Chapter 141 : Chapter 141

Chapter 141 : Liberation

It was cold.

No, it was an eternal silence that even the word freezing was insufficient for.

Seol Yeong-jin, the Ice Soul Spear Saint, had endured for a hundred years like that.

Inside this cold prison, the Ice Crystal, Seol Yeong-jin was both a gatekeeper and a sinner.

The moment the Spear Saint's will wavered, this unstable mass of power would explode and destroy the North Sea.

However, a few days ago, a disgusting energy began to wrap around the Spear Saint.

It was not the energy of his descendant Seol Baek-ho, nor was it the energy of that arrogant 'Demonic Cult brat.'

It was a sticky demonic qi.

Someone had stolen the Ice Crystal.

And they dared to weigh down Seol Yeong-jin's will and forcibly try to extract the power of the Ice Crystal.

'Arrogant fellow...'

The Spear Saint resisted.

But the resistance of a soul without a body was weak.

The fellow forcibly fused the coldness of the Ice Crystal with his own demonic art to create grotesque monstrosities.

Watching the noble coldness that his spear had once touched fall into becoming a tool for slaughter was a pain worse than death.

It was then.

Kwaaaaang—!

A huge vibration was felt from outside the prison.

The disgusting demonic qi surged, and soon scattered while letting out a scream.

And taking advantage of that gap, a familiar yet intense heat enveloped the Ice Crystal.

'This flame is...'

A terrible yang qi.

Yet within it, the coldness of the North Sea and numerous heterogeneous energies were mysteriously mixed.

It was an unforgettable energy.

The bold fellow who had pierced through the Spear Saint's mental world and pointed a spear at him.

[...Found you.]

The fellow's voice was heard.

At the same time, the hand of the fellow who had been holding the Ice Crystal was cut off, and the Ice Crystal floated into the air.

And finally, the fellow's hand grabbed the Ice Crystal.

Jjirr-rr-rr—!

Warm heat flowed in through the surface of the Ice Crystal.

-Ah, I feel like I can live now.

The fellow's Extreme Yang Qi was calming the rampage inside the Ice Crystal and burning away the defiled demonic qi.

The Spear Saint gathered his thoughts and spoke into the fellow's head.

-...You're late, brat.

The fellow was breathing heavily.

It seemed he had used quite a bit of strength to execute the thief.

But there was no time to rest.

Because there was a different reason why those fellows had stolen the Ice Crystal.

The Spear Saint showed him.

The energy wave the Spear Saint had felt while the Ice Crystal was being moved here.

And the place where those fellows' true master had headed.

-He went to open the 'Gate.'

I could feel the fellow's consciousness waver.

-The Demonic Cult seems to have many ups and downs as well. Did you obtain the first founder's legacy?

"I've gained a few clues, but I haven't found it yet."

The rampage inside the Ice Crystal gradually subsided.

I confirmed that the types of true qi coming from him had become several.

-Still, you have grown.

"I might be able to at least stabilize it."

-Even without obtaining the Ice Emperor's legacy?

"We won't know until we measure our lengths."

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"We won't know until we measure our lengths."

I spit out those words and simultaneously put strength into the hand holding the Ice Crystal.

The coldness rampaging wildly within my palm was like the scream of a suppressed beast.

The energies that the Spear Saint had suppressed for a hundred years and that the fake Hyeokryeon Geuk had defiled were tangled together, right on the verge of exploding.

Kugugugung—!

The Extreme Yang Qi I pulled up from my qi center surged fiercely through my blood vessels.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Fire, Water, Dark.

I twisted the energies of the six divine objects residing within me into one and shackled the Ice Crystal like a giant chain.

'Calm down.'

Chiiiiik-!

A massive amount of steam rose from the surface of the Ice Crystal.

But it was not enough.

To resolve the fundamental instability of the Ice Crystal.

A more organic movement was needed.

-Kuh...! It is impossible, brat! With that power, you will only break the Ice Crystal!

The Spear Saint's urgent shout struck my mind.

I knew it too.

But I could not let go.

The moment I failed to stop the Ice Crystal's rampage, not only this Young Palace Head's Hall but half of the Hundred Thousand Mountains would freeze over.

It was then.

"Third Young Master, do not try to shoulder it alone."

A familiar voice was heard from behind my back.

I could tell without even turning around.

The person who always watched my back.

"Miss Seol!"

Seol Ye-rin approached my side.

She overlapped her white hand over my hand that was holding the Ice Crystal.

The Extreme Yin Qi erupted from Seol Ye-rin's fingertips.

"I will help. The Ice Crystal... is like family to me as well."

Seol Ye-rin's eyes glowed with the color of the sky.

In the past, that power which was a curse that gnawed away at her life became a salvation to save the Ice Crystal and flowed in.

Uuuuuung—!

My Extreme Yang Qi and Seol Ye-rin's Extreme Yin Qi.

The moment the two energies met inside the Ice Crystal, the wildly fluctuating rampage began to subside as if it were a lie.

As if rough waves turned into a calm lake, the chaotic air currents inside the Ice Crystal began to bite each other's tails and circulate while drawing a giant Taegeuk.

-.....Ho?

The Spear Saint's voice, mixed with admiration, was heard.

-To think it is the harmony of Yin and Yang. Something that even I, a hundred years ago, could not achieve.....

"Concentrate. It's over if we lose it."

