exuded an even more bizarre atmosphere than usual.

As we approached the coast, sharp metallic sounds were mixed in between the sounds of the waves.

—Chuckle, do you hear it? It is sound waves tearing through the atmosphere with energy infused into them.

—It seems they are doing something with sound waves.

Just like the words of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, as we got closer to the Sound Gathering Pavilion, I began to hear hallucinations.

The scenery before my eyes wavered along with the illusion that someone was screaming in my ear.

“Young Master, put this in your mouth!”

Seong Sang-ah quickly handed a purple pill to the group.

“It is a Clear Mind Pill that clears the mind. And lightly plug your ears with this medicinal cotton. It will reduce the vibrations directly touching the eardrums.”

Thanks to Seong Sang-ah's quick response, the heads of the party became much clearer.

Seol Ye-rin drew her ice sword and moved forward while scraping the ground.

A thin ice wall was formed wherever Seol Ye-rin passed, refracting the fluctuations of the sound.

“There it is! That pavilion on top of that cliff is the Sound Gathering Pavilion!”

In the place Cho Gun pointed to, there was a flamboyant pavilion hanging precariously at the edge of the coastal cliff.

Purple sound waves erupting from there were strangely coloring the night sky, and a massive whirlpool was churning in the sea below.

“The entrance to the underwater cave is opening.”

My eyes flashed.

The four types of energy inside my qi center resonated like crazy and pounded against my chest.

I drew the Blue and Red Twin Swords simultaneously.

“Cho Gun, you wait here. From here on, it will not be the realm of humans.”

“O-Of course! Because my life is precious! Master, you must return safely so you can pay me the remaining balance!”

As soon as Cho Gun hid himself behind a rock, the door of the Sound Gathering Pavilion opened roughly, and musicians dressed in black clothes poured out.

In their hands, instead of weapons, they held strangely shaped musical instruments.

“Are they intruders? How dare they try to interfere with our Pavilion Master's performance!”

When the crowd of the Sound Demon Blood Group plucked their instruments, invisible blade-like sound blades poured toward my group like rain.

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At the highest point of the Sound Gathering Pavilion, in the center of the pavilion where silk fluttered in the wind, a massive zither was placed.

It was a sacred object, the Heavenly Cry Zither, which emitted a chilling brilliance as if the Milky Way had been embedded into its pitch-black body.

The woman sitting in front of it and plucking the strings, the Captain of the Sound Demon Blood Group, the Heavenly Sound Witch, was staring at the horizon with unfocused eyes.

Every time the Heavenly Sound Witch's fingertips brushed the strings, vibrations mixed with the scent of blood spread out to the sea.

“A little more... just cry a little more.”

Bizarre mutterings flowed from between the Heavenly Sound Witch's lips.

It had been several months since she occupied this forbidden area of Liaoning while swearing loyalty to the Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang.

The dissonance extracted by forcibly twisting the strings of the Heavenly Cry Zither was awakening the giant whirlpool sleeping beneath the sea.

Clang—! Booom!

At that moment, the explosive sound of tearing through the air coming from the entrance of the Sound Gathering Pavilion interrupted the Heavenly Sound Witch's performance.

Two energies that could never coexist, a mixture of cold chill and hot demonic fire, were tearing apart the sound blades of the Sound Demon Blood Group musicians in an instant.

“...Are they interlopers?”

A chilly killing intent dwelled in the Heavenly Sound Witch's eyes.

The Heavenly Sound Witch paused her fingers that were dancing on the strings for a moment and watched the red radiance erupting from the entrance.

“That energy...”

The fire energy was rising greatly. It felt like a mixture of several energies there.

The Heavenly Sound Witch smiled fishily and grabbed the strings again.

The Heavenly Sound Witch's fingers bent at a bizarre angle and roughly plucked the thickest string of the Heavenly Cry Zither.

[Heavenly Sound Severing Pulse Tune]

Wuuuuuung—!

The entire Sound Gathering Pavilion vibrated as if it were screaming.

The waves that were pushing in from below the pavilion froze in mid-air and then scattered into powder.

It was a melody of ruin that scraped directly at the soul beyond the eardrums.

“Brat, no matter how much mysterious power you possess, can you prevent your heart from bursting in the darkness where you cannot even make a sound?”

The Heavenly Sound Witch looked down with crazed eyes at the figures climbing the stairs.

A man surrounded by purple flames and three women protecting him.

The Heavenly Sound Witch grabbed all the strings of the Heavenly Cry Zither at once and then let go.

Boom—!

The sound waves became a massive tidal wave and struck the entrance of the Sound Gathering Pavilion.

However, contrary to her expectations, I, with my purple eyes flashing, was shooting in like lightning while crossing the Blue and Red Twin Swords, breaking through that whirlpool of ruin.

“...Interesting. I'll have to listen for myself to what kind of tone your scream has.”

From the Heavenly Sound Witch's fingertips, a true performance of slaughter that would rip apart the night of Liaoning was about to begin.

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Within the melody of ruin that rushed in as if to swallow the pavilion, I kicked off the ground while crossing the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

Even though the vibration that shook my brain even when I covered my ears swept through my whole body, my reason was maintained as coolly clear as ice thanks to the Clear Mind Pill Seong Sang-ah gave me.

“That woman is the Captain of the Sound Demon Blood Group, the Heavenly Sound Witch.”

My purple eyes were fixed on the woman continuing her crazed performance at the upper level of the pavilion.

Every time the Heavenly Sound Witch's fingers plucked the strings, the scream of the atmosphere being torn was heard, and that wave became an invisible blade and brushed past my collar.

“I'll take the front! I'll freeze even with that disgusting sound.”

When Seol Ye-rin swung her ice sword into the air, a thick ice wall instantly rose above the tidal wave of sound waves that was blocking my path.

With a crunching sound, the vibration of the sound waves hit the ice wall and was refracted.

“I can't lose either. Burn.”

Whoosh—

Cheon Deung-jin also shot out through the gaps in the ice wall while emitting red heat.

When the fire energy emitted by Cheon Deung-jin collided with the wave of sound, the atmosphere expanded and a bizarre explosion occurred.

Ice and flames intersected and began to forcibly shake the sound field created by the Heavenly Sound Witch.

Without missing that opening, I stepped on the railing of the pavilion and leaped into the air.

