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Chapter 131 : Young Cult Leader

The energy swirling over the coastal cliff was now chaos itself.

The Ice Flower bloomed by Seol Ye-rin froze the surroundings, and the thick steam generated as Cheon Deung-jin’s Fire Spirit Qi evaporated that ice obscured the vision.

But even within that thick mist, the purple and pitch-black radiance clashed clearly.

Clang—! Boom!

My Blue and Red Twin Swords locked with the Punishment Squad Captain’s massive Great Sword.

The Punishment Squad Captain stared at me with eyes devoid of emotion and pressed down with his Great Sword.

“Traitor, no matter how strange your purple energy is, it is but mere smoke before the Lord's True Body Demonic Qi.”

“You talk too much. I'll freeze that mouth of yours first.”

I tilted the Blue Sword at an angle and let the trajectory of the Great Sword slide off.

At the same time, the purple demonic flower of my Red Sword dug in like a snake toward the Punishment Squad Captain’s chest.

But as if he had no intention of dodging, the Punishment Squad Captain reached out his left hand and grabbed the burning blade with his bare hand.

Sizzle—!

The smell of burning flesh vibrated, but the man didn't even blink.

Rather, the pitch-black demonic qi dwelling in his palm began to encroach upon my Red Sword’s flames.

-Chuckle, he has planted a demonic beast inside that guy's body. He definitely has a body that cannot feel pain.

-Be careful! That demonic qi travels through the blood vessels like poison through a wound!

I narrowed my eyes at the warning from the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen.

“It doesn't matter, I just have to keep pounding it until it breaks.”

I reversed the rotation of the Five Elements ring in my qi center.

The water energy of the Heaven Sea Bead flowed into the Blue Sword, and the Buddhist power of the Buddhist Venerable was maximized into the Red Sword. A perfect harmony of Ice(氷) and Fire began to form.

Ice Fire Combined Wall.

Kboom—!

The Punishment Squad Captain’s arm froze and exploded at the same time, scattering in all directions.

Even after losing an arm, the man swung the Great Sword with his remaining right hand without a change in expression.

Hyeokryeon Mu stepped in, wielding his Jade Sword against that mindless attack.

“You disgusting bastards! Please, just die gracefully!”

Hyeokryeon Mu’s Jade Sword drew the shape of a Black Dragon and aimed for the Punishment Squad Captain’s throat.

But at that moment, a bizarre black smoke billowed from the Punishment Squad Captain’s body, making the surrounding air rapidly heavy.

“...The punishment does not stop here.”

When the man crushed the black bead he was holding in his chest, bizarre formation patterns began to be carved across the entire coastal cliff.

Blood Net Great Formation.

“Are you aiming for a double suicide!”

Hyeokryeon Mu shouted in horror.

If the formation were completed, all life force here would be absorbed and annihilated by the demonic qi planted by Hyeokryeon Geuk.

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and Seong Sang-ah screamed as their feet were tied by the surging black threads.

I slowly withdrew my Blue and Red Twin Swords and placed my hand on the body of the Heavenly Cry Zither hanging on my back.

It was a zither with broken strings, but I connected the strings with my qi.

“Do not discuss demons in front of me.”

My fingers plucked an invisible string in the air.

Ooooooong—!

A purple wave cut across the night sky of Liaoning.

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As the purple wave sliced through the atmosphere, the black threads covering the cliff shattered like glass fragments.

It sliced directly through the blood-reeking demonic qi that was the foundation of the Blood Net Great Formation.

“Ho... how……!”

For the first time, consternation appeared in the Punishment Squad Captain’s eyes.

He probably never dreamed that the absolute forbidden art he activated by using his life as a medium would collapse at the sound of a finger plucking.

“Brother.”

My figure shot out like purple lightning.

The Punishment Squad Captain tried to block with the Great Sword using his remaining arm, but I had already passed him.

Slash—!

The Punishment Squad Captain’s head soared into the air.

Before his body even hit the ground, it was engulfed in the Red Sword’s demonic flame and scattered as ash.

Meanwhile, the Punishment Squad members surrounding them were struggling, blocked by the perfect coordination of the three women.

As the extreme cold bloomed by Seol Ye-rin’s Ice Flower Full Bloom and Cheon Deung-jin’s Fire Spirit Qi collided head-on, the battlefield turned into a thick steam prison where one could not distinguish what was in front.

“This is my territory now. You won't be able to move even a single step.”

Seol Ye-rin’s ice sword appeared like a ghost in the fog and froze the squad members' ankles.

While the squad members were panicking as their vision was blocked and they were suffocating from the intense heat, Seong Sang-ah’s silver needles poured down like rain.

“I didn't hit any vital points. But it'll be hard for you to circulate your demonic power for a while, right?”

The members whose demonic power was tangled by Seong Sang-ah’s acupuncture collapsed helplessly.

The moment I cut down the Captain, the remaining members were also completely neutralized within the combination of ice and flames.

Only the sound of waves lingered on the coastal cliff where the battle had ended.

Hyeokryeon Mu swallowed a hollow laugh as he put his Jade Sword into its scabbard.

“Seriously, you don't give me any room to keep pace. And the same goes for the coordination of the three young mistresses.”

Hyeokryeon Mu brushed the dust off his shoulder and sent a serious look toward me.

“I'm glad.”

“I must part ways with you here for a while. The fact that the Punishment Squad moved means that Hyeokryeon Geuk’s eyes have already reached this place. I think I need to look into the situation of the Demonic Cult.”

“Brother. Will you be alright alone?”

“Don't worry. I'm quite confident in my movement arts. Don't forget. It's the Sa Ma Clan's Black Lotus Cave. Visit that place and obtain the legacy of the Dark Venerable as well. Only then will you be able to face Hyeokryeon Geuk.”

Hyeokryeon Mu turned his back.

“I hope you are stronger than you are now the next time I see you. Take care of yourself, little brother.”

Hyeokryeon Mu disappeared into the fog like a ghost.

I stared in the direction my brother disappeared for a long time, then greeted the three women running toward me.

Inside the carriage that began to move again.

Having fought a fierce battle and duels in succession, I was closing my eyes and exhaling deeply while managing the energy of the Heaven Sea Bead.

Seeing my pale complexion, the air inside the carriage heated up subtly once more.

“Young Master, I will infuse a bit of North Sea's true qi into you. Your qi and blood are too overheated.”

As Seol Ye-rin carefully tried to hold my hand, Cheon Deung-jin cut in while offering a teacup.

“Drinking tea comes first! I brewed this with the energy of the Fire Spirit, so it's the best for stabilizing the mind and body.”

“The two of you really..... I'm telling you, stability is the most important thing for a patient.”

Seong Sang-ah snapped her medicine box shut and approached to apply needles to my shoulder.

“Young Master, please lift your upper garment. I need to open your acupoints.”

At the women's active care(?), I swallowed a hollow laugh and opened my eyes.

I was tired, but my will toward the main house of the Sa Ma Clan, visible to the west of Liaoning Province outside the carriage, was becoming even firmer.

The legacy of the Dark Venerable, and the Black Lotus Cave. That would be the final gateway to becoming a Martial God.

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Around the time purple flames were decorating the night sky in Liaoning of the Central Plains.

The Hundred Thousand Mountains, the home of the Demonic Cult.

The inner room of the Young Cult Leader’s Hall, where the Young Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult resided, was submerged in a chilly silence.

“……The Seventh Squad of the Punishment Squad was annihilated?”

A low voice vibrated the air. It was the man leaning obliquely on the throne, Hyeokryeon Geuk.

He was emitting overwhelming demonic qi, making his position as the Young Cult Leader pale in comparison.

A single letter was placed in front of Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“Yes, Young Cult Leader. It is a report that the Third Young Master’s martial prowess has already surpassed the wall of the Transformation Realm that the so-called Orthodox martial artists talk about. In particular, it is said that he captured a divine beast and obtained its energy, reaching the boundary of Extreme Demon.”

A man who appeared while folding a fan in the darkness replied.

Hyeokryeon Geuk’s adjutant, Sa Gong-hwi.

If Sa Ma-ui was keeping an eye on the entire Demonic Cult, Sa Gong-hwi was a cold-blooded man who served only as Hyeokryeon Geuk’s hands and feet, handling practical slaughter and assassination.

“Extreme Demon…… interesting. The cold wind of the North Sea has tempered that pitiable younger brother into quite a usable sword.”

Hyeokryeon Geuk stood up from his seat, his eyes flashing with a blood-red light.

The Young Cult Leader’s Hall vibrated every time Hyeokryeon Geuk took a step.

“Sa Gong-hwi, even if the Seventh Squad of the Punishment Squad was a discarded pawn, it wasn't luck that the Third Brother killed the Punishment Squad Captain, right?”

Sa Gong-hwi bowed his head even deeper and continued the report.

“That is correct. According to the letter, the Third Young Master’s flames have already gone beyond purple and contain violet true q. Furthermore, it is said that he contains ice qi, water qi, and fire qi in one body and causes resonance, which is an impossible feat by the common sense of our Cult.”

“Impossible? There is no such thing as impossible on the path of the Demon. It is just that the vessel is too small to contain it.”

As Hyeokryeon Geuk reached out into the air, the surrounding shadows flickered like screams and were sucked into his palm.

“It's not bad for Hyeokryeon Yeom to gather the divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens and fuse their energies. When the most pure and powerful strength is perfectly aged within that child's body, I will take that vessel in its entirety.”

Sa Gong-hwi shuddered as he saw Hyeokryeon Geuk’s cruel smile.

It seemed that Hyeokryeon Geuk was not wary of his younger brother's growth, but rather intended to harvest it.

“Sa Gong-hwi, you head to Liaoning right now. Monitor what that old snake Sa Ma-ui is plotting at the main house of the Sa Ma Clan, and just come back after reporting on how Hyeokryeon Yeom is doing.”

“I shall obey the Young Cult Leader’s command.”

“Ah, and.”

Hyeokryeon Geuk muttered after a moment of thought.

“The second one, Hyeokryeon Mu..... if that rat-like fellow lingers around Hyeokryeon Yeom, you may kill him then. There's no need to let him enjoy his sightseeing any longer.”

Hyeokryeon Geuk had already been promised the position of Young Cult Leader through the Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult, Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi.

There were minor squabbles, but they weren't very important.

Hyeokryeon Geuk looked down at the rugged peaks of the Hundred Thousand Mountains visible through the window.

“The day I formally become the Young Cult Leader will be the day the brothers who inherited the Heavenly Demon’s blood meet their deaths.”

Hyeokryeon Geuk’s two eyes began to glow red.

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Chapter 132 : Sa Ma Clan

Along a sparsely populated, dense bamboo forest path on the western outskirts of Liaoning Province, a heavy carriage was running, kicking up dust.

The air inside the carriage was still tense.

“Young Master, a North Sea ice pack is the best for bringing down a fever. Here, l-lean more this way.”

“I told you no! Warm medicinal tea is better for the circulation of qi and blood. Young Mistress Seol, move aside.”

The cold energy of Seol Ye-rin and the steam from Cheon Deung-jin’s hot teacup swirled inside the narrow carriage.

In the midst of that, I smiled bitterly while leaving my shoulder to Seong Sang-ah.

The resonance of the Five Elements occurring in my qi center after swallowing the Heaven Sea Bead was still fierce.

“……Thank you, everyone. But we will arrive soon, so I think we need to prepare ourselves.”

At my words, the women all looked out the carriage window at once.

Beyond the dense bamboo forest, a residence with a massive stone wall stretched long like a fortress wall appeared.

It was the main house of the other Sa Ma Clan in Liaoning.

The carriage stopped, and I stepped onto the ground.

Fitting for the roots of the Demonic Cult Strategist Sa Ma-ui and a family that handled the most secret information in the Central Plains Murim, a damp energy of formations could be felt from the entrance.

“Stop! This is the private property of the Sa Ma Clan. Unauthorised persons are…….”

The warriors guarding the front gate blocked the way, but instead of answering, I took out a heavy token from my robe and showed it.

It was the Gratitude Token that the Divine Physician Seong I-han had handed over, which was like the lifeblood of the current Clan Head, Sa Ma Gang.

“I have come to see Clan Head Sa Ma Gang. Tell him I have brought greetings from the Holy Hand Divine Physician.”

The complexions of the warriors who checked the Gratitude Token turned pale in an instant.

The mere fact that a first-class family secret like the Gratitude Token was in the hands of an outsider was an earth-shattering event for them.

“W-wait a moment! I will report to the Clan Head immediately!”

The warriors ran inside in a state of confusion.

Seong Sang-ah, who was watching, asked curiously.

“It really is effective. Is the thing your grandfather gave you that great?”

“The Sa Ma Clan is a family that pursues practical interests over faith and righteousness. Holding the Clan Head's weakness is no different from holding the leash of this entire family.”

My purple radiance headed deep into the residence.

The [Black Lotus Cave] mentioned by Hyeokryeon Mu.