I erased distracting thoughts and embraced Seol Ye-rin's energy with my own, guiding it deep into the Ice Crystal.

I burned away the defiled demonic qi and filled the empty gaps with freezing coldness.

Paaaaaa—!

A blue-white pillar of light, so intense it made the eyes sting, shot up through the underground cavern.

And within that light, the Ice Crystal began to regain its original form as a brilliant and clear jewel, no longer an unstable time bomb.

".....Ha, ha."

As the light faded, the strength in my legs gave out and I stumbled.

But I did not fall.

Seol Ye-rin was firmly supporting me.

"Did we... succeed?"

Seol Ye-rin asked while wiping the sweat from my forehead.

I looked at the Ice Crystal, which was emitting a cold but gentle energy.

"Yeah. It's perfect. We don't have to worry about it exploding anymore."

-.....Truly amazing.

The Spear Saint's voice sounded much more comfortable.

-The energies of you two stabilized the Ice Crystal. Now there is no longer a need for me to stabilize the Ice Crystal... anymore.

The Spear Saint, who had continued for a full hundred years, stopped the maintenance of the Ice Crystal.

-Heh heh, then join us now.

-Welcome!

-.....??

The Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen added their words.

"I will take responsibility for the Ice Crystal. Now, how about the Spear Saint also moves as you wish?"

At my words, the Spear Saint's soul began to move.

For the sake of the Ice Palace, I wanted the Spear Saint to help in finding the Ice Emperor.

And that mindset was conveyed to the Spear Saint.

-Since you have liberated me, I must repay the favor.

-Kuhahaha! Welcome!

Ssuuuuuk!

The soul of the Ice Soul Spear Saint, Seol Ye-jin, came out of the Ice Crystal.

And,

Uuuuuuu-ng-

A single fragment of the Ice Crystal that had fallen off began to transform into a long spear.

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The fragment of the Ice Crystal swirled in the air, and soon took the shape of a single long spear.

An appearance as if blue starlight was embedded inside transparent ice.

It was the moment the myth of the North Sea became reality in the palm of my hand.

"This is....."

-It is the Ice White Divine Spear.

As I gripped the spear shaft, the energy inside my qi center resonated.

The darkness of the Dark Venerable became the shadow of the spear blade, the Buddhist power of the Fire Venerable purified the coldness, and the ambition of the Fighting Venerable maximized the destructive power of the spear tip.

The soul of Seol Ye-jin, liberated from the prison of the Ice Crystal after a hundred years, permeated the spear shaft and spoke in a majestic voice.

-It is a reward. Now this spear will be able to freeze the world or melt it according to your will.

Seol Ye-rin gasped while watching that sight.

The legendary spear left by the founder of the North Sea Ice Palace had appeared again in my hand.

-Now, there is no time to be soaked in sentiment.

Seol Ye-jin's thoughts brushed through my mind.

I gripped the spear again and asked.

"Hyeokryeon Geuk, where did that fellow go?"

-That fellow used a fake to draw your attention. Take a look at the military strength of the Demonic Cult.

My brow furrowed.

That's right.

The Five Great Demon Clans.

Including the Hyeokryeon Demon Clan, the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, the Yayul Demon Clan, the Dokgo Demon Clan, and the Hyonwon Demon Clan.

I needed to grasp what they were doing while Hyeokryeon Geuk was committing such acts.

At that time.

Thunderbolt Demon Clan.

"Heh heh heh, finally the time has come."

Byeok Tae-san, the Young Clan Head of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, burst into a mad laugh while looking at the huge pile of gunpowder stacked before his eyes.

His father, the Clan Head, Exploding Demon Byeok Hyeong-san, was still staying in the back room under the pretext of isolated training, and the actual power had already passed into Byeok Tae-san's hands long ago.

"Elder, is everything ready?"

At Byeok Tae-san's question, the old man standing beside him, an Elder of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, bowed his head.

He was the one who had filled the vacancy of the deceased Elder Gu Byeok-san.

"Yes, Young Clan Head. As the Young Cult Leader commanded, I have buried 'those things' throughout the main mountain. If the signal drops, the major strongholds of the Hundred Thousand Mountains will turn into ash."

Byeok Tae-san smacked his lips.

Hyeokryeon Geuk had promised Byeok Tae-san.

Once he became a God-Demon and commanded the world, he would give the Thunderbolt Demon Clan the authority to oversee the Demonic Cult's military power.

In exchange, the task Byeok Tae-san had to do was simple.

When Hyeokryeon Geuk returned from the North Sea, he was to set traps so that the old elders who opposed him and the remnants of the Cult Leader's faction could be wiped out at once.

"I heard that the Third Young Master fellow returned alive, but I wonder if you can survive even in this explosion?"

Byeok Tae-san laughed madly while thinking of me.

It was an opportunity to make up for the failure at the Red Cliff last time.

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And the Yayul Demon Clan.

On the other hand, the atmosphere of the Yayul Demon Clan was quite different.

The Clan Head, Hell Poison Demon Yayul Cheon-ung, was staring intensely at the letter placed on the table.

The letter contained a message sent from the North Sea Ice Palace, along with a short greeting sent by his son, Yayul Jin.

"……So the Young Cult Leader has left his post."

Yayul Cheon-ung stroked his beard.

He had already seen my potential.