—Chuckle, it is a clash between a sacred object and a sacred object. Infuse the energy of your qi center into the ring of the Heavenly Cry Zither. Sound is meant to be broken by sound!

As soon as the Sword Venerable's telepathy was heard, I held the Red Sword in my right hand in a reverse grip and struck down toward the Heavenly Sound Witch.

Mad Fire Sword Drawing.

Purple flames shot out, drawing a massive wave along the blade of the Red Sword.

It was not a simple slash.

It was a ‘soundless vibration’ created by mixing the Buddhist power of the Buddhist Venerable and the ferocity of demonic qi.

Kuuuuung—!

The melody of the Severing Pulse Tune that the Heavenly Sound Witch was emitting collided head-on with my strike. Vibrations of different natures meshed in the air, and the pillars of the pavilion were shaved away while screaming.

For the first time, a look of astonishment dwelled in the Heavenly Sound Witch's eyes.

“Erased sound... with sound? This brat, what on earth!”

“The performance ends here.”

My cold voice pierced the Heavenly Sound Witch's ear.

Before she knew it, I had approached right in front of the Heavenly Sound Witch's nose.

The Blue Sword in my left hand rushed in toward the Heavenly Sound Witch's neck while emitting a chilling cold.

The Heavenly Sound Witch hurriedly tilted her body back and blocked my Blue Sword using the main body of the Heavenly Cry Zither as a shield.

Clang—!

When the Blue Sword, forged from Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron, and the Heavenly Cry Zither, made of an unidentified material, collided, sparks flew in all directions along with a metallic sound that made the ears go numb.

The sharp ice energy that had been gathered on the Blue Sword traveled along the body of the zither and surged into the Heavenly Sound Witch's fingertips.

“Th-This chill...!”

The Heavenly Sound Witch screamed and tried to push me away by plucking the strings, but I was already twisting my body in mid-air and swinging the Red Sword in my right hand.

Mad Fire Consecutive Slashes.

The purple flames rotated like a gear and trapped all sides of the Heavenly Sound Witch.

The Heavenly Sound Witch, whose path of retreat was cut off, bit her own wrist with crazed eyes.

When fresh blood was scattered over the Milky Way pattern of the Heavenly Cry Zither, the zither began to emit a red light as if it were a living beast.

“O strings bound by blood, swallow all light! Blood Sound Soul Shaking Tune!”

As the Heavenly Sound Witch began a performance that ground away her own life force, the entire Sound Gathering Pavilion was dyed blood-red and space itself began to distort.

The invisible sound waves now became visible red sword qi and stretched out in all directions.

“Young Master, be careful! Space is tearing!”

Cheon Deung-jin, who was leaping to the upper level, shouted urgently and set up a barrier of fire spirit, but the blood-colored sound waves tore the barrier like a sheet of paper and brushed past the Heavenly Sound Witch's shoulder.

Seol Ye-rin also set up an ice wall to defend, but thousands of cracks appeared on the ice wall in an instant before the massive resonance.

However, I, standing at the center of the ruin, closed my eyes instead.

—Chuckle, do not be misled by the sound and feel the source of the vibration.

—Even sound waves can eventually be cut!

When the advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen flashed through my head, I crossed the Blue and Red Twin Swords as if merging them into one.

The four types of energy that had been dormant in my qi center began to fuse strangely on the blades of the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“Flame Severing.”

The moment I swung the swords down, flames covered everything.

The blood-colored melody and the roaring sound that had filled the Sound Gathering Pavilion disappeared as if they were a lie.

An absolute vacuum space where sound did not exist due to the explosion.

The Heavenly Sound Witch opened her mouth and screamed, but no sound came out.

Boom, boom, boom—!

The soundless strike struck the exact center of the Heavenly Cry Zither.

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Chapter 127 : Divine Beast

The upper level of the Sound Gathering Pavilion, which had been swept away by explosive flames and a vacuum, was transformed into a wretched state.

The flamboyant silk fabrics were scattered as ashes, and the floor was melting from my mad fire, boiling like red lava.

“Ke-heuk...!”

The Heavenly Sound Witch vomited blood while being stuck against a pillar of the pavilion.

The recoil from having the Blood Sound Soul Shaking Tune, into which she had ground her life force, shattered head-on was fatal.

My gaze was directed not at the fallen Heavenly Sound Witch, but at the Heavenly Cry Zither lying on the floor.

Wuuuuuung—!

The sacred object that had lost its owner was emitting a bizarre resonance.

The wave generated as the strings broke stretched out to the sea along the coastal cliff below the Sound Gathering Pavilion.

“...Look over there.”

At Seol Ye-rin's shout, I looked down beyond the railing.

The massive whirlpool that had been rotating as if to swallow the sea off Liaoning stopped, and the sea began to part on both sides like the miracle of Moses.

At the end of that abyss, a massive stone gate emitting a faint bluish-white brilliance revealed itself.

[Gate of the Zither Venerable's Forbidden Area]

“...It finally opened.”

My eyes sank coldly.

The four types of energy inside my qi center fluctuated in response to the pulsation coming from down there.

It was not the energy of an ordinary legacy. It looked like the remnants of a massive power that the Zither Venerable had suppressed for hundreds of years, unable to bring it out into the world.

“He-he-he... brat, do not be mistaken.”

The Heavenly Sound Witch, hanging at the edge of the cliff, burst into a bizarre laugh.

Dark red blood flowed from her mouth like a waterfall.

“What opened is not a treasure house. Down there... lies a ‘calamity’ that the Zither Venerable could not bring himself to kill and thus imprisoned. For you to walk into that mouth with your own feet, the Saphaeryeon Leader will be pleased!”

“You talk too much.”

As I lightly waved my hand, the purple flames erupting from the Red Sword swallowed the Heavenly Sound Witch's form.

Her body turned into ash and scattered into the sea without her even being able to scream.

I picked up the Heavenly Cry Zither and secured it on my back.

The strings were broken, but the body itself was a sufficient sacred object.

“Miss Seol, Miss Cheon, Miss Seong. From here on, it is truly dangerous, so I will go down there alone.”

“Wasn't that discussion already finished earlier?”

Seol Ye-rin replied calmly while brushing the frost off her ice sword.

Cheon Deung-jin snorted while raising her fire spirit energy, and Seong Sang-ah quietly checked her emergency antidotes.

“Let's go. Whatever is down there, it will be less dangerous than sending you alone, Young Master.”

I shook my head and threw my form toward the bottom.