The entrance to that forbidden area, where the legacy of the Dark Venerable lay dormant, was emitting an ominous energy from somewhere behind the residence.

After a while, the front gate opened wide, and a middle-aged man in luxurious clothing hurriedly walked out. It was the current Clan Head of the Sa Ma Clan, Sa Ma Gang.

As soon as Sa Ma Gang saw the Gratitude Token in my hand, he broke into a sweat and performed a clasped hands greeting.

“This..... I failed to recognize the esteemed guest of the Holy Hand Divine Physician and committed a discourtesy. Please, come inside.”

“Nice to meet you, I am Hyeokryeon Yeom.”

“Hyeokryeon.....?”

Sa Ma Gang's expression changed.

“I am from Our Cult.”

“Gasp!”

Sa Ma Gang’s eyes were shining sharply, but he could not hide his trembling fingertips.

“I did not come for the business of Our Cult, so do not worry.”

While guiding our party to a lavish inner hall, Sa Ma Gang constantly scanned the surroundings.

“I see. Regardless of the Strategist's will, the Sa Ma Clan is a family that knows how to repay a favor.”

‘Liar.’

I sneered inwardly.

Sa Ma Gang's words were thorny.

I instinctively felt that the monitors sent by the Young Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult, Hyeokryeon Geuk, were spread throughout the family.

“Clan Head, long words are unnecessary. Open the gate of the Black Lotus Cave in exchange for the Gratitude Token.”

At my straightforward demand, the air in the inner hall froze.

Sa Ma Gang's eyes narrowed.

“The Black Lotus Cave..... that is a forbidden area that only those permitted in our family may enter. What do you intend to find there?”

“What I am looking for is not the legacy of the Dark Venerable. It is the truth dormant within it.”

My purple radiance directly struck Sa Ma Gang’s gaze.

As the momentum of the Extreme Demon covered the inner hall, Sa Ma Gang let out a dry cough as if he were suffocating.

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Sa Ma Gang gulped.

Cold sweat flowed down his back like a stream.

The momentum emitted by the young man in front of him could not be explained merely by his status as a Young Master of the Demonic Cult.

A purple radiance that was pure yet ferocious, and cold yet hot. It was like the omen of the Extreme Demon that he had only seen in the records of the family's founder, the Dark Venerable.

‘How on earth does this person..... know about the existence of the Dark Venerable and the truth of the Black Lotus Cave?’

Externally, the Sa Ma Clan was known as the family that produced Sa Ma-ui, the Strategist of the Demonic Cult, but there was a secret history shared only by the family's core leadership.

It was the fact that the Dark Venerable was the ancestor of the Sa Ma Clan.

Even Sa Ma-ui had hung around the Black Lotus Cave several times, coveting the legacy of the Dark Venerable, but for the past hundred years, not a single person had approached the truth within it.

However, this unwelcome guest, who appeared with the Holy Hand Divine Physician’s Gratitude Token, was mentioning the Black Lotus Cave as if he saw through everything.

“.....The name Dark Venerable, and the truth of the Black Lotus Cave. You are digging too deep into the family roots we have hidden.”

Sa Ma Gang hid his trembling hands inside his sleeves and continued.

“The Black Lotus Cave is not a stone wall where martial arts manuals are written. It is a cursed labyrinth where the shadow of the one who enters eats its master. As a piece of advice considering the relationship with the Holy Hand Divine Physician, it is a place that erases the memories of the living the moment they step into it.”

Sa Ma Gang watched my reaction.

If I were a martial artist who only sought power, it would be normal to hesitate at such a warning.

However, there was not even a flicker of movement in my expression.

Rather, the purple radiance only grew deeper.

‘Did the Holy Hand Divine Physician teach him how to destroy the Dark Venerable? Or is the Young Cult Leader using this man as a move to swallow our family whole?’

Sa Ma Gang’s mind raced with complex thoughts.

Opening the Black Lotus Cave was an act of breaking the family's taboo, but if he ignored the Gratitude Token in front of him, his own life and the safety of the family would be in immediate danger.

Most of all, the energy of the Extreme Demon I emitted had already erased the option of refusal.

“……I understand. Since the weight of the Gratitude Token is not light, I will open the gate. However, the family will not take responsibility for what happens inside. Also, to avoid the eyes of the monitors sent by the Young Cult Leader, you must move at midnight tonight, during the darkest hour.”

Sa Ma Gang bowed his head as if surrendering.

But in his eyes, there was a glimmer of sinister expectation.

‘Yes, enter. Do you think the legacy of the Dark Venerable will be so easily grasped? If you are consumed by the shadows and go mad inside, I just have to reclaim the Gratitude Token and report to the Young Cult Leader that it was an accident.’

Sa Ma Gang stood up to guide them, but I was already wearing a cold smile as if I knew his inner thoughts.

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Sa Ma Gang led the way out of the inner hall.

Throughout the walk down the hallway, he glanced back at my rear.

Three people.

There were only three.

Me, Seol Ye-rin, and Cheon Deung-jin.

According to the Sa Ma Clan's information gathering, this party was said to be from the North Sea Ice Palace.

The Small Snow Squad, led by the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, Seol Ye-rin, and the Holy Hand Divine Physician’s granddaughter, Seong Sang-ah, always accompanied them.

But their traces had vanished on the way here from the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild.

‘Where did you leave the Small Snow Squad and the Divine Physician’s granddaughter, and why did you only bring these elites? Did you prepare some other scheme outside the Black Lotus Cave?’

As if sensing Sa Ma Gang’s suspicious gaze, I spoke indifferently without stopping my steps.

“It seems you are curious about the whereabouts of the other party members.”

“……No, that couldn't be. I was just worried because the number of personnel to take responsibility for your safety seemed small.”

“Don't worry. Because they are currently monitoring your back, Clan Head.”

Sa Ma Gang's shoulders flinched at my answer.

In fact, before heading to the Sa Ma Clan, I had given a secret order to the Small Snow Squad.

The instruction was to track the Sa Ma Clan's hideouts spread within Liaoning Province along with the Rogues' Guild, and to completely block the Sa Ma Clan's retreat in case a commotion occurred in the Black Lotus Cave.

Seong Sang-ah was also identifying the internal poison mist structure through a subcontracting guild that supplied medicinal herbs to the Sa Ma Clan, using her status as the Divine Physician’s granddaughter.

Late at night, at midnight.

When we reached the forbidden forest behind the Sa Ma Clan's residence, a place where the bamboo was abnormally stained black, a massive rocky mountain blocked the front.

Sa Ma Gang put his hand into a crevice in the rock and injected energy, and a heavy stone gate opened with an unpleasant grating sound.

“This is the Black Lotus Cave. From the moment you step inside, neither light nor sound will remain under the family's control. I pray that you will come out alive.”

Sa Ma Gang stepped back, pretending to surrender.

He did not think we would be able to return.

Because the true horror of the Black Lotus Cave was not martial arts, but the inner demons of the Dark Venerable trapped within it.

“Young Master, the energy is unusual.”

Seol Ye-rin approached my side, adjusting her grip on her ice sword.

Cheon Deung-jin also raised her Fire Spirit Qi, her red eyes flashing.

“I'll try to push it back with heat, but it feels like it's swallowing sound. It would be good to be careful.”

I took the first step into the darkness instead of answering.

The Heaven Sea Bead and other divine objects in my qi center were resonating wildly and sending warnings.

But at the same time, a longing to face the identity of that massive darkness that had suppressed me in my past life surged.

“Let's go. To see the bare face of that shadow that the Sa Ma Clan has hidden for a hundred years.”

As I completely permeated into the darkness, the stone door slammed shut with a bang.

I and the party entered the Black Lotus Cave.

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Chapter 133 : Dark Venerable's Pillar

The moment the stone door closed, all sounds of the world were severed.

There was neither the sound of waves scraping the dry atmosphere nor the sound of wind shaking the dense bamboo forest.

Only the rough sound of breathing and my heartbeat could be heard, loud enough to be painful.

“……I can't see anything.”

Seol Ye-rin's voice scattered into the air.

Even though it emitted a blue light when she injected her inner qi into the ice sword, the darkness swallowed that light like a living creature.

“This isn't darkness. I think it's Yin Qi manifested by a formation.”

Cheon Deung-jin exploded her Fire Spirit Qi and conjured a small flame on her palm.

Only when the red flame flickered did the surrounding scenery vaguely reveal itself.

The walls on all sides were covered with smooth black jade and black mist, which rose up to the ankles, pooled like a swamp on the floor.

Black Lotus Illusion Formation.

-Chuckle, another formation?

-Third Young Master, concentrate the water energy of the Heaven Sea Bead in your eyes. It will let you see the invisible!

At the advice of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I gathered my qi center.

As the blue-white energy emitted from the Heaven Sea Bead flowed through my eyes, strange purple lines began to be drawn in my pitch-black vision.

The flow of the formation,

I could see the pulsation emitted by the Dark Venerable's legacy deep within the Black Lotus Cave.

“Follow me carefully.”

I drew my Blue and Red Twin Swords and stepped forward.

However, before I could even take a few steps, Seol Ye-rin's short scream was heard from behind.

“Young Mistress Seol?!”

When I hurriedly turned my body, the black mist pooling at Seol Ye-rin's feet had taken the shape of a massive hand and was snatching her leg.

“What is this! Let go!”

Cheon Deung-jin concentrated her fire power to burn the mist, but the moment the flame touched it, the mist amplified and created a figure identical to mine.

“……Yeom?”

In the moment Seol Ye-rin panicked and stopped her sword, the shadow Yeom swung his sword with the exact same trajectory as mine.

Clang—!

I hurriedly leaped in and blocked the shadow's sword.

The same weight as my sword qi, and the demonic qi that vibrated through my qi center.

“They said it was a labyrinth where the shadow eats its master, and they weren't lying.”

My eyes flashed with a purple light.

The shadow before me was performing the martial arts I possessed perfectly.

-Chuckle, at this rate, it'll be difficult to deal with that shadow, won't it?

The Sword Venerable's words mixed with a sneer were heard, but instead of answering, I raised the fire power of my Red Sword to its maximum.

“This makes it interesting.”

I exploded my purple flames and pierced through the shadow's chest.

However, far from scattering, the shadow began to multiply into an army of dozens of shadows, copying the figures of Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin this time.

While trapped in the sea of shadows, I realized.

In order to break through this place, I had to face the fundamental darkness lurking within me head-on, not through martial arts.

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Sa Ma Gang, who had firmly closed the stone gate, had a smile on his lips as he felt the faint vibration coming from beyond the rocky mountain.

He felt the touch of the Gratitude Token he had carefully stored in his chest.

Even that damned leash given by the Holy Hand Divine Physician is mere scrap metal once its owner is dead.

‘Foolish fellow. Did you think the Dark Venerable's labyrinth was a place that could be broken through with mere martial arts?’

Sa Ma Gang rolled up his sleeves and looked at his forearm.

Dark blue veins were sprouting in an unpleasant manner.

The curse of a short life of unknown cause that anyone of the Sa Ma Clan's direct line suffered from.

The family called it the blessing of the Dark Venerable, but in reality, it was the price of having their souls gnawed away to protect the Black Lotus Cave for generations.

“Hyeokryeon Yeom, no matter how many great divine objects you've gathered, you won't be able to defeat the shadow within you.”

Sa Ma Gang placed his hand on a small altar installed at the entrance of the Black Lotus Cave.

As the altar sucked in his internal energy, the resonance like a scream heard from beyond the stone door became even deeper.

The true terror of the Black Lotus Illusion Formation is not the duplicated martial arts.

The shadow materializes the memory of failure that the practitioner himself wants to erase the most.

Will that young man, who is doing well as the live-in son-in-law of the North Sea Ice Palace, be able to maintain his composure even after facing himself from the days he was called a scoundrel in the Demonic Cult?

‘The moment you strike your own neck, the Black Lotus Cave will use your corpse as fertilizer to complete the Dark Venerable's secret art.’

It was then.

A rustling sound was heard from the bamboo forest behind.

Sa Ma Gang turned his head.

“Who is it!”

What appeared in the darkness was not a warrior of the Sa Ma Clan.

It was a shadow that permeated like black smoke, Sa Gong-hwi, the adjutant of Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“Clan Head, it's been a long time. The Young Cult Leader asked after your well-being. He wonders if you are monitoring the Third Young Master struggling like a rat in the maze.”

Sa Ma Gang felt goosebumps and bowed his waist.

It was a fellow who came by the Young Cult Leader's order.

“...The Black Lotus Illusion Formation has already been activated to its peak. By now, the Third Young Master's limbs will be torn apart by his own shadows.”

Sa Ma Gang answered confidently.

However, he soon felt a purple vibration that he had never felt before transmitting through the soles of his feet from deep within the Black Lotus Cave.

Sa Gong-hwi looked down at Sa Ma Gang's trembling shoulders and smiled.

This bizarre pulsation transmitted through the soles of the feet.