The engagement ceremony at the Ice Palace, and the martial prowess I showed during the Southern Barbarian Poison Palace subjugation war were not those of the scoundrel he once knew.

Above all, I had thrown my body to protect his son, Yayul Jin, and the Ice Palace.

"Father, a troop mobilization order has been issued from the Young Cult Leader's side."

The voice of a vassal was heard from outside the room.

It must be a message sent by Sa Gong-hwi, Hyeokryeon Geuk's closest aide.

They were summoning the elites of each Demon Clan under the pretext of strengthening the security of the main mountain.

"……Ignore it."

"Yes? However, Clan Head, if we disobey the Young Cult Leader's command……"

"The Young Cult Leader is not here right now. And……"

Yayul Cheon-ung's gaze deepened.

He saw the image of the former Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi in me.

No, a flame even hotter and more intense than that.

"I have no intention of pointing a blade at the fellow who saved my son. The Yayul Demon Clan will maintain neutrality for the time being. However, if the Third Young Master returns to the Hundred Thousand Mountains..... then I will open the gate to welcome him."

Yayul Cheon-ung had already made his decision.

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Next, the Dokgo Demon Clan.

The prestigious clan of the sword, the Dokgo Demon Clan, was steeped in grief.

"The Clan Head, no, the Captain is....."

News was delivered that Hell Ghost Dokgo Pyo, the Captain of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God and the pride of the family, had died at the hands of the Third Young Master.

The elders of the family were enraged.

They could not accept the fact that the Third Young Master, born of a concubine, had dared to harm the bloodline of the Dokgo Demon Clan.

However, Dokgo Wol, the younger brother of Dokgo Pyo who was acting as the current Clan Head, was caressing his brother's broken saber with trembling hands.

"Big brother... was defeated in a single strike?"

The survivors of the Twelve Guardians of the Demon God who returned alive testified in fear.

They said I was a monster who freely handled the fist strikes of the Fighting Venerable, the movement arts of the Dark Venerable, and an unidentified fire art.

"We must take revenge! We must immediately assassinate the Third Young Master.....!"

Despite the elders' shouts, Dokgo Wol shook his head.

His martial prowess was lower than his brother's, but he was quick to catch on.

Hyeokryeon Geuk was silent even though his direct guard captain had died.

Instead, he had pushed his brother into a dead-end and disappeared to the North Sea himself.

'We are a discarded pawn.'

Dokgo Wol realized it instinctively.

Even if the Dokgo Demon Clan moved now, they would only become my sacrifices. He laid down the sword and commanded.

"Lock the gates of the main house. Do not let anyone in, and do not let anyone out. We... wait."

Crouching flat until the storm passed. That was the survival method Dokgo Wol chose.

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The prestigious clan of the saber, the Hyonwon Demon Clan, was chaos itself.

The Clan Head, Heaven Shaking Saber Demon, was a fervent supporter of Hyeokryeon Geuk.

But he was not in his position right now.

Because he had secretly headed to the North Sea upon receiving Hyeokryeon Geuk's command.

"When is the Clan Head returning?"

"There is no news. He only left words that he was heading to the end of the North Sea....."

The warriors remaining in the main house were in a state of confusion.

The leader had disappeared, and urges to draft troops poured in from the Young Cult Leader's Hall.

They did not know.

That their Clan Head was currently by Hyeokryeon Geuk's side, accepting 'new power' and changing into something that was not human.

Chapter 142 : Chapter 142

Chapter 142 : Heaven Shaking Saber Demon

The deepest end of the North Sea, a place in the depths of the frozen land where even the eternal snow was frozen and only silence lingered.

Hyonwon Ak, the head of the Hyonwon Demon Clan and the Heaven Shaking Saber Demon, was trembling as he watched the scene unfolding before his eyes.

“……Is this truly a realm that a human can reach.”

The broadsword held in Hyonwon Ak's hand quivered.

He was a man who had carried a corner of the Demonic Cult with a single blade throughout his life, cutting down countless masters.

However, the energy currently radiating from his liege, Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk, transcended the category of martial arts he knew.

A cocoon made of energy was surrounding Hyeokryeon Geuk.

Rumble—!

Every time Hyeokryeon Geuk moved, the surrounding space was torn apart.

Hyonwon Ak had to dig the tops of his feet into the ice floor to keep from being pushed back by the waves of energy.

“Hyonwon Ak.”

The voice heard from inside the cocoon was not Hyeokryeon Geuk's previous voice.

It was a chilling multiple voice, as if thousands of metals were interlocking and scraping against each other.

“Yes, Young Cult Leader.”

“Are you prepared? For the path of the ‘complete blade’ that you craved so much.”

Hyonwon Ak's eyes flashed.

Hyonwon Ak followed Hyeokryeon Geuk despite knowing his cruelty.

The reason was only one, to break the limits of the blade techniques of the Hyonwon Demon Clan.

“……I only wish to see that realm even if I have to sacrifice my life.”

“Good. Then, receive it. This is the essence of the Demon Emperor.”

A single dark red thread sprang out from Hyeokryeon Geuk's cocoon and pierced through the middle of Hyonwon Ak's forehead.

“Aaaaaaaakh!”

Hyonwon Ak rolled on the floor while screaming.

It was a contradictory pain where his blood vessels were freezing and burning at the same time.

An illusion where the blade techniques of the Hyonwon Demon Clan were twisted and redefined tens of thousands of times passed through his brain.