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah followed behind me.

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At that time, unlike the Sound Gathering Pavilion where the scent of flowers and the smell of powdered medicine vibrated, the southern edge of Liaoning was mixing the smell of human sweat and the fishy smell of alcohol.

At the center of it, the base of the Rogues' Guild was located.

“Who are you! This isn't a place for drifters to linger...!”

It was before the gatekeeper guarding the entrance of the Liaoning branch of the Rogues' Guild could even finish his words.

Boooom—!

The bolt of the heavy iron gate twisted, and the Small Snow Squad members led by Wi Ji-yeong pushed into the inner courtyard.

At the sudden raid, the warriors of the Rogues' Guild raised their weapons, but no one dared to step forward due to the chilly killing intent erupting from behind Wi Ji-yeong's back.

“We didn't come here to fight. We came to meet the Liaoning branch leader.”

At Wi Ji-yeong's cool voice, the Liaoning branch leader of the Rogues' Guild, Iron Sword Cho Chil, stormed out of his room.

He had already been informed of the existence of the gold I had thrown to Cho Gun through a messenger of the Rogues' Guild.

“...So you are the subordinates of the Ice Palace. You came earlier than expected.”

Cho Chil laughed, revealing his teeth, but his eyes were not laughing.

Cho Chil stared intently at the thick silk pouch that Wi Ji-yeong slammed down onto the table with a bang.

What shone through the gaps in the pouch was the brilliant light of gold.

“It is the Captain's order. We would like to borrow all the ‘ears’ within Liaoning. Especially the movements of the fellows coming over from the Sa Ma Clan and the main base of the Demonic Cult, and even the positions of the experts the Saphaeryeon has ambushed around the Sound Gathering Pavilion.”

Cho Chil picked up the gold pouch, weighed it, and then replied with a giggle.

“Haha! You certainly have a grand scale. Fine, for this much, I can lend you not just the information network of the Rogues' Guild but even the eyes of the rats on the floor of Liaoning. However, there is one thing you should know.”

Cho Chil lowered his voice and approached Wi Ji-yeong.

“The Sa Ma Clan has already released their people. The Black Lotus Warriors of the Sa Ma Clan are not just targeting the Sound Gathering Pavilion.”

Wi Ji-yeong's brow narrowed. While I was fighting the sound arts of the Sound Gathering Pavilion, it seemed that an information war had already begun in the invisible places.

“Before delivering this to the Captain, we will grab the leashes of those Black Lotus Warriors first. Branch Leader Cho, I'd like you to tell me their hideout immediately.”

“A hideout... those fellows are hidden in places deeper than rats. The basement of the closed grain warehouse in the west of Liaoning, that is the base of the Black Lotus Warriors.”

Cho Chil spread a map on the table with a fishy smile.

The place he pointed to with his finger was the most dilapidated and deserted place in Liaoning.

“Be careful. The Black Lotus Warriors are not ordinary assassins. They are experts at hiding in the shadows and brandishing weapons. If you are not careful, you might go to grab their leashes and end up having your limbs torn instead.”

Instead of answering, Wi Ji-yeong turned to look at the Vice Captain, Eun Bin.

“Vice Captain, what do you think?”

“A mere shadow, we should be able to catch easily.”

As Eun Bin nodded, the Small Snow Squad members waiting behind began to move like ghosts.

They left the Rogues' Guild branch and permeated into the dark alleys of Liaoning.

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Meanwhile, we, who had thrown ourselves between the parted sea, were facing a bizarre sight.

The seawater rose on both sides to form transparent walls, and the floor revealed between them was paved with smoothly polished white jade stone instead of seaweed or sand.

“...Did the Zither Venerable make all of this?”

Cheon Deung-jin asked while looking around.

Cheon Deung-jin's Extreme Yang Body made a sizzle sound as it evaporated the surrounding moisture, but the energy coming up from the underground was so cool and heavy that it suppressed even that heat.

I watched the front instead of answering.

Before the massive stone gate, statues that seemed to have endured hundreds of years were standing together.

Musical instruments were held in the hands of the statues, but the killing intent they emitted was of a different level from the musicians of the Sound Gathering Pavilion.

—Chuckle, they seem to be statues in which the Zither Venerable implanted his internal strength.

—It seems we should open the gate before their performance begins.

At the warnings of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I drew the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

The Heavenly Cry Zither secured to my back trembled as if it were alive and began to resonate with something inside the stone gate.

“Miss Seol, please stop the movement of those statues. Miss Cheon and Miss Seong, please guard my back.”

“Understood!”

As Seol Ye-rin swung her ice sword, white frost began to freeze from the ankles of the statues.

At the moment the statues made a bizarre friction sound and lifted their instruments, I rushed toward the stone gate like purple lightning.

Boooom—!

The sound of a massive pulsation coming from beyond the stone gate.

The calamity that the Zither Venerable was said to have imprisoned was waking up from a long sleep to greet me.

***

It had been hundreds of years.

The bottom of the deep sea where not a single point of light reached, the years endured in a cold jade stone room with only the sound of its own heart as a companion.

It was once a Divine Beast that commanded the world, the most cherished companion of the Zither Venerable, and at the same time, an incarnation of destruction that the Zither Venerable could not handle in the end and had to seal.

—Rumble.

Beyond the massive stone gate, the sleeping bluish-white scales trembled minutely.

Golden eyes, torn vertically, flashed in the darkness and slowly opened.

—Who are you?

Not human language, but a massive thought wave that directly shook the soul swept through the closed space.

The existence is remembered.

The last performance left by the master who imprisoned it here.

On the day that elegant yet sad melody stopped, it was said that only two types of people would come to wake it.

Either a demon who wanted to use it to destroy the world, or a true master who would cut its neck and give it rest.

Wuuuuuung—!

A disgusting resonance heard from outside the stone gate.

It was the sound of the Heavenly Cry Zither, which had been its master's item.

But the quality was different. It was a dissonance emitted by greedy humans, forcibly twisted and torn.

—How laughable. Are the vermin who want to use me as a tool again knocking on the gate.

The mouth of the Blue Dragon slowly opened.

Between them, a blue mist swirled as if the water pressure of the deep sea had been compressed.

Boooom!

Finally, the stone gate opened, and a figure surrounded by purple flames flew inside.

The Blue Dragon stood up its whole body while harboring a cold sneer.