It was not the struggle of a dying person as Sa Ma Gang had boasted.

Rather, it was close to a vibration full of ecstasy that shook the entire body before a great predator chewed and swallowed its prey.

“Clan Head, did you just say his limbs were being torn apart?”

Sa Gong-hwi snapped his fan shut and coldly scanned Sa Ma Gang's neck.

“This vibration doesn't seem like the scream of one being torn, but rather the roar of the one doing the tearing. Do you still not know the reason why the Young Cult Leader calls the Third Young Master a ‘vessel’?”

Sa Ma Gang's complexion turned as pale as paper.

Sa Gong-hwi's gaze stared as if to pierce through the firmly closed stone gate of the Black Lotus Cave.

The real reason Hyeokryeon Geuk sent him here was not for monitoring.

It was an order to clearly watch and report that fleeting moment when Hyeokryeon Yeom devoured the shadows of the Black Lotus Cave and was reborn as a true monster.

‘Third Young Master, how deep is your darkness? Is it black enough to threaten the Young Cult Leader's night, or is it merely a single shadow?’

It was then.

Rumble—!

Purple mist began to leak out like smoke through the cracks of the stone door.

In the mist, the resentment the Black Lotus Cave had harbored for hundreds of years and my demonic flames were mixed, harboring a bizarre intimidation that made one's mind grow distant just by looking at it.

Sa Gong-hwi tightened his grip on his sword hilt without realizing it.

He was someone who had assassinated countless masters while hiding in shadows, but he felt an instinctive fear from the energy felt beyond the door.

“Th-the formation is backflowing! At this rate, the Black Lotus Cave itself might collapse!”

Sa Ma Gang screamed and tried to take his hand off the altar, but Sa Gong-hwi pressed down on the back of his hand with his cold blade.

“Do not move, Clan Head. You must not interfere with the sight of the Third Young Master being completed.”

Sa Gong-hwi's eyes flashed red.

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The shadow in front of me lunged once more, drawing the trajectory of my Red Sword.

The breathing of Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin was becoming rough under the wave of attacks from the shadows that imitated my swordsmanship, my internal energy, and even my habits.

“Young Master! There's no end to these bastards even if we cut them!”

It was just as Cheon Deung-jin shouted.

The shadows, which multiplied from one to two and two to four when cut, had now increased enough to fill the walls of the cave.

However, the pressure I felt was not because of the numbers.

The bottom of the energy these shadows emitted.

There, my appearance from my past life, waiting for death with my limbs bound in the Demonic Cult's dungeon, was flickering.

-Chuckle, do you see it? That seems to be your essence.

The Sword Venerable's voice pierced my chest like a dagger.

One of the shadows whispered in my ear.

‘You will eventually die. At the time Hyeokryeon Geuk decides, in the way he wants.’

At that moment,

The Heaven Sea Bead in my qi center vibrated coldly.

The deep sea of Liaoning,

That chilly sensation the Blue Dragon had endured for hundreds of years flashed through my mind.

‘Essence?’

I withdrew my Blue and Red Twin Swords and grabbed the air instead.

My purple radiance deepened as if it would swallow the entire cave.

“You're wrong. You cannot know my essence.”

I closed my eyes.

Three reincarnations.

Three deaths.

A mere shadow understands that?

Within my darkened vision, the core of the formation, that is, the ‘core of darkness’ hidden by the Dark Venerable, was clearly read.

A shadow exists only when there is light.

But if I become the light and the darkness itself, where is the place for the shadow to stand?

Ten Thousand Demons Returning to the Origin.

The Five Elements, based on the Extreme Yang Qi of my qi center, rotated in reverse like crazy and began to forcibly suck in the surrounding Yin Qi.

The black mists that formed the Black Lotus Illusion Formation screamed and were converged into my body.

“Young Master! You are absorbing too much energy! Your body won't be able to handle it!”

Seong Sang-ah's voice seemed to be heard from afar.

The pain of my blood vessels expanding and tearing rushed in, but I did not stop.

The multiplying shadows lost their forms, melted away, and gathered at my feet.

-Eat it. Chew it. And digest it completely.

The resentment accumulated by the Sa Ma Clan for hundreds of years and the evil martial intent of the Dark Venerable began to be transformed into pure power as they were burned by my purple flames.

-Hahahaha! You crazy bastard! You are a predator! Yes, this is the true completion of the Demon!

Along with the Sword Venerable's mad laughter, a heavy reverberation erupted from deep within the cave.

Rumble—!

What was revealed in the place where the darkness cleared was a massive coffin(棺) made of black jade,

And it was the pitch-black bead placed upon it.

Black Lotus Bead.

Drip—

Even while vomiting blood, I took a step.

The purple flames, which bloomed using the memories of my past life as nourishment, finally arrived before the legacy of the Dark Venerable.

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Chapter 134 : Seen as Overlapping

Purple smoke mixed with the scent of blood erupted from my entire body.

The price for forcibly devouring all the Yin Qi of the Black Lotus Illusion Formation was harsh.

My blood vessels expanded as if they would burst at any moment, and different types of energy collided in my qi center, causing a massive whirlpool.

But my gaze was fixed on only one thing, the Black Lotus Bead on top of the black jade coffin.

“Young Master! Please stop! Your body will burn up!”

Cheon Deung-jin hurriedly reached out her hand, but the purple flames surrounding me pushed even her Fire Spirit Qi away.

It was an absolute domain where even approaching it would shave away one's soul.

Rumble—!

The moment I reached for the Black Lotus Bead, the lid of the black jade coffin slowly opened, and a thought-wave that vibrated the entire cave erupted.

-……After a hundred years of waiting, the monster that devoured my darkness has appeared.

The one who raised only his upper body from within the coffin was an old man like smoke without a physical form.

A being who wore pitch-black robes and harbored an abyss instead of pupils. It was the remnant soul of the Dark Venerable, one of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens and an ancestor of the Sa Ma Clan.

-Are you of the Sa Ma Clan's bloodline?

“I am not.”

I spat out blood-mixed phlegm, my eyes flashing.

“I am just a person who collects the divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.”

The remnant soul of the Dark Venerable burst into a bizarre laugh.

As the Dark Venerable lightly waved his hand, black threads erupting from the Black Lotus Bead surged toward my heart.

But I did not dodge.

Rather, I opened my chest and accepted those threads.

Demonic Fire Heavenly Gang.

“It's still not enough. Give me more.”

With my roar, the Black Lotus Bead began to tremble while letting out a scream.

The remnant soul of the Dark Venerable was horrified.

It was because there were many who sought to obtain his legacy, but this was the first time he had seen such an ignorant person who tried to devour the legacy itself.

-You crazy bastard……! Are you not afraid that the vessel will break!

“It won't break with just this much.”

Kboom—!

My hand snatched the Black Lotus Bead.

Instantly, all light in the cave vanished.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin could see nothing, but they could feel only one thing.

They could feel that the energies of Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddha and Water that were sleeping within my qi center had begun to merge with the darkness.

Kboom!

The entrance to the Black Lotus Cave exploded, and stone dust splattered in all directions.

Whoosh—

At that moment, I entered the mental world.

***

The remnant soul of the Dark Venerable could not believe the sight unfolding before his eyes.

A hundred years ago, when he lost his physical body and sealed himself in this cave, there was only one thing he hoped for.

That someone among the family's descendants would appear as a vessel capable of handling this darkness of the Dark Venerable.

However, this man who burst into the space of thoughts while clutching the Black Lotus Bead was not of the Sa Ma Clan's bloodline.

-……This is my mental world. This is not a place for the body of a living person to set foot in.

The Dark Venerable looked down at the young man while floating in the air.

In this space where only pitch-black darkness existed, my existence was bizarrely heterogeneous.

From me, the energies of Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddha and Water swirled in different colors, forcibly pulling the fundamental Yin Qi of the Dark Venerable.

-You, just what is your identity? To think that your ego hasn't collapsed even after harboring five arrangements of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens in your body?

“What does it matter what my identity is?”

I took a step into the darkness.

Even though it was a mental world, purple flames rose wherever my footsteps touched, burning away the Dark Venerable's darkness.

“I will put this Black Lotus Bead you left behind to good use, because the energies inside me are welcoming it very much.”

The Dark Venerable shuddered.

It was because he saw massive illusions behind the young man's back.

The merciful smile of the Buddhist Venerable, the bellicose momentum of the Fighting Venerable, and even the blue radiance of the Blue Dragon.

-……Indeed. The legacies you possess are tremendous.

“If you've realized that, then submit gracefully.”

The forms of the Blue and Red Twin Swords manifested in my hands.

-This is madness! Darkness is meant to swallow all light. Those brilliant energies you harbor will eventually disappear without a trace within my abyss!

As the Dark Venerable reached out, the entire mental space turned into a massive maw and pounced on me.

A power of fundamental annihilation that intended to erase existence itself.

I smiled and crossed my swords.

“Swallowing is my specialty, you see.”

Ten Thousand Demons Preying.

A purple whirlpool raged in the reverse direction from my chest.

The approaching darkness of the Dark Venerable began to be sucked into my qi center instead.

The remnant soul of the Dark Venerable screamed as his form became blurred.

-No! This cannot be…… Do you know how long I have waited here! You monster!

“A monster..... If I can become one, I will even become a monster for you.”

I absorbed the essence of the Black Lotus Bead, which was the darkness the Dark Venerable had spent his entire life completing, into my qi center.

Purple radiance exploded as it tore apart the Dark Venerable's mental world.

***

The moment the purple flames exploded and tore apart the Dark Venerable's mental world, the actual Black Lotus Cave began to fluctuate as if an earthquake had occurred.

Kboom!

The black jades covering the walls of the stone chamber shattered with an air-piercing sound like a scream, and beyond that thick dust pit, I slowly revealed myself.

Blood-reeking smoke no longer erupted from my entire body.

Instead, a thick purple true qi that seemed to suck in all light was surging like a wave, enveloping my physical body.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddha, Water and finally Darkness.

The six energies achieved a perfect equilibrium within my qi center, pulling me to a new realm.

“Young Master.....?”

Seol Ye-rin carefully called my name, but I looked forward instead of answering.

It was the collapsed entrance of the cave.

Sa Ma Gang and Sa Gong-hwi were standing there, filled with horror.

“Wh-what is this.....! The formation of the Black Lotus Cave has vanished? Where has the Dark Venerable's legacy gone!”

Sa Ma Gang shouted with a mad voice, but I silently reached out and snatched the air.

Swoosh—!

Sa Ma Gang's shadow suddenly rose like a living creature and strangled its master's neck.

A martial art that controls the opponent's shadow.

I was materializing that ultimate technique which even the Dark Venerable, the master of the Black Lotus Cave, had only established as a theory.

“Gah, ack……!”

“Oh dear.”

Sa Gong-hwi took a step forward to save Sa Ma Gang.

The Demonic Cult's assassination squad members, who were waiting behind him, appeared like mist and surrounded me.

But Sa Gong-hwi's eyes stayed on my pupils, not my hands.

Abyssal eyes that did not reflect any light.

They were the eyes of an absolute being that he had only seen in the Young Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“Third Young Master, truly amazing. I did not know you would even take the legacy of the Black Lotus Cave.”

At Sa Gong-hwi's words, I replied.

“That mouth of yours is the same as ever, Sa Gong-hwi.”

The Heavenly Cry Zither hanging on my back reacted to the purple energy and sent out a clear resonance.

There were no strings, but my will became a melody and sliced through the atmosphere.

“Go and tell your master. That I will return to the Hundred Thousand Mountains soon.”

Sa Gong-hwi's eyebrows twitched.

“I have no intention of delivering that message, however.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Sa Gong-hwi's form melted into the shadows.

At the same time, the assassination squad members surrounding us from all directions shot in, aiming for different blind spots.

I did not draw the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

I simply waved my left hand lightly and scattered purple darkness.

Not flames, but darkness.

Dark Abyss Boundless Realm.

The martial art of the Dark Venerable erupted once again from my hand.

***

Seol Ye-rin doubted her own eyes.

Until just a moment ago, what had enveloped my entire body was purple flames that raged ferociously as if they would burst my blood vessels.

But now, what was erupting from my fingertips was not flames, but darkness itself.

“……Ah.”

Seol Ye-rin inhaled without realizing it.

The moment the Dark Abyss Boundless Realm unfolded, all vision inside the cave was cut off.

A chaos that erased existence itself.

Slash—! Slash!

Not even the sound of a scream could be heard.

The Demonic Cult's assassination squad members, who had permeated like mist, were disassembled in midair without even knowing what they were being hit by.

Seol Ye-rin froze in place while holding her ice sword.

Because she was someone who handled the extreme cold of the North Sea, she could feel it more sensitively than anyone else.

‘He became stronger.’

“Ha!”

In the mist, Sa Gong-hwi's perplexed shout was heard.

Even Sa Gong-hwi's movement of hiding his body inside the shadows was meaningless before the darkness I had scattered.