His skin turned black, and red demonic qi rose from his pupils like frost.

Hyonwon Ak was now being reborn as a demonic practitioner, an existence that could no longer be called human, crafted by Hyeokryeon Geuk.

After a long time, as the pain subsided, Hyonwon Ak slowly raised his body.

The broadsword that had been broken was manifested and held in Hyonwon Ak's hand once again.

However, that blade was no longer made of iron, but a bizarre form mixed with hardened blood clots and ice.

“Can you feel it? The feeling of the human limits that shackled you disappearing.”

Hyeokryeon Geuk, who had torn through the cocoon and emerged, asked.

“……It is strong. It feels as if I have reached the realm of a god.”

Hyonwon Ak knelt down, intoxicated by his changed power.

“Go. Return to the main mountain. A single rat trying to defile my throne must have sneaked in there.”

The corners of Hyeokryeon Geuk's mouth rose as if they would tear.

“My younger brother, Hyeokryeon Yeom. Strip away the divine objects that brat has gathered. The moment I arrive, the Hundred Thousand Mountains will witness the birth of a true God-Demon.”

Hyonwon Ak swung his broadsword instead of answering.

With a single swing, the massive mountain in front of him turned into dust and disappeared.

“Do not worry. The Third Young Master’s neck will be the first sacrifice for my new blade technique.”

A black mist surrounded Hyonwon Ak's figure as he shot out toward the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

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At that time,

The main mountain of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult, the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Byeok Tae-san, the Young Clan Head of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, was wearing a smile full of joy on a high ground overlooking the main mountain.

Since his father, the Exploding Demon Byeok Hyeong-san, entered closed-off training, he had taken practical power and had buried Thunderbolt Spheres at key points of the Hundred Thousand Mountains under the orders of Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk.

“The energy in the basement of the Young Cult Leader’s Hall has subsided. It seems the fake Young Cult Leader has dealt with the rat.”

Byeok Tae-san raised one hand high.

“Set fire to the Council of Elders where the elders are gathered and the base of the Cult Leader’s faction! Once we turn the old men of the opposing faction into ashes, the Hundred Thousand Mountains will be born anew under the name of the Young Cult Leader tonight!”

When the command was given, the subordinates all at once lit the fuses of the detonators.

Sizzle—

The sound of burning echoed in the darkness.

Byeok Tae-san licked his lips, expecting a massive explosion that would shake the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

However, even after one quarter of an hour passed, and then another.

Forget the expected explosion, not even a small spark flew up.

The Hundred Thousand Mountains were as silent as a dead rat.

“……What happened? Why is it not exploding?”

The flustered Byeok Tae-san shouted.

At that moment, someone's voice was heard from behind him.

“To think you planted bombs in my house's inner room, you should have chosen your opponent properly if you were going to play with fire.”

Startle.

Byeok Tae-san turned his head in horror.

There was a man walking out through the pitch-black darkness.

With red eyes and the Blue and Red Twin Swords held in both hands, it was I, Hyeokryeon Yeom.

“Th-Third Young Master?! How are you alive! The basement of the Young Cult Leader’s Hall was definitely……!”

“It took a bit of time because I had to cut down that fake piece of trash.”

I lightly snapped my fingers.

Then, hundreds of Thunderbolt Spheres that Byeok Tae-san's subordinates had planted rolled out under my feet.

Those fuses had all been unable to burn due to the violet flames and had turned into black ash with their energy sucked out.

To me, who was a fusion of the Extreme Yang Body and the darkness of the Dark Venerable, the heat of gunpowder was nothing more than a mere snack.

“The gunpowder you're so proud of is just a stone in front of me, the one who rules fire.”

Byeok Tae-san's face distorted hideously at my cold mockery.

“Y-You monster-like brat! Kill him! Tear that brat apart right now!”

At Byeok Tae-san's spiteful command, the elite warriors of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan who were lurking in the surroundings all at once drew their weapons and rushed in.

I withdrew the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

At the same time, I reached out behind my back.

Woo-oo-oong—!

A single spear emitting a brilliant cold air that had been strapped to my back was grasped in my hand.

It was the Ice White Divine Spear, the legacy of Seol Yeong-jin, the Ice Soul Spear Saint and North Sea Martial God who had been liberated from the prison of the Ice Crystal after a hundred years.

-You look more suited to holding a spear than I thought. Stay true to the basics!

Along with the grand voice of the Spear Saint echoing in my mind, I held the spear and lightly slashed horizontally.

Crack—!

The overwhelming extreme cold air emitting from the Ice White Divine Spear froze the atmosphere.

The warriors of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan who were rushing in were frozen in mid-air and fell to the ground without even being able to scream.

Only the shattered ice fragments proved that they were once living humans.

“Hi-Hieeeek……!”

Byeok Tae-san's legs lost their strength and he ended up collapsing.

The incompetent and weak Third Young Master he once knew was nowhere to be found.

“Pl-Please spare me, Young Master! I, I was daresay blind and……!”

Byeok Tae-san begged for his life while pounding his forehead against the ground.

I looked down at him with indifferent eyes and brought the tip of the Ice White Divine Spear to the back of Byeok Tae-san's neck.

“I wanted to see how much the heads of the Five Great Demon Clans were played with by Hyeokryeon Geuk, but seeing your state, there's nothing more to see.”

My eyes turned cold.