Every time its massive form, reaching dozens of meters, rose while scraping the ceiling, the white jade stones laid on the floor were smashed and screamed.

—Evil energy... and the scent of unidentified sacred objects. Brat, did you open this gate?

The roar of the dragon struck the group like an earthquake.

The ice energy of Seol Ye-rin, who followed inside, was eaten by the coolness of the Blue Dragon to such an extent that the energy emitted by the Blue Dragon, the master of this place, was absolute.

—Come. I will fill my hundreds of years of hunger with your bone marrow!

Under the stone gate, the calamity the Zither Venerable had hidden was a Divine Beast.

I, Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah were astonished by the unbelievable appearance of that Divine Beast and at that moment.

The Blue Dragon's massive front paw fell like a great mountain over my head.

Whoosh—!

The front paw of the Blue Dragon and my sword collided.

Soon, an enormous flame began to overflow in the surroundings.

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Chapter 128 : Misfortunes Never Come Singly

Kuuuuuuung—!

The shockwave generated by the collision of the Blue Dragon’s massive front paw and my Red Sword shook the entire deep-sea room.

The white jade floor cracked like a spider web, and the massive stalactites hanging from the ceiling poured down like rain.

“Is this..... even a size that makes sense?!”

Cheon Deung-jin screamed as she exploded her fire spirit energy.

The flames she emitted surged at the Blue Dragon’s feet, but the divine beast’s blue scales were absorbing even that fierce heat as chilling cold.

—How laughable. Do you intend to burn my flesh with mere human flames!

The Blue Dragon’s thought wave was transmitted to my brain.

I wiped the blood pooled at my mouth and put strength into the hand holding the Red Sword.

If it hadn't been a sword forged from Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron, my arm itself would have been crushed by that strike just now.

“Third Young Master, move back!”

Seol Ye-rin shouted as she drove her ice sword into the floor.

Behind her, thousands of ice awls soared and flew toward the Blue Dragon’s flank.

However, as the Blue Dragon swung its massive tail once, even the North Sea’s secret ice palace martial arts were scattered like powder, as if they were mere frost.

—The energy of the North Sea..... Are you a descendant of Seol Cheon-u? But compared to that man’s cold qi, your martial arts are nothing more than a child’s prank!

‘Seol Cheon-u?’

The Blue Dragon was mentioning the Ice Emperor.

“Miss Seol, Miss Cheon! Move back!”

I roared and even drew the Blue Sword.

Inside my qi center, the four types of energy—Iron, Fighting, Poison, and Buddhist—rotated madly and emitted a purple brilliance.

Extreme Yang Qi.

My foundation ultimately converged into Extreme Yang Qi.

Perhaps reacting to that energy, the Heavenly Cry Zither secured to my back trembled its broken strings and sent out a bizarre resonance.

“If you are the divine beast the Zither Venerable imprisoned, you should remember this object!”

As I made the body of the Heavenly Cry Zither ring, the Blue Dragon’s golden eyes flickered.

—.....The master’s zither. But the strings are broken and the soul is dead. Did you kill the master and usurp it!

The Blue Dragon’s rage reached its peak, and blue lightning swirled inside its mouth.

—Die!

Sssssss—!

A blue beam poured toward me.

In that desperate moment, Seong Sang-ah drove three silver needles into my Great Hammer acupoint from behind my back.

“Hold on for just a moment! It is a forbidden art that draws out potential!”

Seong Sang-ah’s medical art exploded the qi and blood of my entire body.

Purple flames soared ten zhang high, and I crossed the Blue and Red Twin Swords to take the lightning head-on.

Mad Fire Manifestation.

Kwaaaaang—!

The space wavered as the Blue Dragon’s lightning and my purple shield collided.

Even as I was pushed back several zhang, I did not let go of my swords.

—Chuckle, for a divine beast, its temper is certainly grand. Aim for the Reverse Scale beneath its scales. That is where the Zither Venerable’s energy is most densely concentrated!

—If you crash the resonance of the Heavenly Cry Zither against the Reverse Scale, you will be able to restore its reason!

It has no reason?

Listening to the advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I took my stance again.

Before the massive majesty of the Blue Dragon, my form was insignificantly small, but the purple light in my eyes did not lose to the golden eyes of the divine beast.

“I want to have a conversation, but you still won't acknowledge me.”

I kicked off the ground once more.

Whoosh—

The flames soared again.

“Let's talk again after I light a fire for you.”

***

Near the ceiling of the deep-sea tomb, there were eyes watching this crazy sight while hiding in the shadow of a white jade pillar.

Hyeokryeon Mu, the second son of the Demonic Cult Leader, swallowed hard, having erased his usual idle smile.

Hyeokryeon Mu had met numerous eccentric people and famous masters while traveling the Central Plains, but the sight before him was far beyond the category of his common sense.

‘Is that really the Hyeokryeon Yeom I used to know?’

In Hyeokryeon Mu’s eyes, I was already more of a massive fire demon than a human.

The momentum of kicking off the ground while receiving the front paw of a divine beast reaching dozens of zhang with twin swords.

In particular, the purple flames surrounding my whole body held something much more pure and destructive, different from the energy of the Demonic Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk, the pinnacle of the Demonic Cult.

—Graaaaaaah! Does a worm-like fellow dare to climb to the heavens!

Every time the Blue Dragon’s roar erupted, the air pressure inside the stone chamber was distorted.

Hyeokryeon Mu pressed his body against the wall while covering his ears.

Even amidst the buzzing tinnitus, my movements were clear.

Swish—!

I passed between the Blue Dragon’s scales as if brushing against them and flipped my form in mid-air.

Every time the purple flames erupting from the Red Sword collided with the Blue Dragon’s blue mist, water vapor filled the stone chamber.

Even in that chaotic situation, I was persistently aiming for the single brightest shining scale beneath the Blue Dragon’s chin.

‘The Reverse Scale. If I touch that, I will either die or subdue it.’

Hyeokryeon Mu put strength into the hand holding his fan.

Meanwhile, the gazes of Seong Sang-ah, Seol Ye-rin, and Cheon Deung-jin, who were guarding my back near the entrance of the pavilion, were also desperate.

“Young Master……!”

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lip, suppressing her fire spirit body which kept trying to jump out by resonating with my flames.

In her eyes, my back as I fought against the divine beast was as dazzling as the sun.

Seol Ye-rin was constantly freezing and smashing the falling rocks while holding her ice sword.