Shadow was being eaten by shadow.

Clang—! Boom!

A flash glittered and Sa Gong-hwi's figure was thrown backward.

“Th-this cannot be……!”

Seeing Sa Gong-hwi, who was slammed into the wall while vomiting blood, Seol Ye-rin realized.

Hyeokryeon Yeom was reborn as an absolute being.

Cheon Deung-jin also watched the sight with her Fire Spirit Qi extinguished, as if she had lost her mind.

“Young Mistress Seol…… do you see that? Just how many types of energy does he possess in one body?”

Seol Ye-rin nodded at Cheon Deung-jin's trembling voice.

Multiple energies were winding around me amidst the darkness.

Seol Ye-rin had seen such energy only once in her life.

If you asked when that was.

-Ye-rin, this is the essence of the North Sea, the Ice White Divine Art.

It was when her father, the Palace Head and the King of the Ice Palace, Seol Baek-ho, passed down the martial arts to Seol Ye-rin.

For some reason, her father's illusion was seen as overlapping with Hyeokryeon Yeom.

-Chuckle, you finally look a bit like a person now.

-I agree, it's a relief that you seem to have become stronger.

As if they were auditory hallucinations, the voices of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen seemed to be heard.

“Martial God……”

Seol Ye-rin muttered while looking at Hyeokryeon Yeom.

Cheon Deung-jin and Han Seol-bi agreed with those words as well.

The three women's gazes could not be pulled away from Hyeokryeon Yeom.

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At that time, North Sea Ice Palace.

“Ye, Ye-rin.”

A man in black permeated into the Palace Head's quarters.

“What should I do? It seems I will close my eyes without even seeing my daughter get married.”

Grin.

The man in black left those words and disappeared.

The North Sea Ice Palace Head, Seol Baek-ho, trembled his entire body and closed his eyes.

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Chapter 135 : Return

Rumble—!

The forbidden area of the Sa Ma Clan, the Black Lotus Cave, completely collapsed, spewing out a massive cloud of dust.

“Gah……!”

Sa Gong-hwi, who was slammed into the wall, stared at me even amidst the pain of his entire body being crushed.

No, he was looking at the massive abyss beyond me.

“Those eyes…… those eyes are definitely…… similar to the Young Cult Leader.”

I replied to Sa Gong-hwi’s words.

“Go and tell Hyeokryeon Geuk. If he wants to catch me, tell him to come himself.”

Grit—

Sa Gong-hwi did not answer and vanished into the shadows.

I did not bother to chase him.

It was because I knew that the news a terrified hunting dog would deliver to its master would create a greater anger than killing a single dog.

“Young Master!”

It was before the thick dust had even settled over the debris of the collapsed Black Lotus Cave.

I, who had been overwhelmed by Sa Gong-hwi, suddenly turned my head and stared at the northern sky.

My senses, having accepted the essence of the Dark Venerable and the power of the shadow that squirmed while alive, had already far exceeded the human category.

“……A carrier pigeon?”

Simultaneous with my low murmur, a white hawk that flew through the sky landed on Seol Ye-rin’s shoulder.

It was the Snow Hawk, the exclusive messenger of the North Sea Ice Palace.

Though it was a divine creature that would usually cry gracefully, its feathers were plucked out here and there, and the cylinder tied to its leg was clearly stained with red blood.

“Eung-ie?”

Seol Ye-rin’s complexion turned pale in an instant.

The moment she took out the message with trembling hands and read it, blue veins stood out on the back of her hand that held the ice sword.

“Young Master, ……Father, they say Father has collapsed.”

I could feel Seol Ye-rin’s voice trembling.

The contents written in the message were disastrous.

Unidentified black-clad men had infiltrated through the Ice Palace’s barrier, and the Palace Head Seol Baek-ho was struck down while facing them, and his life or death was uncertain.

“How can this be……”

Cheon Deung-jin murmured in horror, and Han Seol-bi hurriedly checked my complexion.

My eyes sank coldly.

The memories of my past life rushed in like a wave.

Originally, this was something that should have happened a bit later.

A massacre carried out by the Young Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult, Hyeokryeon Geuk, to neutralize the North Sea's resistance before swallowing the Central Plains.

'While you tied me down in Liaoning, your real blade was aimed at the north.'

I turned my head and looked down at Sa Ma Gang, who was crawling on the ground while vomiting blood.

Sa Ma Gang was looking at me with eyes that had not given up.

"Heh, Third Young Master..... shouldn't you hurry back to the North Sea?"

"Quiet."

As I lightly waved my hand, a shadow surged once again and gagged his mouth.

With the sound of bones crushing, Sa Ma Gang's figure was slammed into the darkness.

"Young Mistress Seol."

I tightly grabbed Seol Ye-rin's shoulder.

A true qi warmer than ever before forcibly calmed her anxious mind and body.

"Let's return to the North Sea immediately."

"But Young Master, no matter how much we hurry, it will take half a month from here to the North Sea!"

At Han Seol-bi's worried words, I readjusted the Heavenly Cry Zither on my back and emitted purple radiance from my eyes.

"We must try to move as quickly as possible."

The engagement trip seemed to be over now.

To return to the North Sea, and save the Ice Palace Head.

'And after that.....'

I looked back at Seol Ye-rin.

It seemed that only by truly becoming the live-in son-in-law of the North Sea Ice Palace would I be able to deal with the other forces.

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The affairs in Liaoning Province were settled in an instant.

The Clan Head of the Sa Ma Clan, Sa Ma Gang, became a cripple along with the collapse of the Black Lotus Cave, and the Black Lotus Warriors who were hiding in the shadows were annihilated by my hand.

All that remained was the cleanup.

“B-big brother..... what on earth is going on?”

Moyong Geum, who arrived late leading his troops, could not close his mouth.

The main house of the Sa Ma Clan, and specifically the back mountain called the forbidden area, had been entirely blown away.

It was a disaster as if a massive dragon had ascended to heaven and overturned the ground.

I looked at Moyong Geum while stowing away my Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“There is no time to explain. I hope the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild finishes the cleanup in Liaoning. Whether you absorb the remnants of the Sa Ma Clan or crush them, do as you see fit.”

“Pardon? But.....”

“Instead, prepare the fastest horses and a ship. Because I must go to the North Sea right now.”

At my razor-sharp momentum, Moyong Geum instinctively realized the gravity of the situation.

Moyong Geum nodded without a word.

“.....I understand. I will mobilize all the Merchant Guild’s power to clear the path!”

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From Liaoning to the North Sea, it was a road of over a thousand li.

For a normal merchant guild, it would take half a month, and even for a master of movement arts, it would take at least ten days.

But my party was shortening that time to less than half.

Clop, clop!

The sound of horse hooves continued as if it would break.

The air inside the carriage was heavy.

Seol Ye-rin stared out the window, her fists clenched so tightly that her fingernails turned white.

“……Father is a strong person. He wouldn't be defeated easily.”

Her voice, murmuring as if hypnotizing herself, was trembling slightly.

I wordlessly wrapped my hand around hers.

The warm Extreme Yang Qi pulled up from my qi center melted her cold hand.

“I know. There's no way the Ice King would collapse so easily.”

“But the blood on the message…… if Eung-ie was hurt that much……”

I wiped around Seol Ye-rin’s eyes.

My eyes sank coldly.

In the memories of my past life, Hyeokryeon Geuk had invaded the North Sea with force.

But now, the timing was too early.

‘Did I become a variable? Because of me, he moved the timing forward.’

The bastard used Sa Gong-hwi and the Black Lotus Warriors to tie my feet in Liaoning and turned his main force toward the North Sea.

Robbing an empty house.

It was a petty method for someone who was the Young Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult, but it was that much more certain as a move.

“We must hurry.”

I closed my eyes and examined the energy within me.

Following the five divine objects of Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddha, and Water, even the darkness of the Dark Venerable absorbed from the Sa Ma Clan was situated deep within my qi center.

-Chuckle, do you intend to use that power? It probably hasn't even settled in your body yet.

The Sword Venerable's worried voice was heard, but I shook my head.

'It doesn't matter. Because right now, arriving even a moment sooner is what's important.'

I opened my eyes.

Purple radiance lit up the inside of the carriage.

"Young Mistress Cheon, Young Mistress Seong. Hold on tight. I'm going to increase the speed."

"Pardon? The horses are already foaming at the mouth?"

Before Cheon Deung-jin could even finish speaking, I touched the wall of the carriage.

Pitch-black darkness erupted from my fingertips and enveloped the entire carriage.

The horses began to be entwined in shadows.

Boom—!

The speed of the carriage began to become incredibly fast.

As the scenery pushed back as if tearing, we began to head north at an unbelievable speed.

A few days later. The entrance of the North Sea.

The outer wall of the Ice Palace, which should have been covered in pure white snow normally, was engulfed in black smoke.

A pungent smell stung the nose.

"Ah……"

Seol Ye-rin, who got off the carriage, stumbled.

The sight unfolding before our eyes was disastrous.

The massive ice wall guarding the entrance of the Ice Palace was half-destroyed, and the corpses of Ice Palace warriors in white martial robes were strewn about its surroundings.

“How can this be, how could the Ice Palace be……”

Cheon Deung-jin and Han Seol-bi also could not continue their words.

The North Sea Ice Palace had been breached once again.

“We aren't too late.”

I grabbed Seol Ye-rin’s shoulder.

My gaze was directed beyond the collapsed wall, toward the Palace Lord's Hall, the main hall of the Ice Palace.

A massive coldness was still erupting from there.

It was evidence that the Ice King Seol Baek-ho was alive.

However, red and turbid energies that suppressed that coldness were surrounding the Palace Lord's Hall.

“Are they still... here?”

Since the carrier pigeon had arrived, I thought the situation would have been settled.

Swish!

Those who were hiding began to surge out.

I drew my Blue and Red Twin Swords.

Swish—!

I stood at the lead and crossed the wall. Seol Ye-rin followed behind me.

A razor-sharp murderous intent was erupting from Seol Ye-rin’s eyes.

Inside the wall, near the Palace Lord's Hall, black-clad men discovered our party and began to pour out.

‘They aren't demonic practitioners?’

I recognized the identity of the energy they emitted in an instant.

“Blood Cult……”

To avoid getting his own hands dirty, Hyeokryeon Geuk had released the remnants of the Blood Cult as hunting dogs.

“We've been waiting for you!”

“Block them!”

The black-clad men discovered our party and rushed in.

But I did not stop my steps.

“Move.”

Whoosh—!

As I swung my sword horizontally, purple flames surged like a wave, turning dozens of black-clad men in front into ash at once.

The flames mixed with the shadows of darkness annihilated the opponents as if devouring them the moment they touched.

“It's just as I heard!”

“The target is the Small Snow Squad Captain, Hyeokryeon Yeom!”

The bastards seemed to be targeting me as well.

Seol Ye-rin jumped in among the bastards who were hesitating, flustered by the soaring flames.

“Get out of my house, right now!”

Kaboom!

As Seol Ye-rin struck the ground, the entire training ground turned into a massive ice sheet, tying the feet of the black-clad men.

Taking that opening, Cheon Deung-jin’s Fire Spirit Qi and Han Seol-bi’s daggers rained down.

The party broke through toward the Palace Lord's Hall with the force of a bamboo splitter.

And when we finally arrived at the front yard of the Palace Lord's Hall, we witnessed an unbelievable sight.

“Is it this place you wish to enter?”

A massive man with red tattoos engraved all over his body was raising red energy while holding a Great Blade.

“Who are you?”

“I am the Upper Blood Lord of the Blood Cult, the Fourth Blood Lord.”

“Where is my father!”

Seol Ye-rin’s Ice White Divine Palm struck the Fourth Blood Lord before I could even stop her.

Flash—

“The Young Palace Head, I see.”

Kaboom!

As Seol Ye-rin’s palm and the Great Blade met,

Crackle— Crack!

“Kyaak!”

“Young Mistress Seol!”

Seol Ye-rin was thrown back.

“Hmph, you are quite something, but you chose the wrong opponent.”

It was the first time Seol Ye-rin had met an opponent her Extreme Yin Qi did not work on.

I felt like I knew why my father-in-law was defeated.

“I am sorry I am late, Father-in-law.”

I murmured toward the energy my father-in-law felt from inside the Palace Lord's Hall.

“I will settle this quickly and go to greet you.”

Whoosh—!

Flames began to surge from my entire body.

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Chapter 136 : Cleaning

In the front yard of the Palace Lord's Hall, the swirling purple flames were on a different level than before.

My Demonic Fire, which had swallowed the darkness of the Dark Venerable, was no longer just burning; it was bizarrely surging while gnawing at the surrounding space and light.

"……Third Young Master."

Seol Ye-rin, who had stepped back, called me with a trembling voice.

The martial prowess of the Fourth Blood Lord, who had broken her Extreme Yin Qi head-on, was truly desperate, but the momentum I was radiating now was overwhelming enough to make even that despair seem trivial.