“The Thunderbolt Demon Clan will be erased from the Hundred Thousand Mountains as of today.”

Stab!

The sharp tip of the Ice White Divine Spear pierced through Byeok Tae-san's neck without mercy.

Byeok Tae-san's body instantly froze white.

Soon, as I recovered the spear, it crumbled into powder and scattered.

“Third Young Master!”

Seol Ye-rin and the Small Snow Squad members who arrived late to the high ground witnessed that scene and stopped.

Seol Ye-rin's eyes widened as she saw the brilliant blue-lit spear held in my hand.

This was because the spear inhabited by the soul of Seol Yeong-jin, the Ice Soul Spear Saint and legend of the North Sea Ice Palace, was perfectly synchronized with my energy.

“Is the cleanup finished?”

When I asked while withdrawing the spear, Baek Mu-yong of the Small Snow Squad knelt and reported.

“Yes, Captain. The Rogues' Guild and the Small Snow Squad elites have neutralized all the remaining explosives that the Thunderbolt Demon Clan had planted through Wi Ji-yeong. The chaos at the Council of Elders and the Cult Leader’s faction bases has also been settled.”

I nodded my head.

My gaze turned once again to the highest place of the main mountain, the Heavenly Demon Palace where Cult Leader Hyeokryeon 휘 stayed.

“Young Master, the energy..... a very ominous energy is coming from the north.”

Seol Ye-rin warned as she adjusted her grip on her ice sword.

I, too, was already feeling it.

An overwhelming killing intent pressing down on the earth as it approached from beyond the horizon.

It was the killing intent of a demonic practitioner.

“To think it's energy of this level, who is it?”

-Heh, the Demonic Cult bastards have raised their hunting dogs quite well.

-The one approaching seems to be no longer human.

-A man holding a blade is approaching!

At the advice of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint, I grasped the Ice White Divine Spear once again.

There was only one family that came to mind when it came to the blade.

“It must be the Hyonwon Demon Clan.”

“Third Young Master.”

“Small Snow Squad, you take care of the small fry.”

“Yes!”

Eun Bin, Baek Mu-yong, Wi Ji-yeong, as well as Yu So-dong and Cheon Deung-jin.

Before I knew it, Cheon Deung-jin was moving along with the Small Snow Squad.

As the Small Snow Squad stood behind Seol Ye-rin.

“What an enormous energy……!”

Seol Ye-rin shouted as she saw the storm of demonic qi.

“It's okay.”

I smiled faintly while looking at Seol Ye-rin who stood by my side.

“The son-in-law and the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace are together, so what is there to be afraid of.”

Seol Ye-rin nodded her head vigorously with a flushed face at my words.

As the party looked toward the side where the demonic qi was fluctuating,

In the center of it, a man clad in demonic qi darker than black armor appeared, stepping through the air.

It was Hyonwon Ak, the head of the Hyonwon Demon Clan and the Heaven Shaking Saber Demon.

However, his appearance had already escaped human common sense.

A dark red demonic eye had sprouted in the middle of his forehead, and the massive broadsword he held was pulsating like the tongue of a living monster.

“……Third Young Master Hyeokryeon Yeom.”

Hyonwon Ak's voice echoed in a bizarre multiple voice with several layers of voices overlapping.

“The Young Cult Leader told me to bring your neck. Along with those divine objects you possess.”

Behind Hyonwon Ak, the elite warriors of the Hyonwon Demon Clan, who had become demonic practitioners like him, poured out with a ghost-like momentum.

The surrounding forest instantly turned black and died out due to the murky energy they emitted.

“I didn't know we would face each other like this.”

To deal with Hyeokryeon Geuk, eventually.

I knew that I had to deal with the Five Great Demon Clans of the Demonic Cult.

The first opponent was Byeok Tae-san of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan.

The second was none other than the Heaven Shaking Saber Demon, Hyonwon Ak.

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Chapter 143 : Sichuan Tang Clan

Rumble—!

The Hundred Thousand Mountains vibrated.

The extreme cold qi of the North Sea, which made one freeze to the very bone, reacted to the reddish-black dark energy that eroded life.

“……Third Young Masterrrrr.”

It was a bizarre, layered sound, like scraping pieces of iron together.

Hyeonwon Ak, the Clan Head of the Hyeonwon Demon Clan, a prestigious family of the blade that once commanded the Hundred Thousand Mountains, and the Heaven Shaking Saber Demon.

However, his appearance could no longer be called human.

His skin was a dead reddish-black, and an endless killing intent erupted from his blood-colored eyes, where his pupils had vanished.

The broadsword held in Hyeonwon Ak’s hand was throbbing, powered by its master's deep-seated resentment.

I stared at that monstrosity with indifferent eyes.

“Clan Head Hyeonwon. You said you wanted to see the ultimate peak of the blade, but in the end, have you become Hyeokryeon Geuk’s dog?”

“Shut up! This is the sacred fire bestowed by the Demon Sovereign! It is the power that has shed the human shell and reached the realm of God!”.

Hyeonwon Ak let out a grotesque scream and raised his broadsword.

Heaven Shaking Demonic Saber.

Annihilation.

As Hyeonwon Ak struck down with his broadsword, a reddish-black demonic qi poured toward me like a tidal wave, accompanied by a roaring sound that seemed to tear space itself apart.

It was a destructive strike imbued with the demonic qi of the Saber Demon.