She felt her heart go cold in one corner as she heard the name of the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, being uttered by the Blue Dragon.

‘The divine beast the Zither Venerable imprisoned…… and the Third Young Master who reawakened that divine beast.’

Seol Ye-rin realized.

I was facing the arrangements left by the legends of hundreds of years ago head-on.

The sacred objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens I had acquired, and the legacies of the Ice Palace, were moving so that I could reach the level of a Martial God.

Rumble!

A massive explosion echoed through the stone chamber once more.

I soared into the air like purple lightning while delivering a strike right before the Blue Dragon’s eyes.

“I said I would light a fire for you. O divine beast, I will burn that arrogant gaze of yours with my flames!”

Along with my roar, the Blue and Red Twin Swords crossed in the shape of a cross.

Purple flames swirled and shot down toward the Blue Dragon’s Reverse Scale.

As he watched that brilliant radiance, demonic qi began to surge from Hyeokryeon Mu’s entire body.

Competitive spirit.

Competitive spirit began to manifest in Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes as he looked at his strengthened younger brother.

***

In my vision as I soared into the air, the Blue Dragon's massive golden eyes were captured.

Within its eyes, hundreds of years of solitude and madness, and the arrogance of regarding me as a mere moth, were mixed.

'I will show you. How far the human flames you considered laughable can reach.'

I squeezed the energy of the four sacred objects inside my qi center and pushed it into the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

Thanks to the silver needles Seong Sang-ah had driven in, my meridians were as hot as if they were burning, but that pain instead sharpened my mind as coolly as a blade.

Reverse Scale Slash.

A massive pillar of purple flame fell toward the beast's throat, drawing a cross trajectory.

The Blue Dragon opened its mouth and exhaled blue cold qi, but this time was different.

The Blue Sword of Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron absorbed that chill and opened a path, and the mad fire of the Red Sword followed that path to strike the beast's Reverse Scale directly.

Boom boom boom—!

"Graaaaaaaah!"

A scream that seemed to crush the stone chamber erupted.

The purple flames embedded in the beast's Reverse Scale burned away the waste-like energy of the Zither Venerable and caused a massive resonance.

The Heavenly Cry Zither on my back trembled and sent out a clear wave, and that sound penetrated deep into the Blue Dragon's brain.

In the moment I was being repelled by the aftermath of the impact, I straightened my form in mid-air and landed.

My knees almost buckled, but I supported myself by driving the Blue Sword into the floor.

“Ha..... ha.....”

Beyond the thick water vapor and dust, I saw the Blue Dragon’s massive form collapsing to the floor.

The killing intent vanished from the Blue Dragon’s eyes, and in its place, deep emptiness and a rational light were returning.

—.....This melody, I can feel the master’s heart.

The thought wave no longer struck my brain but pushed in like a calm wave.

The Blue Dragon lowered its head and gazed at me.

—I thought you were a brat, but you are one qualified to handle the master’s item. No, perhaps even more than that.

As the Blue Dragon raised its body, a bluish-white jewel that made the eyes sting dropped from the Reverse Scale position beneath its neck.

The jewel was a crystal in which the Zither Venerable had suppressed the divine beast’s power and contained the essence of his martial arts.

—The predecessor of the Heavenly Cry Zither, the legacy of the Zither Venerable, is this Heaven Sea Bead. Are you looking for clues about the place closest to the sky?

At the Blue Dragon’s words, I slowly approached and picked up that bead. Through my fingertips, the Zither Venerable’s vast enlightenment and the energy of the deep sea pushed in.

It was then.

“Incredible, Yeom-ah. You’ve truly become strong, to the point it’s dazzling.”

A figure walking out while folding a fan from the shadow of a statue.

It was my second brother, Hyeokryeon Mu.

The demonic qi erupting from Hyeokryeon Mu’s body was enormous.

“...How are you here, brother?”

I put the bead into my robes and adjusted my grip on the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“I heard news that you were heading toward Liaoning and was looking for you.”

“Did you follow me?”

My eyes narrowed.

Hyeokryeon Mu looked back and forth between the fallen divine beast and me, and then listened to the massive vibration echoing throughout the entire underground of Liaoning.

“I want to have a match with you right now.”

Rumble-

The environment was changing for the worse to the extent that vibrations rang out.

I looked at Hyeokryeon Mu and sought an exit.

It was because I had to at least make Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah escape.

However,

Rustle-

I saw a group of people moving.

From the entrance of the stone chamber, about ten warriors dressed in black permeated in mist.

As if misfortunes never come singly, the Black Lotus Warriors of the Sa Ma Clan were storming in.

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Chapter 129 : Extreme Demon

The air cooled rapidly.

It was not because of the Blue Dragon's chill.

The battle spirit emitted by Hyeokryeon Mu from behind and the killing intent of the Black Lotus Warriors who had permeated in like mist from the front pricked my skin sharply.

“Brother, the joke is going too far. A duel in this situation?”

I muttered lowly while readjusting my grip on the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

However, the look in Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes was sincere.

Hyeokryeon Mu lightly unfurled his fan and stared greedily at the flames enveloping my entire body.

"Does it look like a joke? When you see a younger brother who has grown strong, it is only proper for a brother to be curious about his foundation. But..."

Hyeokryeon Mu's gaze turned toward the entrance.

"The guests are not showing any courtesy first."

Swish—!

No sooner had he finished speaking than the silent hidden weapons of the Black Lotus Warriors poured in.

They were not mere hidden weapons.

They were black needles imbued with the unique yin qi of the Sa Ma Clan, swallowing even the light.

"Young Master!"

Seol Ye-rin swung her ice sword and erected a massive ice wall in front of the group.

Clang, clang!

Along with the metallic sounds, the hidden weapons embedded in the ice wall emitted black smoke and corroded the ice.

"How dare these vipers act this way before us!"

Cheon Deung-jin exploded her fire spirit energy and leaped forward.

Red flames were brandished like a whip, entangling the neck of one Black Lotus Warrior hidden in the mist.

-Aaargh!

Along with the scream, the smell of burning flesh vibrated.

However, the Black Lotus Warriors paid no mind to their comrade's death and used the terrain to tighten the net around my blind spots.

-Chuckle, they are hunting dogs. But it seems they are targeting not only you but also the fallen divine beast and the Heaven Sea Bead?

Just as the Sword Venerable warned, the gazes of the Black Lotus Warriors were directed toward the bluish-white bead in my robes.