"You have quite the mouth, brat. But do you think that flame of yours can defeat the Immortal Qi of the Blood Cult?"

The Fourth Blood Lord laughed madly and scraped his great blade against the ground.

Then, the red tattoos engraved all over his body wriggled and exhaled blood-stinking true qi.

Blood energy was drawn out from the corpses scattered everywhere and condensed into his great sword.

-Heh heh, the dregs of the Blood Cult have drifted all the way here. Those guys supply their life force through blood. If you do not burn them away all at once, they will come back to life like Jiangshi.

-Be careful! If you touch that red mist, your inner power will be corroded!

At the warnings of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, I crossed the Blue and Red Twin Swords as if merging them into one.

"Immortal? That is not about not dying; it is just that you have not encountered a proper death yet."

Whoooooosh—!

My figure disappeared like an illusion, riding the footwork of the Dark Venerable.

“Slow!”

The Fourth Blood Lord swung his great blade horizontally.

A red sword wind swept through the entire courtyard, turning the stone floor into powder.

However, my figure was nowhere to be found in that destructive trajectory.

“Where are you looking?”

“……?!”

Above the Fourth Blood Lord's head, I fell upside down from the air and struck down with the Red Sword.

It was the Black Flame that erased existence, a mixture of the Fire Spirit's Demonic Fire and the Dark Venerable's shadow.

Dark Abyss Prey.

Booooom—!

The red true qi and the purple darkness collided head-on.

The Fourth Blood Lord's great blade shrieked and bent, and the moment the blood energy surrounding him touched the purple flames, it began to evaporate along with the sound of screaming.

“W-what is this…… my Immortal Qi is being burned?!”

“I told you that burning is my specialty.”

My purple eyes flashed.

The Blue Sword in my left hand burrowed in like a snake and slashed the Fourth Blood Lord's side.

If it were an ordinary wound, it would have been regenerated immediately by the secret art of the Blood Cult, but the wound mixed with the cold qi of the Heaven Sea Bead and the Yin Qi of the Dark Venerable instantly necrotized and burned black.

“Cough! Y-you monster!”

The Fourth Blood Lord tried to step back in panic, but I did not give him a chance.

The Heavenly Cry Zither on my back vibrated with a soundless vibration, and the impact tangled the Blood Lord's inner arts operation for a split second.

“Die.”

My twin swords crossed and aimed for the Fourth Blood Lord's neck.

***

Meanwhile, in the internal corridor of the Palace Lord’s Hall.

The men in black guarding Seol Baek-ho's quarters were broken into ice pieces one by one.

Seol Ye-rin was pouring out the Ice White Divine Art that surpassed her limits with the single thought of saving her father.

“Father!!”

The door swung open roughly, and Seol Ye-rin ran into the room.

On the bed, Seol Baek-ho, who was called the Tiger of the North Sea, was gasping for breath with a pale face.

A dark palm mark was clearly etched on his chest.

“……I told you…… to tell her not to come…… and yet you came anyway……”

Seol Baek-ho opened his eyes with difficulty.

The vision of Seol Baek-ho, lying on the bed, blurred.

The demonic energy of the Corroding Blood Palm embedded in his chest was burrowing into his blood vessels like a venomous snake and tightening around his heart.

Even the Ice White Divine Art, which he took pride in as the peak of the North Sea, could not completely push out the Yin Qi of the Blood Cult.

‘Is my life ending here. Without even seeing Ye-rin's wedding……’

Beyond his fading consciousness, the door opened as if it would break, and a nostalgic voice was heard.

It was Ye-rin.

The touch of his daughter, who ran and grabbed his hand, was cold as ice but trembling with desperation.

“Father! Pull yourself together!”

He wanted to caress his daughter's face, but not even the strength to flicker a finger remained.

He just watched the figures following behind Ye-rin within his blurred vision.

A woman in red, Han Seol-bi, and.....

Thud-boom—!

The terrible blood stench and the giant's killing intent that had been heard from outside vanished in an instant.

No, the expression that it was swallowed was more correct.

What seeped into the room was a purple wave that was deeper than the cold of the North Sea yet seemed to burn.

‘Is this energy..... could it be that fellow?’

Seol Baek-ho's eyelids, which had been heavily closed, trembled minutely.

A man walking into the room.

Seol Baek-ho trembled at the sight of me, Hyeokryeon Yeom, approaching while reigning in my purple eyes.

Only a few months ago, when he sent me off to Liaoning, I was a son-in-law he considered a fairly useful talent of the Demonic Cult.

But now, a mythical intimidation that only the ancestors of the North Sea might have reached was wafting from the man before his eyes.

“Father-in-law, I am late.”

I approached the bedside and knelt.

As my hand was placed on Seol Baek-ho's chest, the demonic energy of the Corroding Blood Palm that was pressing down on his chest shrieked and fluctuated.

-Heh heh, the Tiger of the North Sea looks like he is about to die.

The laughter of an old man was heard like an auditory hallucination from behind me.

Seol Baek-ho realized instinctively.

The fact that I, Hyeokryeon Yeom, had become strong.

“Miss Seol, Miss Cheon. Please step back for a moment.”

At my low command, Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin hesitated and stepped back.

Pitch-black purple smoke rose from my fingertips and burrowed into Seol Baek-ho's chest.

“Ugh……!” Seol Baek-ho groaned.

It was painful, but at the same time, it was strange.

The moment the energy of the Blood Cult that was gnawing at his heart touched my darkness, it was being sucked out powerlessly as if it were not even a terrified rat.

The darkness of the Dark Venerable hunted the demonic energy of the Blood Cult, and the water energy of the Heaven Sea Bead recovered Seol Baek-ho's burned blood vessels.

Seol Baek-ho felt his blurring mind wake up clearly and stared into my eyes as I looked down at him.

‘He is a monster.’

“Father!”

Seol Ye-rin let out a sigh of relief seeing Seol Baek-ho, whose complexion had improved.

***

I withdrew the Blue and Red Twin Swords that had been aimed at the Fourth Blood Lord's neck.

No, precisely speaking, there was no need to even withdraw them.

The fellow was collapsing on the floor and convulsing without even being able to scream.

The purple mist that brushed past his throat had already caused his qi and blood to flow in reverse, and the regenerative power characteristic of the Blood Cult vanished without a trace after being eaten by the Yin Qi of the Dark Venerable that had settled within me.

“Cough, ack…… m-monster……”

I looked down indifferently at the eyes of the Fourth Blood Lord, who was mumbling while scratching the floor.

The red true qi flowing out of his body was caught in the whirlwind of my qi center and evaporated vainly.

“To discuss immortality, your blood is far too turbid.”

I stepped on the fellow's chest and turned my gaze toward the Palace Lord’s Hall.

The energy of Seol Baek-ho felt from there was like a thin thread, but it had not gone out yet.

It was a relief. Since I arrived before my father-in-law's life was cut off.

As I entered the room, the acrid demonic energy of the Blood Cult stung my nose.

I saw Seol Baek-ho dying, unable to respond to Seol Ye-rin's tearful call.

I approached the bedside without hesitation.

“Father-in-law, I am late.”

The poison I felt as soon as I placed my hand was more terrible than I thought.

But for me, it was not a difficult energy.

Dark Abyss Qi Suction.

My palm became a giant maw and began to suck in the demonic energy embedded in Seol Baek-ho's chest.

I could feel my father-in-law's complexion gradually returning from purple to its original color.

But removing the poison was not the only thing to do.

I had to repair the torn blood vessels.

This time, I operated the water qi of the Heaven Sea Bead and the Dharma power of the Buddhist Venerable at the same time.

The cold water energy calmed the inflammation, and the warm Dharma power awakened the dying cells.

-Heh heh, to use the divine items like this, how impressive.

I heard the Sword Venerable's sarcasm but ignored it.

When Seol Baek-ho took a deep breath and opened his eyes, I finally took my hand away.

The image of me reflected in my father-in-law's eyes might resemble the intimidation of Hyeokryeon Geuk, whom he feared so much in his past life.

“……Son-in-law.”

Twitch-

It was the first time I heard the word son-in-law.

Seol Baek-ho's cracked voice was heard.

I wiped my sweat and showed a faint smile.

“Do not speak. Your qi and blood have not fully settled yet.”

“Father!”

Seol Ye-rin ran and hugged Seol Baek-ho.

Watching that scene, I quietly walked out of the room.

The rats that were not yet organized were still lingering around the Palace Lord’s Hall.

As I came out to the courtyard, the Blood Cult warriors who survived among the half-burned corpses were backing away while looking at me.

In their eyes, the instinctive emotion called fear was dwelling.

“Where are you going?”

I drew the Blue and Red Twin Swords once more.

“The eyes of the North Sea should be white, not red.”

The purple flames spread out from my toes once again.

Now the hunting time is over.

From now on, it is cleaning time.

Whoooooosh!

The flames flared up.

***

Not even a drop of blood remained in the place where the purple flames swept past.

The Blood Cult warriors who tried to flee were turned to ash and scattered without even letting out a single scream.

I looked down at my feet once more.

The body of the Fourth Blood Lord, who had been directly hit by the Demonic Fire mixed with the five elements of my qi center, was already burned to the point where it was difficult to recognize its shape.

However, in the middle of that pile of ashes, a strange red brilliance was flickering.

“……?”

As I pushed aside the ashes with the tip of my sword, a red crystal about the size of an adult's fist revealed itself.

It was the Blood Crystal, the essence of qi and blood that the high-ranking Blood Lords of the Blood Cult had devoted their lives to condensing.

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A strange red brilliance sparkled in the middle of the ash pile.

“……?”

As I brushed aside the ashes with the tip of my sword, a red crystal about the size of an adult's fist revealed itself.

It was the Blood Crystal, the essence of qi and blood that the high-ranking Blood Lords of the Blood Cult had devoted their lives to condensing.

-Heh heh, it is quite a large one. It must be something those guys made by squeezing out the fresh blood of tens of thousands of people.

-Third Young Master, you must not touch it carelessly! The resentment is so strong that you might defy heaven if you are not careful.

Warnings from the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen followed, but I indifferently reached out and picked up the Blood Crystal.

A sticky and unpleasant blood energy was transmitted through my palm, but the purple true qi flowing inside my body suppressed it in an instant.

‘Now that I have obtained the power of the Dark Venerable, resentment of this level is merely prey to me.’

I grasped the Blood Crystal without hesitation.

Then, just as when I absorbed the Black Lotus Bead, a purple mist surrounded the Blood Crystal and began to suck in the energy within it.

The qi and blood that the Fourth Blood Lord had spent his life collecting flowed into my qi center, repairing the torn blood vessels and filling the empty energy in an instant.

Seol Ye-rin walked out into the courtyard where the cleanup was finished.

Relief from saving her father and the lingering killing intent of the battlefield coexisted in her eyes.

“Third Young Master, the situation seems to be organized. But……”

Seol Ye-rin's gaze stayed on the fragments of the Blood Crystal that were fading in my hand.

“That energy looks too dangerous. I heard the power of the Blood Cult is like poison; are you okay?”

“You do not have to worry. I have experienced this kind of thing more than once or twice.”

I smiled bitterly and let the dust of the broken Blood Crystal fly away in the wind.

Thinking about the experiments I suffered in my past life, this much was nothing.

I lifted my head and looked beyond the collapsed roof of the Palace Lord’s Hall.

The Blood Cult is merely a hunting dog. The master who planned this whole board was still lurking in the darkness of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

“Miss Seol, how is my father-in-law?”

“Seol-bi is taking care of him by his side. The crisis has passed, but they say he needs to recuperate for the time being. And……”

Seol Ye-rin hesitated for a moment and then stared straight into my eyes.

“My father is looking for the Young Master. He says he has something to say……”

I nodded.

There must be something behind why the Tiger of the North Sea was defeated so miserably.

I pushed the Blue and Red Twin Swords into their scabbards and moved my steps into the Palace Lord’s Hall.

Now, as the master of the North Sea and a traitor of the Demonic Cult, it was time for the real story to begin.

***

The interior of the Palace Lord’s Hall was miserable.

The pillars carved from the Eternal Thousand-Year Ice of the North Sea were melted here and there, and the dark red bloodstains left by the Blood Cult warriors were embedded on the walls like indelible brands.

I cut through the heavy air and entered Seol Baek-ho's bedroom. Inside the room, Han Seol-bi was organizing Seol Baek-ho's qi and blood, and Seong Sang-ah was moving busily while handling a medicine pot.

“……Have you come.”

Seol Baek-ho's voice had more energy than before, but he still could not hide his deep internal injuries.

Seol Baek-ho leaned his body on the bed and stared intently at me as I approached.

“Yes, father-in-law. How is your body?”

“Thanks to my son-in-law, I have held onto my life, but the pride of the North Sea has been turned to powder.”

Seol Baek-ho gave a self-mocking smile.

He signaled Han Seol-bi, who was guarding his side, to dismiss her from the room.