-Mixing trashy demonic qi with blade qi. You call that a blade strike that has reached the divine?.

I curled the corners of my mouth at the voice of the Ice Soul Spear Saint Seol Yeong-jin echoing in my mind.

“I agree. I should teach him what the true power of the North Sea is.”.

I did not dodge.

Instead, I took a step forward and grasped the Ice White Divine Spear, which held a blue starlight in the air.

Extreme Yang Qi surged up from my qi center as if exploding.

However, I did not vent those flames outward.

Instead, I shoved the darkness of the Dark Venerable, the grit of the Fighting Venerable, and the flames of the Extreme Yang all into the shaft of the Ice White Divine Spear.

Whirrrr—!

The transparent Ice White Divine Spear began to be dyed in a bizarre color, a mixture of pitch-black and purple, as it accepted my energy.

“A fake can never defeat the real thing.”

Heaven Breaking Ice Flame Spear.

I lunged forward with the spear.

The purple beam fired from the tip of the spear collided head-on with Hyeonwon Ak’s reddish-black ice blast.

Boom—!

The entire Hundred Thousand Mountains shook.

It was a collision of overwhelming power.

However, the balance, which seemed like it would be tense, did not hold for even a single exchange.

The moment the Annihilation, which Hyeonwon Ak had taken pride in as the power of God, touched my spear strike, it shattered like glass and evaporated.

“This makes no sense……! The power bestowed by the Young Cult Leader……!”.

“There is one thing Hyeokryeon Geuk misunderstood.”

I whispered coldly, having already closed the distance right in front of Hyeonwon Ak’s eyes.

“Forcibly mixing energies does not mean completion. That is merely a temporary measure right before an explosion.”.

Thwack!

My Ice White Divine Spear pierced through Hyeonwon Ak’s qi center without mercy.

“Keuh, keu-heok……!”

Hyeonwon Ak's blood-colored eyes were dyed with shock.

The flames of the Extreme Yang and the cold qi of the Extreme Yin, which had penetrated through the tip of the spear, began to burn and freeze all the demonic qi that had been forcibly fused within his body.

"You, you monster-like bastard..... The Eldest Young Master..... will kill you.....".

"Hyeokryeon Geuk will follow after you someday."

As I roughly pulled out the spear, Hyeonwon Ak's massive body crumbled like dust and scattered into the wind of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

It was the vain and horrific end of the Heaven Shaking Saber Demon, the head of the Hyeonwon Demon Clan, one of the Five Great Demon Clans.

Once the situation was over, I withdrew the Ice White Divine Spear and let out a light breath.

At that moment, the sound of urgent footsteps was heard from the entrance of the collapsed Young Cult Leader's Hall.

".....What on earth is this?"

Standing there was Yayul Cheon-ung, the Hell Poison Demon, with a stiff expression.

Having noticed the signs of rebellion from the Thunderbolt Demon Clan and rushing to stabilize the headquarters, they had clearly witnessed me cutting down Hyeonwon Ak in a single strike.

"You have arrived, Clan Head Yayul.".

I greeted him nonchalantly while shaking the blood off my hand.

Yayul Cheon-ung swallowed hard as he looked at the fragments of Hyeonwon Ak's broadsword scattered on the floor.

-He is not the Third Young Master I used to know. This momentum is..... like the Cult Leader of the past, no, even more than that..

Without hesitation, Yayul Cheon-ung knelt on one knee toward me and performed a clasped hands greeting.

"Yayul Cheon-ung, Head of the Yayul Demon Clan, greets the Third Young Master!".

It was the moment the Yayul Demon Clan stood on my side.

“Please stand up, Clan Head Yayul.”.

At my calm voice, Yayul Cheon-ung slowly raised his head.

“I have suppressed the Young Clan Head of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, and as you just saw, the Head of the Hyeonwon Demon Clan has also died by my hand.”.

The Hell Poison Demon sensed that perhaps the master of these Hundred Thousand Mountains might change.

I looked around the destroyed Young Cult Leader’s Hall and gave an order.

“Since the Dokgo Demon Clan bastards must have locked their gates in fear, there won't be any force within the Cult to cause a major rebellion for the time being. Clan Head Yayul, please take charge of the recovery and control of the headquarters that Hyeokryeon Geuk has vacated.”.

“Are you saying you are entrusting the full authority of the Hundred Thousand Mountains to our Yayul Demon Clan?”.

“Yes. And.....”

My gaze turned toward my second brother, Hyeokryeon Mu, who was lying unconscious while being supported by Eun Bin in the back.

He had survived because I had absorbed the murky demonic qi that had been forcibly injected into him, but he was in a state where absolute stability was required for the time being due to his torn blood vessels.

“Please protect my brother. Until I return, I will leave the safety of the Hundred Thousand Mountains and my brother to Clan Head Yayul.”.

Yayul Cheon-ung once again performed a firm clasped hands greeting without hesitation.

“I will stake the fate of the Yayul Demon Clan to repay the Third Young Master's grace and protect the headquarters. However..... where do you intend to go, Third Young Master?”.

My gaze turned toward the northern sky.

Deep within my qi center, the divine objects of the Ten Venerables were ominously resonating.

I had a rough idea of the real reason why that madman Hyeokryeon Geuk had left the Hundred Thousand Mountains and stolen the Ice Crystal.