At that moment, Hyeokryeon Mu lightly flew and landed beside me.

“I have a proposal. How about we join hands until we clean up these rats? We can settle our matter after that.”

“...I have no reason to refuse.”

No sooner had my answer fallen than the energies of the two brothers clashed and meshed explosively.

My purple flames and Hyeokryeon Mu’s black demonic qi.

Their natures were different, but the energies of the same root flowing through our bloodlines covered the deep-sea stone chamber.

Mad Dragon Joint Strike.

My Red Sword emitted purple lightning, and Hyeokryeon Mu’s Jade Sword brought forth pitch-black darkness.

Two strands of massive power swirled and instantly shredded the shadow formation deployed by the Black Lotus Warriors.

“H-How can this be!!”

The leader of the Black Lotus Warriors shouted in shock, but my Blue Sword had already frozen his heart.

However, the sense of victory did not last long.

The vibration of the stone chamber grew even stronger, and the walls of the sea that had been parted began to collapse.

Thousands of tons of seawater were pressing down on the deep-sea tomb, threatening to pour in.

“Third Young Master! The gate is closing! We have to hurry!”

Seong Sang-ah pointed at the collapsing ceiling and shouted urgently.

I looked at the fallen Blue Dragon.

The divine beast quietly closed its eyes and sent a thought wave.

-Take the master's legacy. I will return to the master's side along with the collapse of this place.

I could not find the words to respond, so I put the Heaven Sea Bead into my robes and grabbed the women's hands.

"Let's go!"

Just before the seawater struck the stone gate, the four figures and Hyeokryeon Mu made a desperate leap toward the surface, breaking through the water pressure pouring like a waterfall.

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Booom—!

The parted sea merged again, and a massive water column soared into the sky.

Enormous water pressure chased us, but I, the three women, and Hyeokryeon Mu emitted explosive true qi and soared above the water's surface.

"Phew... Haa!"

As I landed on the ruins of the Sound Gathering Pavilion while gasping for breath, the first thing that caught my eyes was the black shadows filling the coastal cliff.

A much larger number of Black Lotus Warriors than those who had intruded into the underground tomb had already occupied the coast of Liaoning.

"Rats keep coming out endlessly."

Hyeokryeon Mu smirked while holding his sword.

"Shall we make a bet on who cuts down more this time?"

"I will pass on the bet."

I drew the Blue and Red Twin Swords as I spoke.

Compared to the overwhelming pressure of the Blue Dragon I had faced in the water just a moment ago, the assassins before me were nothing more than mere prey.

Blue and Red Dance.

Purple flames and chilling ice energy whirled like a storm on the coast.

Every time I took a step, the necks of the Black Lotus Warriors fell like autumn leaves.

Seol Ye-rin's ice arts and Cheon Deung-jin's fire spirit energy swept the left and right, while Seong Sang-ah's silver needles dominated the air, causing the ones said to be the elites of the Sa Ma Clan to fall and roll into the sea without being able to endure even fifteen minutes.

Traversing through that carnage, Hyeokryeon Mu also slaughtered the assassins, drawing bizarre black trajectories with his Jade Sword.

In less than half an hour, the beach of Liaoning was dyed black with the blood of the Black Lotus Warriors.

Silence arrived.

On the cliff where only the sound of waves could be heard, Hyeokryeon Mu shook the blood off his Jade Sword and looked back at me.

"Now the interlopers are gone. Shall we finish the talk we were having earlier?"

Demonic qi seethed in Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes.

He was sincere.

It was a competitive spirit to confirm his younger brother's growth, and a gaze longing for something beyond that.

"If you want a duel, I will accept. But..."

I took out the bluish-white glowing Heaven Sea Bead from my robes.

The essence of the Zither Venerable and the crystal in which the Blue Dragon's power was concentrated.

"I should settle this first."

"...Are you really going to eat that here right now?"

Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes widened in shock.

Absorbing something that was essentially a divine beast's inner dan immediately after a fierce battle was no different from a suicidal act.

However, my instinct was telling me that I had to eat this now.

Gulp.

I threw the Heaven Sea Bead into my mouth without hesitation.

“...!!”

Instantly, my whole body was enveloped in a bluish-white brilliance.

The four energies of Iron, Fighting, Poison, and Buddhist that had been dormant in my qi center all ran wild at once, rejecting the new intruder.

The pain of my bloodlines being torn apart rushed in, but I clenched my teeth and raised my Extreme Yang Qi.

-Chuckle, you crazy brat! To swallow that vast water energy all at once!

-Get a hold of yourself! Do not suppress the energy, leave it to the resonance of the Heavenly Cry Zither!

The shouts of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen were heard.

I guided the vibration of the Heavenly Cry Zither secured to my back to my qi center.

There were no strings, but the vibration was transmitted to my heart.

The water energy of the Heaven Sea Bead, which had been running wild, was gradually tamed according to the melody of the Heavenly Cry Zither and began to mix with the other four energies.

Booom—!

Beneath my feet, the ground of Liaoning screamed and sank.

The purple flames harbored the bluish-white water energy and transformed into a mysterious violet radiance.

It was the moment the fifth sacred object, the legacy of the Zither Venerable, was completely engraved into my body.

I slowly opened my eyes.

My eyes were now shining in a bizarre violet that contained the depth of the deep sea beyond mere purple.

I readjusted my grip on the Blue and Red Twin Swords and gazed at Hyeokryeon Mu.

“I am sorry for keeping you waiting, brother. Now... let us begin.”

Hyeokryeon Mu swallowed hard.

I, who until a moment ago was a genius younger brother he could handle, had now become a monster whose presence alone was suffocating just by standing across from him.

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The bluish-white water energy that had been swirling inside my qi center began to mesh with the other four energies and rotate like gears.

In my bloodlines, which had been close to tearing, a cool and heavy power I had never felt before rose up.

Beyond my vision, which had turned violet, I saw my brother Hyeokryeon Mu’s complexion turning pale.

“...You are nothing short of a monster.”

Hyeokryeon Mu muttered lowly while readjusting his grip on the Jade Sword.

Hyeokryeon Mu’s fingertips were trembling minutely.

It was strange.

Upon seeing me as a monster, his competitive spirit was manifesting even more.

I lightly swung the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

The true qi flowing along the blades was much smoother and sharper than before.