Once even Seol Ye-rin stepped back outside the door, only two men remained in the room.

“Did you call for me?”

“Yes, I will not say thank you for saving me.”

“It was something I obviously had to do.”

“Thank you. By the way, your energy has changed a lot?”

“Fortunately, I obtained the legacy of the Dark Venerable.”

At my calm reply, Seol Baek-ho's eyes shook greatly.

Because he knew well how dangerous and difficult it was to take the arrangements of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, he felt a fresh shiver at my boldness.

“The Dark Venerable..... Is it the power of the one who eats darkness and commands shadows. No wonder your eye light seemed to swallow even the light.”

Seol Baek-ho stopped talking for a moment and frowned as if enduring the pain in his chest.

And then, as if he had made up his mind, he brought up the main point in a low voice.

“I was not the only one they aimed for. Their real purpose was..... the records of the Ice Emperor and the Ice Crystal stored deep within the Ice Palace.”

My eyebrows twitched.

The legacy of the Ice Emperor Seol Cheon-u.

Something even I had not confirmed yet.

“Did the legacy remain deep within?”

“.....It was just a record. Fortunately, I protected it, but the Ice Crystal fell into their hands. There was someone who came with the Fourth Blood Lord. That fellow was using the energy of the Demonic Cult.”

A clear sign of fear passed through Seol Baek-ho's eyes.

An existence that suppressed him, a master of the Transformation Realm, with a single move and snatched the object.

I immediately intuited who it was.

Hyeokryeon Geuk.

It was clear that he had moved personally or sent a clone equivalent to him.

“He is trying to obtain the power of the Ice Emperor.”

“Likely so. He will try to complete his demonic qi by absorbing the essence of the North Sea. I will ask a favor of you, putting aside my shame.”

Seol Baek-ho tightly grabbed my hand.

The hand of the tiger that commanded the North Sea was trembling thinly.

“Recover the sacred object of the Ice Palace. And..... protect my daughter.”

“That means.....”

“Get married.”

Instead of an answer, I held Seol Baek-ho's hand back.

At the word marriage.

The energy inside my qi center began to resonate.

“Do not worry. I will surely protect Miss Seol.”

“You cannot decide such a thing regardless of my intention.”

“You.....”

My mother-in-law appeared.

***

Cutting through the heavy air in the bedroom, the figure that had been standing behind the wall like a shadow slowly revealed herself.

It was Hong Ye-hwa, wearing a red robe, with eyes holding a chilly coldness instead of her usual playful smile.

“.....Deciding on a marriage regardless of my intention, you are still very indifferent.”

Her voice was low, but it held a pressure that seemed to freeze all the air in the room.

I flinched and let go of his hand.

It was because I instinctively knew that when the mother-in-law called the Ice Queen showed such serious air, it was much more dangerous than the sarcasm of the Sword Venerable.

‘To think it was not discussed with my mother-in-law.’

-Heh heh, you are going to suffer a bit.

The Sword Venerable's giggling ridicule passed through my mind, but Hong Ye-hwa's gaze was fixed only on Seol Baek-ho on the bed.

She approached with an elegant yet threatening gait and lightly tapped my shoulder.

“It is quite a shame that the return from the engagement trip was like this.” “Mother-in-law……?”

I tried to offer a clumsy greeting, but Hong Ye-hwa raised her hand and lightly stopped me.

Hong Ye-hwa's gaze was fixed on her husband, Seol Baek-ho, who was lying on the bed in tatters.

“Rather than that, what is that appearance? You called yourself the Tiger of the North Sea, but you look like a cat with its teeth pulled out.”

“W-wife. It is not that……”

The sight of the great Ice King Seol Baek-ho being at a loss at a single look from his wife was hard to believe for someone who had just crossed the threshold of death.

Hong Ye-hwa let out a long sigh and approached the bedside to take Seol Baek-ho's hand.

Although she scolded him outwardly, the warm true qi flowing through their joined hands represented her concern.

“And you, are you in your right mind now? Not only did you have the Ice Crystal, the treasure of the Ice Palace, stolen, but you are trying to finish the daughter's marriage as if roasting beans in a lightning flash.”

“That is…… because there is no one else but this fellow who can protect Ye-rin……”

“Who says otherwise? But the order is wrong.”

Hong Ye-hwa turned her head and stared at me.

The eyes of the woman called the Ice Queen were transparent, resembling her daughter Seol Ye-rin, but in their depths, a different kind of sharpness from Seol Baek-ho's was flashing.

“You, do you truly want my daughter?”

I nodded without hesitation.

The numerous energies wriggling inside my qi center and Seol Ye-rin's gaze looking at me from the side gave me conviction.

“Yes. At first, I came to survive, and next, I endured with stubbornness..... but now I am sincere.”

“You speak well. But the rules of our Ice Palace are strict. If you cannot retrieve the Ice Crystal, forget about the wedding; do not expect to even cross the threshold of the Ice Palace.”

“Mother!”

Seol Ye-rin came in from outside.

Seol Ye-rin tried to step forward in a huff, but I caught her hand and stopped her.

A relaxed smile spread across my lips.

“Do not worry. My mother-in-law is right. I cannot make the family of the person who will be my wife a pauper.”

I fingered the Blue and Red Twin Swords that were emitting a chilly coldness from within my robes.

“I will retrieve the Ice Crystal. No matter who the fellow who stole it is, I will bring it back even if I have to cut off his wrist, so it would be good if you prepared for the wedding.”

At my bold answer, Hong Ye-hwa's eyes curved. She nodded as if satisfied.

“Yes, a man should have that much confidence. You pass.”

Hong Ye-hwa turned her gaze back to Seol Baek-ho.

“Did you hear? The son-in-law says he will retrieve it. You just lie down quietly and recuperate. I will handle the aftermath of the Ice Palace.”

“Haha, well now. I have no face to show.”

As the situation was organized, the heavy air that had been hanging in the room became a little lighter.

But my mind began to work in a complex way.

‘The one who took the Ice Crystal.’

According to Seol Baek-ho's words, that person was using the energy of the Demonic Cult. Hyeokryeon Geuk.

Whether he moved personally or sent his closest aide, the reason for targeting the Ice Crystal was clear.

‘Completion of demonic qi.’

He must be planning to obtain a transcendental power that goes beyond the harmony of yin and yang by adding the Ice Crystal, the Extreme Yin energy of the North Sea, to the Heavenly Demon Divine Art which has the power of Extreme Yang.

If Hyeokryeon Geuk succeeds in absorbing the power of the Ice Crystal, then a monster will truly be born.

‘I have to hurry.’

As I tried to get up from my seat, Seol Ye-rin stood up after me.

“I am going too.” “Miss Seol.”

“The Ice Crystal was originally an object I had to protect. And……”

Seol Ye-rin's gaze wavered.

“If that person is truly Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk, the Third Young Master should not be sent alone. My ice art will be of help.”

I contemplated for a moment.

It is a dangerous path.

But the current Seol Ye-rin was not the sickly Young Palace Head of the past.

Seol Ye-rin was a master who handled the cold of the North Sea freely, and more than anything, my power could be exerted most stably when Seol Ye-rin was by my side.

“Fine. Instead, do not fall behind me.” “I promise.”

Watching the determined appearance of the two, Hong Ye-hwa clicked her tongue.

“It is so unsightly I cannot stand to watch. If you are going, go quickly. Before my mind changes.”

“We will be back, mother-in-law. Father-in-law, please recover well.”

I politely clasped my hands and turned around.

Behind my back, the Small Snow Squad members naturally followed.

“By the way, where is the destination?”

“Our Cult.”

If possible, I thought it would be good to introduce Miss Seol to my father on this occasion.

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Chapter 138 : Black Wind Squad

“……Did you say Our Cult?”

Wi Ji-yeong's voice trembled slightly.

The members of the Small Snow Squad also swallowed hard.

They were veterans who had experienced all sorts of hardships through the fierce battles in Liaoning and the tragedy of the North Sea, but the news of walking into the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the sacred ground and forbidden area of the Demonic Cult, with their own feet came with a different level of pressure.

“Yes. The Ice Crystal is the essence of Extreme Yin and a catalyst that amplifies demonic qi. If Hyeokryeon Geuk got his hands on the Ice Crystal, the location is obvious. It can only be the Young Cult Leader’s Hall where he can complete his power.”

My eye light reigned in, but its depth seemed even deeper.

Seol Ye-rin stood by my side and nodded.

“Mother, Father. I will be going. I will retrieve the Ice Crystal and return after establishing the honor of the Ice Palace.”

At Seol Ye-rin's farewell, Hong Ye-hwa opened her fan and covered her face as if she could not be stopped.

“Yes, go. I will prepare the ceremony so that you can hold the wedding right away as soon as you find the Ice Crystal and return.”

“W-wedding?”

“I understand.”

Seol Ye-rin's face turned red.

I bowed politely and then left the Palace Lord’s Hall.

In front of the main gate of the Ice Palace, top-quality horses were waiting.

“These horses?”

“The General Manager prepared them.”

The horses lined up through the snow wind of the North Sea were all large in stature and had dignified muscles.

The General Manager of the Ice Palace had brought out the Hanhyulma horses that the family cherished for me.

“Captain, we have finished preparations.”

Wi Ji-yeong reported while clutching the reins.

A sense of tension hung in the eyes of the Small Snow Squad members, but blind trust toward me was underlying it.

Given the martial prowess I showed in Liaoning, they were certain that even the Hundred Thousand Mountains was not a place where they would die.

“We are heading out. The goal is the Hundred Thousand Mountains.”

I muttered while climbing onto my horse.

Clatter, clatter—!

The horses burst through the main gate of the Ice Palace.

It was not as fast a pace as when we came from Liaoning to the North Sea, but the momentum the group radiated was truly like a crushing force.

Inside the moving carriage, Seol Ye-rin was still staring out the window, unable to calm her reddened face.

It seemed that the unconventional declaration of my mother-in-law, Hong Ye-hwa, about 'a wedding as soon as you return,' would not leave her head.

“Miss Seol, your face looks very red. Are you okay?”

At my question, Seol Ye-rin flinched and turned her head.

“N-no! It is just..... my mind is complicated because I am leaving the North Sea.”

“Do not worry. I will definitely retrieve the Ice Crystal and I will also take revenge on the fellow who made my father-in-law critical.”

I lightly held Seol Ye-rin's hand and closed my eyes.

I was calm on the outside, but my interior was fluctuating.

As the darkness of the Dark Venerable settled in, the energies of the five divine items in my qi center were finally forming a single sphere and causing a giant whirlwind.

-Heh heh, Our Cult. You are still a demonic practitioner.

-The Spear Saint will be waiting for us.

At the Demon Queen's words, I nodded.

The unstable Ice Crystal.

The Spear Saint who protects it.

Hyeokryeon Geuk must have taken it knowing the Ice Crystal was unstable.

Every second was urgent.

Neigh—

Hanhyulma let out a cry.

***

The road toward the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

As we left the boundary of the North Sea and entered the border region of the Central Plains and the Western Regions, the air became noticeably turbid.

Instead of the cold snow wind, a wind mixed with sand dust blew, and the traces of people became rare before disappearing altogether.

“Young Master, over there.....”

Wi Ji-yeong, who was sitting on the coachman's seat, stopped her whip and pointed ahead.

A single old inn was standing alone on the desolate land.

The sign was roughly written in red letters as Black Pine Inn.

“It is an inn.”

“It is the last inn one passes through before entering the territory of Our Cult. Usually, informants stay there, or wanderers who want to join the cult stay there while acting out.”

At my explanation, Seol Ye-rin looked out the window and frowned.

The energy flowing around the inn was unusual.

Blood scent and unrefined, turbid demonic qi were mixed together.

“Are you going to stop by?”

“I need information. If Hyeokryeon Geuk went in with the Ice Crystal, I need to know how the boundary of the Hundred Thousand Mountains has been strengthened now.”

When I got off my horse, the Small Snow Squad members followed behind in an orderly fashion.

Seol Ye-rin also stood by my side with an ice sword at her waist.

Creak—

As we opened the inn door and entered, the boisterous noise stopped in an instant.

Dozens of ominous eyes were fixed on the group.

Most were martial artists of the unorthodox sects or low-level disciples of the Demonic Cult.

“Oho, look who it is? A bunch of hicks from the North Sea have swarmed here.”

A giant man who was drinking at a corner table stood up and slammed his great blade onto the table.

The pattern of the Black Wind Squad, a lower-level military organization of the Demonic Cult, was engraved on his chest.

“Hey, looking at your face, you look like a pretty boy because you are so fair. This is not a place for sissies like you. Get out of here.”

At the man's provocation, the crowds inside the inn burst into giggles and laughter.

Baek Mu-yong tried to put his hand on his sword hilt, but I raised my hand and stopped him.

I slowly approached the man.

There was no hesitation in my gait.

“Are you the Black Wind Squad Leader, Ma Cheol?”