“I have realized that what that crazy bastard Hyeokryeon Geuk wants are the divine objects.”.

He knew that I was obtaining the divine objects of the Ten Venerables.

In other words, he was also moving to become a Martial God.

Therefore,“I will go out to the Central Plains to collect the rest of the divine objects of the Ten Venerables and then return.”.

At that time, I would be with the forces of the Ice Palace.

Yayul Cheon-ung swallowed his dry spit quietly.

I turned around and met the eyes of the companions standing guard behind me.

There, Seol Ye-rin, emitting a cold chill, and the members of the Small Snow Squad were waiting in perfect combat readiness.

Eun Bin also carefully handed over Hyeokryeon Mu to the warriors of the Yayul Demon Clan and stood behind me.

“Miss Seol. It seems we have to move without any time to rest.”.

“It is fine.”

Seol Ye-rin answered with a smile.

The Small Snow Squad members also raised their weapons all at once, waiting for my order to fall.

-Tsk tsk, you have to find four more..

-To think that finding the legacy of the Ice Emperor is the priority. Fate is truly tragic..

-I shall provide my assistance.

The voices of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint echoed in my head.

I gripped the Ice White Divine Spear again, wrapping my entire body in Extreme Yang Qi and the darkness of the Dark Venerable.

***

Dense dust rose behind my cavalry as we descended the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Although the urgent fire within the Demonic Cult was put out as the Yayul Demon Clan took control of the headquarters, my expression was heavier than ever.

The Ice White Divine Spear in my hand was pointing north, trembling slightly.

“Young Master, where is our next destination?”.

Seol Ye-rin asked as we galloped side by side.

I glanced back.

Mu-myeong was following behind the Small Snow Squad.

Mu-myeong was the blood descendant of the Poison Venerable whom I met in the tomb of the Poison Venerable in Guizhou.

I had once promised Mu-myeong that I would help him reclaim the Sichuan Tang Clan.

I took out the Secret History, which contained the arrangements of the Ten Venerables, from my robe and skimmed through it.

“We are going to Sichuan.”.

At my short declaration, Mu-myeong’s shoulders trembled minutely.

I did not miss his reaction and added.

“I promised you. That I would help you reclaim your clan. Coincidentally, I have obtained a clue that the traces of the Illusion Venerable, one of the remaining Ten Venerables, are near Mount Emei in Sichuan.”.

-Tsk tsk, the Illusion Venerable. That fox-like girl's divine object was hidden in Sichuan..

-Third Young Master, the Illusion Venerable’s divine object, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, is a mirror that reflects a person's heart. It is a perfect item for causing inner demons.

The voices of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen echoed in my mind.

I adjusted the Ice White Divine Spear on my back and increased my speed.

The road to Chengdu, Sichuan Province, was arduous.

***

A few days later.

As we entered the boundary of Sichuan, the scent of poisonous herbs mixed with the humid air on the wind.

To Mu-myeong, who had grown up in Sichuan for over a decade, this smell was the scent of home and the stench of the traitors who had swallowed his clan.

“……We have arrived.”

He snapped out of it at my voice as I rode ahead.

Mu-myeong gripped the horse's reins tightly.

The sweat breaking out on his palms turned cold.

Sichuan Tang Clan.

Once, it was a prestigious family that dominated the poison and hidden weapons of the Murim in the Central Plains, but the landscape of Sichuan unfolding before Mu-myeong’s eyes now was quite different from what he knew.

At every crossroad toward Chengdu, the flags of the Saphaeryeon were fluttering.

“Mu-myeong, your face looks like you've eaten poison.”.

Wi Ji-yeong, who had approached his side before he knew it, spoke nonchalantly.

Normally he would have retorted, but right now he didn't even have the luxury for that.

“……You must be feeling complicated.”

Mu-myeong stared at the Tang Clan’s main residence crouching far off in Chengdu.

When he met the Third Young Master in the tomb of the Poison Venerable, he had promised Mu-myeong.

That he would reclaim Mu-myeong’s clan. To be honest, he had been skeptical at that time. What power would a discarded prince of the Demonic Cult have to overturn a giant family in Sichuan?.

But now he knew.

That this man running in front of him was already a monster walking the path of a Martial God, having surpassed the human realm.

“Mu-myeong.”

I stopped my horse and looked back at Mu-myeong. My purple eyes seemed to pierce deep into his chest.

“Yes, Young Master.”.

“It seems the Myriad Poison Formation is spread out from here. Can you break through it?”.

Mu-myeong dismounted from his horse and knelt.

He took out the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand, the legacy of the Poison Venerable, from his robe and gripped it.

This hidden weapon, which was the symbol of his clan, was trembling in Mu-myeong’s hand due to his anger.

“There are no shortcuts. But..... I think I know the only blood path through which we can pass without dying. Please follow me.”.

Mu-myeong took the lead and threw himself into the forest.

Following behind, Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and the members of the Small Snow Squad followed Mu-myeong like shadows.

At that moment, things blocking our path jumped out.

Boom—!

In an instant, the extreme chill that erupted filled the forest, freezing the purple mist that had filled it and making it fall to the ground.

The poisonous herbs and spiderweb-like traps that were blocking the path were shattered into pieces.

“I have cleared away the mist. Keep going.”

Mu-myeong shuddered at my indifferent command.

There wasn't even a need to avoid the traps.