“This is the duel you wanted, brother. You aren’t thinking of avoiding it, are you?”

Before I could even finish my words, Hyeokryeon Mu’s form scattered like mist.

It was the movement technique of the Demonic Cult, Phantom Demon Step.

However, in my current eyes, that trajectory was read as clearly as ripples spreading on water.

Clang—!

At the instantly narrowed distance, the Jade Sword and the Blue Sword collided.

Hyeokryeon Mu's black demonic qi collided with my meager Extreme Yin Qi and let out a bizarre sound.

Hyeokryeon Mu swung his sword relentlessly and dug into my blind spots, but I deflected all those offensives with my twin swords without taking a single step back from my spot.

The sense of 'Resonance' I gained after swallowing the Heaven Sea Bead was truly absolute.

Hyeokryeon Mu's breathing, the trembling of his muscles, and even the flow of air his sword tip intended to cut were heard as precisely as music bars.

Meanwhile, the eyes of the three women watching this scene from behind sparkled.

"His energy has changed completely."

Seol Ye-rin whispered lowly while putting strength into the hand holding her ice sword.

As someone who handled the cold qi of the North Sea, she could feel it better than anyone else.

The energy swirling around me was now closer to the laws of nature rather than human inner qi.

"Violet eyes... it feels like I am going to suffocate."

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lip, feeling her heat constantly shrinking, suppressed by my new energy.

Seong Sang-ah held her medicine box tightly to her chest and examined my complexion.

"To take in that vast energy of the Heaven Sea Bead so instantly... There was indeed a reason why Grandfather put his expectations on the Young Master. Is that what the so-called Transformation Realm feels like?"

Booom—!

Along with a massive impact sound once again, Hyeokryeon Mu's form was pushed back several zhang.

Hyeokryeon Mu gasped for breath and wiped the blood from his mouth.

"Haha... I will admit what I have to admit, you have become strong."

However, Hyeokryeon Mu's competitive spirit had not yet gone away.

"Brother."

I wanted to ask how long he intended to continue this battle.

No, I knew.

'My brother, who reveres martial arts, will never...'

Never declare defeat himself.

Therefore.

"I will show you the sword of one who has reached the Transformation Realm—no, Extreme Demon."

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Chapter 30 : Punishment Squad

At the same time as my declaration, the energies covering the coastal cliff of Liaoning came to a halt all at once.

A silence where not even the sound of the waves could be heard.

The space itself created an illusion of being compressed toward me, the massive center of gravity.

"...Extreme Demon?"

Hyeokryeon Mu's pupils trembled slightly.

A realm that surpasses the demon. It was a word from myth that the warriors of the Demonic Cult spent their entire lives trying to reach.

Hyeokryeon Mu unconsciously gripped his Jade Sword so hard that blood stopped flowing to his hand.

"Fine. Show me, where is the end that you have reached!"

Hyeokryeon Mu pulled up every last bit of his remaining true qi.

Behind Hyeokryeon Mu, a phantom of a massive black dragon flickered, and demonic qi erupted as if to shave away the cliff.

Black Dragon Celestial Ascension.

Hyeokryeon Mu's form became pitch-black darkness and pounced on me.

The surroundings turned into darkness, and an absolute killing field was formed where only Hyeokryeon Mu's sword qi emitted light.

However, in the middle of that darkness, I slowly merged the Blue and Red Twin Swords into one.

"When the vessel changes, the water it contains also changes."

My violet eyes flashed.

The cycle of the five elements, completed through the Heaven Sea Bead, rotated while drawing a perfect circle inside my qi center.

The violet brilliance, created by the mixture of purple flames and bluish-white water energy, was thinly compressed along my sword blade.

One Sword Fire Defect.

There was no flamboyant technique, nor was there a grand explosion.

The moment I swung the sword down, the massive domain of darkness that Hyeokryeon Mu had deployed shattered as if glass were breaking.

Clang—!

A single collision.

The moment Hyeokryeon Mu's Jade Sword touched my sword blade, it was repelled backward.

Hyeokryeon Mu's form flew through the air like a fallen leaf and was deeply embedded into the floor of the cliff.

"...Heuk, cough!"

Hyeokryeon Mu clutched his chest and vomited blood.

His internal injuries were deep, but Hyeokryeon Mu's eyes were instead clear.

However, looking at the sword tip that had stopped right in front of his chest, he burst into a hollow laugh.

“Haha... really, you’ve become impossibly strong.”

I withdrew my sword and reached out my hand.

“Are you hurt anywhere, brother?”

“My heart is a bit hurt. Since I was broken so miserably by my younger brother.”

Hyeokryeon Mu grabbed my hand and stood up.

Hyeokryeon Mu put his Jade Sword into its scabbard.

The competitive spirit from before the duel had disappeared, and in its place, a strange trust and complex emotions toward his brother took hold.

“I acknowledge it. That you’ve become strong. But.”

Hyeokryeon Mu furrowed his brow.

“You are still not a match for Hyeokryeon Geuk.”

At those words, my expression stiffened.

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After withdrawing the Jade Sword and standing up with the help of my hand, Hyeokryeon Mu exhaled a long breath as if to drive out the stagnant qi gathered in his chest.

However, his gaze still lingered on my violet eyes.

My swordsmanship, which had reached the realm of an Extreme Demon, was marvelous.

Yet, in Hyeokryeon Mu’s mind, a darker darkness, a massive wall he had never once overcome, flickered past.

“Hyeokryeon Yeom, the realm you have reached is certainly close to a miracle. But... Hyeokryeon Geuk, our eldest brother, seems to have already surpassed his limits.”

“I know.”

Through the memories of my past life, I sufficiently understood how strong Hyeokryeon Geuk was.

Is that not why I am building up my strength in the North Sea?

Hyeokryeon Mu closed his eyes for a moment and recalled memories of the past.

The back of Hyeokryeon Geuk, who would make thousands of warriors kneel with just a single wave of his aura at the training grounds of the Demonic Cult.

Hyeokryeon Mu was not someone who practiced martial arts, but rather an existence that forced 'Demon' itself into the vessel of his body.

“He has already given his physical body over to demonic qi. While we operate inner qi, he commands the demonic energy in the atmosphere. If the One Sword Fire Defect you just showed is a pure sun, then Hyeokryeon Geuk’s strike is an eternal night that swallows all suns. If you were to clash with him... your violet flames would be dyed black and extinguished in an instant.”