At my voice correctly calling his name, the giant man, Ma Cheol, flinched.

Ma Cheol narrowed his eyes and looked closely at my face.

It was a face that overlapped with someone in his memory.

But there was no way.

That 'scoundrel' should be frozen to death in the North Sea by now or living miserably as a hostage.

“Y-you, could it be..... Third Young Master?”

As the words 'Third Young Master' came out of Ma Cheol's mouth, a silence like cold water being poured flowed through the inn.

But soon, Ma Cheol gave a sinister smile.

“Heh heh heh, the disgrace of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult, the scoundrel Hyeokryeon Yeom has returned alive? Did you get kicked out after being sold as the live-in son-in-law of the Ice Palace?”

Ma Cheol seemed to think I was still the incompetent illegitimate son of the past.

Ma Cheol picked up his great blade and swung it threateningly.

“Good timing. The Young Cult Leader said he would give a great reward if I brought your head. To think you crawled in on your own, you are luc.....”

Whoooooosh—!

It was before Ma Cheol's words could even finish.

My hand covered Ma Cheol's face.

The purple flame, Flame, that erupted from my palm covered Ma Cheol's head in an instant.

“Aaaaaagh!”

Along with a final scream, Ma Cheol rolled on the floor.

Rather than the pain of burning flesh, the absolute fear and pressure burrowing into his bones shattered Ma Cheol's spirit.

“Who is taking whose head?”

I asked coldly while stepping on the chest of Ma Cheol, who had collapsed on the floor.

Behind my back, a giant image of Asura, a fusion of the darkness of the Dark Venerable, the spirit of the Fighting Venerable, and the dominant energy unique to the Demonic Cult, wavered.

“H-hik! P-please spare me! Young Master! I was blind!”

The other martial artists in the inn could not even make the sound of breathing and froze.

The image of the scoundrel Third Young Master they knew was nowhere to be found.

Standing before them now was a monster no less than the Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk.

I reigned in the flames and looked down coldly.

“Where is Hyeokryeon Geuk now?”

“He is at the main mountain..... at the altar in the basement of the Young Cult Leader’s Hall! He went into seclusion a few days ago with a blue jewel he brought from the North Sea! He said not to let anyone in!”

It is the Ice Crystal.

As expected, Hyeokryeon Geuk was plotting something using the Ice Crystal.

“An altar.....”

My eyes turned toward the highest peak of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Soon, I kicked away Ma Cheol beneath my feet and looked back.

“Did you hear? There is no time to rest. We go immediately.”

Seol Ye-rin smiled brightly and nodded.

The Small Snow Squad members followed behind while shooting fierce looks at those remaining in the inn.

***

Only a terrible silence hung inside the Black Pine Inn, which the group of Hyeokryeon Yeom had swept through like a storm.

Ma Cheol, who was rolling on the floor while clutching his head and groaning, finally regained his senses and lifted his head.

“Ugh, h-have they gone?”

“S-Squad Leader..... are you okay?”

A Black Wind Squad member approached to support Ma Cheol with a trembling hand.

But Ma Cheol roughly brushed off that hand and stood up while stumbling.

Half of Ma Cheol's face was already burned by my Flame and had become a hideous sight.

“.....That fellow is not the Third Young Master.”

Ma Cheol's voice cracked as if it would tear due to fear.

“The scoundrel we knew cannot radiate such overwhelming energy! Cough.”

The other Black Wind Squad members remaining in the inn also looked at each other with pale complexions.

Although it was called a low-level military organization of the Demonic Cult, the Black Wind Squad was a cruel group that had slaughtered countless people of the jianghu while being in charge of the Cult's boundary missions.

Such people were so terrified that they almost peed their pants at a single display of momentum from someone who was just an illegitimate son.

“Squad Leader, shouldn't we report to the Young Cult Leader? That the Third Young Master is heading to the main mountain.....”

Thwack—!

Ma Cheol slapped the cheek of the member who suggested making a report.

“You idiot! You want to report to the Young Cult Leader with a sight like this? You must be crazy to want your head to be cut off first!”

Ma Cheol screamed while slapping the member's cheek.

But the back of Ma Cheol's own hand was also trembling.

Fear spread among the Black Wind Squad members like a contagious disease.

It was then.

“There is no need to report. Because I have already heard it.”

A man wearing a pitch-black coat walked into the inn through the open door along with the wind.

The temperature inside the inn dropped sharply at the same time as the man's appearance.

The Black Wind Squad members knelt all at once and bowed their heads to the floor.

“V-Vice Captain!”

The man who appeared was Dokgo Pyo, the Black Wind Squad Vice Captain and one of the direct henchmen of Hyeokryeon Geuk, known as the Hell Ghost.

Dokgo Pyo looked down at Ma Cheol, who was gasping on the floor, with indifferent eyes.

“Ma Cheol, you are a disgrace to the Black Wind Squad. Not only did you end up like this because you could not handle a single Young Master, but you are even slapping your subordinates out of fear.”

“C-Captain! It is not that, but the Third Young Master's energy was……!”

“Make your excuses in the afterlife.”

Dokgo Pyo lightly flicked his finger.

Whoosh—.

Demonic qi like an invisible thread swept past Ma Cheol's neck.

Ma Cheol's neck bent and he tumbled to the floor without even being able to scream.

Ma Cheol ended his life like that.

Dokgo Pyo brushed off his hand, which did not even have blood on it, and stared at the horizon where the group of Hyeokryeon Yeom had disappeared outside the inn.

“Third Young Master Hyeokryeon Yeom……”

Dokgo Pyo turned his head and scanned the surviving members.

The members stopped their breathing at the murderous eye light.

“Everyone, pursue them. There is no need to fight head-on. Follow behind them and gnaw away their stamina. Make them exhausted until they reach Mamun Pass.”

“We receive your orders!”

The Black Wind Squad members left the inn like mist and seeped into the darkness.

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Chapter 139 : Hyeokryeon Mu

The entrance to the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

In the canyon heading toward Mamun Pass, the sheer cliffs were hiding the sky.

Despite it being broad daylight, the thick demonic qi and mist were mixed together, making it difficult to see even a few meters ahead.

Clatter, clatter!

The sound of the Hanhyulma's hooves echoed roughly through the canyon.

I gripped the reins and sharpened my senses.

The energy of the Black Wind Squad, which had been persistently following us since the Black Pine Inn, was gradually getting closer.

Instead of a head-on confrontation, they constantly tried to slow us down by shooting arrows and rolling stones.

“Young Master, the rats are pursuing us. At this rate, the horses will be exhausted before we even arrive at Mamun Pass.”

At Wi Ji-yeong's report, I silently reached out and grabbed the air.

Whoooooosh—!

One of the Black Wind Squad members who was looking for an opportunity from above the cliff was caught by an invisible shadow hand and fell while screaming.

For me, having obtained the energy of the Dark Venerable, ambushes were meaningless.

“Miss Seol, I leave the rear to you.”

“I understand. I will freeze those bugs away.”

Seol Ye-rin flew up from her horse and looked back.

The Ice White Divine Palm erupting from Seol Ye-rin's fingertips blocked the entrance of the canyon with a giant ice wall.

While the pursuit of the Black Wind Squad following behind hesitated for a moment, my group finally arrived in front of the giant iron gate of Mamun Pass.

Rumble—!

The iron gate opened, and warriors clad in pitch-black armor poured out.

It was a pressure of a different level than the Black Wind Squad.

It was the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God, the direct escort unit of the Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk.

And in the center of them, Hell Ghost Dokgo Pyo stood with a great blade over his shoulder.

“Third Young Master, you finally came all the way here.”

Dokgo Pyo's smile flashed through the mist.

Dokgo Pyo scanned Seol Ye-rin, who stood behind me, and clicked his tongue.

“To even drag in a woman from the North Sea, it seems you truly intend to betray Our Cult.”

“Betrayal, you say.”

I drew the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“Who was it that took the North Sea's Ice Crystal? if you open the path quietly, I will spare only your life.”

“Kwahahaha! You still only have your mouth alive!!”

When Dokgo Pyo struck down with his great blade, the red demonic qi soared from the earth and covered me.

At the same time, the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God simultaneously brandished their weapons and pressured the Small Snow Squad members.

Dark Abyss Slash.

A pitch-black purple sword qi shot out from the tip of my sword.

The moment the red demonic qi touched my darkness, it scattered like a scream, and Dokgo Pyo's great blade was bounced away powerlessly by my strike.

“H-how……!”

Astonishment was etched in Dokgo Pyo's eyes.

“Do not block my path.”

The entire canyon vibrated every time I took a step.

The momentum, a mixture of the Fighting Venerable's spirit and the Dark Venerable's Yin Qi, began to crack the walls of Mamun Pass.

-Heh heh, let us start by taking that fellow's head.

Along with the Sword Venerable's mad advice, my figure became purple lightning and rushed toward Dokgo Pyo.

Booooom—!

Along with a roar that seemed like it would leave the canyon, the lightning and red demonic qi collided.

The moment his great blade touched my sword strike, Dokgo Pyo felt a massive pressure hitting his entire body, making his breath hitch.

“Ugh……! Is this the inner qi of someone who has only just reached adulthood?!”

Dokgo Pyo gritted his teeth and infused demonic qi into his great blade.

Befitting his alias of Hell Ghost, bright red flames flared up from his blade, trying to swallow me.

But I did not avoid it.

Rather, with a bloody smile on my lips, I struck down vertically with the Red Sword.

“Are you discussing fire in front of me?”

Whoooooosh—!

The purple flames erupting from the Red Sword swallowed Dokgo Pyo's red flames in an instant.

The flames mixed with the Dark Venerable's darkness burned even more fiercely using the opponent's energy itself as fuel.

“This is impossible! My flame energy is……!”

A flustered Dokgo Pyo tried to quickly retreat, but my Blue Sword had already burrowed in, aiming for his shoulder.

Slice!

“Urgh!”

Fresh blood spurted from Dokgo Pyo's left shoulder.

It was a strike that would have taken his neck if he hadn't instinctively twisted his body.

“Captain!”

The warriors of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God saw Dokgo Pyo's crisis and simultaneously rushed toward me.

The sharp sword qi erupting from the tips of their swords surrounded me from all sides.

-Be careful! It is from the back!

I heard the Sword Venerable's shout, but I did not look back. It was because I had something I trusted in.

“How dare you.”

Booom-booom-booom!

A giant ice wall soared up from behind my back.

It was Seol Ye-rin.

As she brandished her ice sword, sharp ice thorns sprouted from beneath the feet of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God, breaking their formation.

“Aaargh!”

“My legs are..... frozen!”

Seol Ye-rin glared at the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God with a cold gaze and shouted to me.

“I will take care of the small fries with the Small Snow Squad. Young Master, open the path!”

“Reliable.”

I replied shortly and turned my gaze back toward Dokgo Pyo.

Fear was etched for the first time in the eyes of Dokgo Pyo, who was clutching his shoulder and gasping for breath.

“You..... what is your identity!”

“The live-in son-in-law of the North Sea Ice Palace.”

I slowly moved my steps.

With every step I took, a black lotus pattern bloomed and disappeared on the floor.

It was the Dark Shadow Step, the footwork of the Dark Venerable.

“Damn it! Everyone, attack! Block that fellow!”

Dokgo Pyo screamed and ordered the remaining Twelve Guardians of the Demon God.

However, my figure had already disappeared from their sight.

Swish—!

Appearing before Dokgo Pyo's eyes again, I had the Blue and Red Twin Swords crossed.

“I asked if the one who took the Ice Crystal was Hyeokryeon Geuk.”

My voice whispered in Dokgo Pyo's ear like a death god.

“Ugh..... Do not carelessly bring up the name of the great Young Cult Leader!”

In a final act of desperation, Dokgo Pyo swung his remaining arm to strike down with his great blade.

To die together.

It was a mad strike intended to inflict a fatal wound on me even at the cost of his own life.

But my eyes were calm.

Diamond Fighting King Divine Fist.

Heaven Breaking Strike.

I threw a punch instead of using my sword. Putting the destructive power of the Fighting King into the wrist holding the sword, I struck the front of Dokgo Pyo's great blade.

Clang—!

Along with the noise of steel being torn apart, Dokgo Pyo's great blade was shattered into pieces.

And my fist did not stop, burying itself into Dokgo Pyo's chest.

Thud!

“Cough, ugh……”

A shockwave pierced through Dokgo Pyo's back.

It was powerful enough to dent the heavy gates of Mamun Pass from the aftermath of that shockwave.

Dokgo Pyo knelt down while looking down at his chest as if he couldn't believe it.

“T-this power belongs to Lord Fighting Venerable……”

“Give your answer in the afterlife.”

As I gave a heartless kick, Dokgo Pyo's figure tumbled powerlessly.

It was the vain end of the Hell Ghost Dokgo Pyo, the Captain of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God.

When their leader fell, the remaining Twelve Guardians of the Demon God and the Black Wind Squad members lost their will to fight and hesitated.