Hyeokryeon Mu gripped my shoulder tightly.

“It is something to celebrate that you ate the Heaven Sea Bead and opened the beginning of an Extreme Demon. But now is not the time. Hyeokryeon Geuk already knows the fact that you are collecting sacred objects. Perhaps he might even be hoping for you to become stronger. He is keeping an eye on you, who became the live-in son-in-law of the North Sea Ice Palace, and me.”

It was just as Hyeokryeon Mu warned.

Surely, if it were Hyeokryeon Geuk, he would try to kill both Hyeokryeon Mu and me to eliminate future troubles.

Instead of answering, I tightly gripped the hilt of the Blue and Red Twin Swords at my waist.

“What is the reason you are telling me that?”

At my question, Hyeokryeon Mu turned his gaze to the west, staring into the darkness where the Sa Ma Clan was located.

“Go to the Black Lotus Cave.”

“Black Lotus Cave?”

“The legacy of the Dark Venerable will make you stronger than you are now.”

The brothers' gazes intertwined.

Hyeokryeon Mu once again wore an idle smile.

Within that smile, I saw the Hyeokryeon Mu of my past life.

And that smile,

looked similar to the smile Hyeokryeon Mu wore just before he died.

Rustle—

“You fellows are...”

“We have come from the Punishment Squad, directly under the Young Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Mu, Hyeokryeon Yeom. Submit to your arrest quietly.”

The ones who appeared silently in the darkness were clad in black armor darker than shadows.

On the hems of the robes they wore, not the red pattern representing the Demonic Cult, but a one-eyed pattern meaning only punishment was engraved.

Directly under the Demonic Cult's Young Cult Leader.

Punishment Squad.

The idle smile on Hyeokryeon Mu’s face evaporated in an instant.

“...The elder brother has already moved? Liaoning shouldn't even be within the Demonic Cult’s sphere of influence yet.”

In Hyeokryeon Mu’s voice, suppressed anger dwelled along with bewilderment.

Hyeokryeon Geuk’s reach was faster and more persistent than expected.

“To speak of arrest, you have no manners.”

I stepped forward while letting the Blue and Red Twin Swords hang diagonally.

The violet true qi I obtained while absorbing the Heaven Sea Bead just now rose like a haze from beneath my feet.

The man who appeared to be the captain of the Punishment Squad drew a greatsword while making a cold metallic sound.

“Manners are a luxury for traitors. Hyeokryeon Yeom, you colluded with the barbarians of the North Sea and privately coveted the cult’s sacred objects, and you, Hyeokryeon Mu, used your travels as an excuse to collude with the powers of the Central Plains. The Young Cult Leader's order is to transport you to the Hundred Thousand Mountains even if we have to sever your limbs.”

“...Since when did Hyeokryeon Geuk become the Young Cult Leader?”

“You don't need to know that.”

I stared at the man at his words.

The timing is too fast.

It seemed I would have to figure out what was happening in the Demonic Cult.

Soon, my violet eyes flashed.

Even in my past life, the Punishment Squad were Hyeokryeon Geuk’s most faithful hunting dogs.

Experts like machines who carry out only their orders without mercy or emotion.

“Go first.”

Words the same as in the past popped out from Hyeokryeon Mu’s mouth.

I could not let Hyeokryeon Mu and the Punishment Squad clash like this.

“That will not happen.”

“I will help!”

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah, who were watching from behind, tried to run over with their weapons, but I raised my hand and stopped them.

“Stay back. They are the elites of the Demonic Cult. I do not want to involve you in a family fight.”

“Wasn't the Third Young Master an Ice Palace person now?”

Seol Ye-rin spoke with a smile after seeing that.

At those words, I also burst into a chuckle.

“Now that I think about it, you are right.”

Unlike in the past, Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah were with me by my side.

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Seol Ye-rin tightly gripped the hilt of her ice sword.

The chilling sensation transmitted through her palm instead calmed her fluctuating heart.

The crowd in black armor standing in front.

The killing intent emitted by those called the Punishment Squad of the Demonic Cult was fundamentally different from the Twin Venerables she had faced in Hebei or the musicians of the Sound Gathering Pavilion.

It was a mechanical battle spirit forged only for destruction, with emotions characteristic of living beings removed.

Are they the Young Cult Leader's hunting dogs?

Seol Ye-rin’s gaze lingered on my back.

The imposing back that was overwhelming the divine beast and his brother while emitting a violet brilliance until just a moment ago.

However, she did not miss the tension felt beyond that back.

I was now facing a massive shackle called the Demonic Cult.

“Wasn't the Third Young Master an Ice Palace person now?”

It was a remark thrown like a joke, but it was sincere.

Seol Ye-rin had no intention of letting me be dragged back into the dark and damp shadows of the Demonic Cult again.

The moment I chuckled and nodded, white frost stretched out from beneath Seol Ye-rin’s feet as if exploding.

Ice Flower Full Bloom.

“Young Master, you take that man. I will freeze the underlings so they cannot hold you back.”

Seol Ye-rin swung her ice sword while flying her form.

Every time the sword tip touched the air, crystals formed and a massive ice flower bloomed.

Several Punishment Squad members tried to block it by swinging their greatswords, but the ice fragments harboring Extreme Yin Qi were prepared to dig into the gaps in their armor and freeze even their blood vessels.

“My, I can't let Miss Seol be the only one to score points!”

From the side, Cheon Deung-jin joined in while brandishing her fire spirit energy like a whip.

The water vapor generated as the cold frost and hot heat intersected filled the coastal cliff.

Seong Sang-ah was also breaking the combined formation of the Punishment Squad by flying silver needles at an invisible speed.

Seol Ye-rin saw the sight of me clashing with the captain of the Punishment Squad through the mist.

Every time the violet lightning collided with the pitch-black demonic qi, an explosion was heard.

Hyeokryeon Mu was joining in there.

Are brothers really brothers after all?

Their brotherly love seemed quite deep.

The problem was that the Punishment Squad did not fear death.

Even if a comrade’s neck was blown away, they did not blink an eye and rushed in, aiming for my and Hyeokryeon Mu’s hearts.

Seol Ye-rin bit her lip and raised the energy of her ice sword even further.

He is the man she chose.

From the day she first met him in the blizzard of the North Sea, she swore to be with him no matter what lay at the end of the path this man took.

Even if the Ice Palace were to become enemies with the Demonic Cult.