They too were elites of the Demonic Cult, but the man before them was a monster beyond their common sense.

“M-move! Open the path!”

Along with someone's shout, the cultists split to the left and right and began to flee.

I didn't bother to chase them.

My gaze was already directed toward the deepest part of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, beyond the dented gates of Mamun Pass.

“Let's go.”

I said while shaking off the blood from my swords.

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As Dokgo Pyo's body was thrown into the dust pit, the red demonic qi that had filled the canyon receded like the ebbing tide. A strange silence fell before the gate.

“The Captain was..... defeated.”

A deep bewilderment was etched in the eyes of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God.

They probably never dreamed that Dokgo Pyo, a top powerhouse in the cult, would be so miserably crushed by the scoundrel Third Young Master, who was called the disgrace of the Divine Cult.

“What are you just staring blankly for? Did I not tell you to make way.”

My purple eye light scanned the remaining warriors.

With just that gaze, several warriors took steps back as if they were suffocating.

“Hmph, ownerless dogs are quite persistent.”

Seol Ye-rin, who was guarding the rear, approached my side while emitting a chilly cold.

At the tip of Seol Ye-rin's ice sword, the fresh blood of several Twelve Guardians of the Demon God was already frozen.

“I will finish them off with the Small Snow Squad. Young Master, do not stop.”

As soon as Seol Ye-rin's words ended, shadows wearing pitch-black martial arts uniforms soared from within the shadows.

It was the Small Snow Squad.

“Captain! We will open the path for your retreat!”

The Small Snow Squad Captain Wi Ji-yeong burrowed through the gaps in the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God while brandishing her daggers.

Following her, Baek Mu-yong and the Small Snow Squad elites began to devastate the confused Demonic Cult warriors while unfolding a joint attack formation.

“Thank you.”

I replied shortly and flew toward the dented iron gate.

As I crossed Mamun Pass and entered the interior of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the density of the air changed.

Surrounded on all sides by giant rock walls, this was a land of eternal twilight where even sunlight did not properly reach.

I did not stop and ran toward the Heavenly Demon Peak where the Young Cult Leader’s Hall was located.

However, when I reached the middle of the mountain, a familiar yet alien energy stimulated my senses.

-Heh heh, a rat has brought back something very big.

Simultaneously with the Sword Venerable's ridicule, a man stumbled out from behind the shadow of a rock.

“.....”

It was Hyeokryeon Mu.

But his usual leisurely appearance was nowhere to be found.

his martial arts uniform was torn to shreds, and dark red blood was seeping from his side.

“Second Brother? What has happened.”

“.....”

Just by looking, I could sense that he was not in a normal state.

“Who made you like this?”

“.....”

“Please answer me!”

“.....”

“I will be passing through.”

When I tried to pass by Hyeokryeon Mu.

Whooooosh—!

A tremendous sword strike covered me.

Clang—!

“Brother!”

This could not be.

“Please wake up!”

No matter how much I shouted.

Whooooosh!

Hyeokryeon Mu did not stop brandishing his sword.

The second brother I knew, Hyeokryeon Mu, already looked like he was in an unconscious state.

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Chapter 140 : Rampage

My arm muscles tightened.

The tip of Hyeokryeon Mu’s sword, which I had blocked by crossing the Blue and Red Twin Swords, was trembling.

It was a world of difference from Hyeokryeon Mu’s usual leisurely appearance.

“.....Brother, who's doing this!”

I let out a thundering roar, but Hyeokryeon Mu did not answer.

His focusless eyes were wandering in the air, and the veins revealed through his torn martial arts uniform were pulsating with an unpleasant purple light.

As if someone had forcibly injected inner qi to make him a puppet.

-Heh heh, he is out of his mind. Demonic qi has infiltrated his brain. Someone crushed that fellow's will and turned him into a killer.

-Third Young Master, it seems to be the Demonic Cult's... Heavenly Demon Puppet Art.

Heavenly Demon Puppet Art.

Hyeokryeon Geuk, that madman had finally laid hands on Hyeokryeon Mu.

Swish!

Hyeokryeon Mu's sword drew a bizarre trajectory and aimed for my neck.

A murderous form he would never have shown normally.

I stepped back while using my footwork.

"I told you to wake up!"

I tried to strike Hyeokryeon Mu's solar plexus with the hilt of the Blue Sword, but Hyeokryeon Mu swung his sword again as if he couldn't even feel pain, unconcerned about the wound on his side opening up.

Boooom—!

The rock wall of the rocky mountain crumbled.

The energy loaded into Hyeokryeon Mu's sword was a turbid demonic qi mixed with the cold qi of the Ice Crystal.

It was certain that Hyeokryeon Geuk had forcibly injected the byproduct that overflowed during the process of absorbing the Ice Crystal into Hyeokryeon Mu.

"……K-ugh…… K…… ill…… me……."

A cracked voice leaked out between Hyeokryeon Mu's lips.

A voice close to a plea to be killed.

My eyes blazed at my brother's miserable state.

“……Truly.”

Is killing the only way?

I no longer backed down.

I sheathed my twin swords and reached out my bare hands.

The only way to suppress my elder brother who was brandishing his sword without hurting him.

Ten Thousand Demons Returning to the Origin.

The moment my palm touched Hyeokryeon Mu’s chest, the turbid demonic qi that was rampaging inside Hyeokryeon Mu began to be sucked into my palm.

“Aaaaagh!”

Hyeokryeon Mu twisted his entire body while screaming.

My qi center fluctuated violently as the demonic qi, which felt like a foreign substance, entered.

But I, who had already gathered various energies, chewed and swallowed even the poison as nourishment.

Flash—!

Finally, the purple mist began to clear from Hyeokryeon Mu’s eyes.

Soon, Hyeokryeon Mu collapsed to the floor.

Thud.

When I supported Hyeokryeon Mu, he breathed a breath mixed with blood and opened his mouth.

“Yeom…… ah…… I am…… sorry…….”

“It is fine. Do not speak.”

“The Ice Crystal is…… below this……”

Hyeokryeon Mu’s eyes closed after he told me the Ice Crystal was below.

“You must not die, Brother.”

I entrusted Hyeokryeon Mu to Eun Bin and moved toward the underground.

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The spiral staircase leading underground was so deep that the end was not visible.

With every step I took, the cold qi that pierced my skin deepened.

It was an absolute coldness that one would feel on the Eternal Snow Mountain of the North Sea.

However, blood scent and demonic qi were mixed in that coldness to the point of being nauseating.

'It is alien.'

I pulled up the flames in my qi center, pushed away the cold air, and increased my speed.

A giant heartbeat was heard from deep underground.

Thump, thump, thump.

A thumping that did not belong to a living creature.

It was the sound of the Ice Crystal screaming while forcibly harboring demonic qi.

Boooom—!

As I kicked open the giant iron door and entered, my vision widened, and a giant underground cavern revealed its appearance.

And at its center, my eyes sank coldly.

"……Have you come."

On the altar where dark red blood was pooled.

A man was sitting in a lotus position, receiving the cold qi erupting from the blue jewel floating in the air, the Ice Crystal, with his entire body.

The Young Cult Leader of the Demonic Cult, and my greatest enemy.

Hyeokryeon Geuk.

'…It is not him?'

It was a fake.

I could tell as soon as I saw him.

The one who killed me in my past life is not this person.

“Who are you?”

The fellow pretending to be Hyeokryeon Geuk slowly opened his eyes.

The fake’s eyes did not look human.

Inside the pitch-black eyes without whites, the pupils were torn vertically.

“What do you mean? I am the Young Cult Leader of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult, Hyeokryeon Geuk. Your mind must have gone strange after dealing with the second one.”

The existence pretending to be Hyeokryeon Geuk began to feign ignorance.

“Trying to deceive my eyes?”

“Did you fail to recognize me after going to the North Sea?”

When the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk stood up, the blood pooled below the altar began to boil.

The overwhelming demonic qi erupting from the fake’s entire body filled the underground cavern.

A completed image of 'Demonic' that was on a different level from what Hyeokryeon Mu had shown.

It was just like the real Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“How did you do it?”

I looked at the fake with a puzzled expression.

But the fake curled his lips as if it were contemptible.

“Monster? No, this is evolution. The demonic art of Extreme Yang and the Ice Crystal of Extreme Yin have met to achieve chaos that goes beyond the harmony of yin and yang. It is not an area that someone like you can understand.”

As the fake reached out, blue cold qi poured out from the Ice Crystal floating in the air and condensed in the fake’s hand.

At the same time, the blood on the floor soared and mixed with the cold qi, creating a dark red ice spear.

“The sacred objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens you collected... if you even offer those sacred objects to me, I will become a God-Demon who has surpassed a true Heavenly Demon.”

“I do not know why you are pretending to be Hyeokryeon Geuk, but seeing as you mention the sacred objects, there must be something.”

Purple flames soared from my body as if exploding.

The six energies inside my qi center resonated and resisted the fake’s demonic qi.

“I cannot let you sacrifice my father, my brother, and even the Ice Palace for your filthy ambition.”

“Bark all you want. I will tear you apart.”

Boooom—!

When the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk waved his hand, dozens of dark red ice spears rushed toward me.

A contradictory attack that freezes and burns space.

It was a power where the cold qi of the Ice Crystal and the demonic art of the Demonic Cult were forcibly fused.

But I did not back down.

The energy emitted by the six sacred objects rotating in my qi center flowed into the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“Yama’s Roar!”

When I struck down with the Red Sword, a giant purple flame wave swallowed the ice spears and collided head-on.

Sizzle—!

My vision was obscured along with a massive amount of steam.

Taking that opportunity, the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk popped out through the mist.

In the fake’s hand was a transparent sword made of the Ice Crystal's cold qi.

“Die!”

Clang! Clang-clang!

I laughed coldly while parrying the fellow’s sword strikes with the Blue Sword.

“You are pathetic.”

“What?”

“Hyeokryeon Geuk’s sword is not something light like this. His demonic qi is heavy enough to swallow the world, and his killing intent is so terrible that one cannot even breathe. But you……”

My eyes shone eerily.

“You are just a clown mimicking him.”

Bang!

When I stomped my foot, the Dark Venerable’s shadow stretched out along the floor.

The shadow instantly bound the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk’s ankles.

“Th-this, this is the Dark Venerable's……!”

The flustered fake tried to pull his feet out, but I had already burrowed into that gap.

Heaven Breaking Strike.

I loaded the Fighting Venerable’s destructive power into my left hand, which was not holding a sword, and struck the fellow’s solar plexus.

Thud!

“Cough, ack……!”

The fake Hyeokryeon Geuk’s body was pushed back.

But the fellow did not fall.

The blue energy flowing from the Ice Crystal was filling the fellow’s wound in an instant.

“Heh heh heh…… did you see? This is the power of the Ice Crystal! I have an immortal body……”

“It is not immortality, but parasitism.”

I cut off his words and crossed the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“The Ice Crystal is not something that would lend power to someone like you. You are just forcibly squeezing it out.”

A giant image of Asura wavered behind my back.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Fire, Water, Dark. Six types of energy were fused into one and condensed at the sword tip.

“I will show you who the real owner is.”

Hummmmm—!

As if reacting to my momentum, the Ice Crystal floating behind the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk began to vibrate violently.

As if it recognized me.

“Step aside, fake.”

I kicked off the ground and shot forward.

An attack mixed with flames, pitch-black darkness, and the cold of the North Sea Cold Iron covered the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“Aaaaagh! No! My power is……!”

The fake drew the power of the Ice Crystal and set up a defensive barrier, but it was shattered like glass fragments before my strike.

Slice—!

A single flash.

The fake Hyeokryeon Geuk’s body was split in half and poured out dark red blood.

The fake’s body was caught in my Demonic Fire and turned to ash before it even touched the floor.

In that place, only the ownerless Ice Crystal remained floating while emitting a blue light.

“Phew……”

I caught my breath and sheathed my swords.

I looked around, but I could not feel the real Hyeokryeon Geuk's energy.

'What on earth is he up to?'

The reason for setting up his double and having the Ice Crystal stolen.

Was it to buy time, or is it another trap?

Just then, the Ice Crystal floating in the air slowly approached me.

Like a child who had been waiting for a long time, the Ice Crystal emitted a soft cold qi as if to be embraced in my arms.

I grabbed the Ice Crystal.

-……You are late.

A voice resonating in my head.

It is the voice of the Ice Soul Spear Saint.

I carefully reached out and grabbed the Ice Crystal.

Then, along with a roar that seemed like it would tear apart, the Spear Saint who was protecting the incomplete Ice Crystal spoke to me.

-It is difficult, so you take care of the rest.

Hummmmm—

A massive light began to flash from the Ice Crystal.

The only thought that entered my mind in an instant.

Rampage.

"Why of all times now!"

Along with the thought that it was a relief, Seol Ye-rin didn't get caught in the rampage.

Flash—!

The Ice Crystal began to rampage.