Eventually, we broke through the Myriad Poison Formation.

Mu-myeong finally arrived in front of the Gate of Myriad Poisons, the outer wall of the Tang Clan.

On top of the wall, the warriors of the Tang Clan dressed in black and the experts of the Saphaeryeon were standing with their weapons glinting, as if they had already been waiting for us.

From the center, Tang Cheon-ak, who was currently in control of the Tang Clan, looked down at the group with a smile and asked.

“……How did you enter this place?”

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Chapter 144 : Illusion Venerable

The Gate of Myriad Poisons was destroyed.

The extreme chill erupting from the Ice White Divine Spear instantly turned the sturdy castle gate that the Tang Clan had taken pride in into a lump of scrap metal.

Beyond the cloud of dust, the faces of the Tang Clan warriors filled with shock were visible.

In the center of them, Tang Cheon-ak’s face contorted menacingly.

“……How did you enter this place?”

“Didn't you see me break in?”

“Y-you crazy bastard! Subdue the intruders! Pour out the Myriad Heavens Flower Rain!”

With Tang Cheon-ak’s command, thousands, tens of thousands of hidden weapons poured down from the top of the wall.

The hidden weapons steeped in poison covered the sky like a massive black wave.

-Tsk tsk, it is quite flashy.

-The Tang Clan is indeed the Tang Clan.

-Are you going to be defeated by mere hidden weapons?

Along with the voices of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint, I adjusted my grip on the spear shaft.

Striking down each hidden weapon one by one was a waste of time.

“Miss Seol.”

“Yes.”

Absolute Ice Wall.

Crash—!

A massive wall of ice was formed in the air.

The pouring hidden weapons were either embedded in the ice wall or bounced off, falling helplessly to the ground.

While the Tang Clan warriors were panicking, I lightly tapped Mu-myeong on the shoulder.

“Go. You should cut down your enemy with your own hands.”

Mu-myeong nodded instead of answering and swung the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand.

The elites of the Tang Clan tried to block him, but the lightning erupting from the tip of my spear tore their formation to shreds.

I moved my feet while staring straight into Tang Cheon-ak’s eyes.

With every step I took, black frost settled on the ground.

“Tang Cheon-ak, I don't care whether you sold your country or your clan to the Saphaeryeon. However.....”

I held the Ice White Divine Spear at an angle.

Whirrr, whirrr.

The divine objects reacted.

The energy of the Illusion Venerable that Tang Cheon-ak possessed sensed the distorted illusions nearby and let out a cry.

“So you are the one holding the Illusion Venerable’s divine object.”

“How did you! If you came aiming for the divine object.....”

The Illusion Venerable’s divine object.

The Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection.

Tang Cheon-ak pulled out a small, brilliantly shining mirror from his robe.

Then, the surrounding space began to shimmer.

The destroyed castle gate was rebuilt, and the dead warriors came back to life, beginning to surround me.

“...It is an illusion art.”

-Tsk tsk, you couldn't even prepare for it.

-Be careful!

Simultaneously with the Demon Queen’s warning, my vision was dyed red.

The memories of my past life.

The miserable moment of my final end, when my heart was pierced by Hyeokryeon Geuk’s blade and I was discarded like a dog, unfolded before my eyes.

The Tang Cheon-ak in front of me changed into Hyeokryeon Geuk’s face and let out a sneer.

“Have you come to die again, you miserable bastard son?”

I felt a pain as if my heart was being squeezed.

However, I smiled.

Because the memories of my past life were not painful to me, but merely the driving force that made me grit my teeth.

“This is too cliché for an illusion.”

I pulled up the darkness of the Dark Venerable from deep within my qi center.

Illusion arts are made through light. If that is the case, then I just need to cover it with an absolute darkness where even that light does not exist.

Universal Phenomenon Annihilation.

Sizzle—

The pitch-black darkness that started from beneath my feet swallowed the brilliant illusions in an instant.

Both Hyeokryeon Geuk's face and the blood-soaked grave of my past life melted and disappeared into the darkness.

Clang—!

Along with the sound of glass breaking, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection held in Tang Cheon-ak's hand began to lose its light.

"H-how! For the illusion art to be broken!"

"How could someone swallowed by an illusion art know the end of an illusion?"

At Tang Cheon-ak's exclamation of shock, I took a step closer.

Once the absolute darkness chewed up the illusion and cleared away, a heavy fear pressed down on Tang Cheon-ak's entire body.

"Y-you monster-like bastard……! Don't come any closer!"

Tang Cheon-ak hurriedly backed away and swung his sleeve strongly.

The Sichuan Tang Clan Head's specialized hidden weapon, the Pear Blossom Rain Needle, was fired while carrying a deep blue poison, aiming for my entire body.

However, I didn't even think about dodging.

"For someone called the Head of the Sichuan Tang Clan to not even know the source of poison and just scatter hidden weapons about."

Both of my hands began to be dyed black as pitch.

The legacy of the Poison Venerable, the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand.

Sizzle—!

As my hand swept through the air, the hundreds of Pear Blossom Rain Needles that were flying in like a swarm of locusts lost their power in mid-air and fell down with a clatter.

The dense poison of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand had conversely corroded the shallow poison coated on the hidden weapons.

"T-Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand?! How do you know our Tang Clan's lost secret technique……!"

Tang Cheon-ak’s two eyes widened as if they would tear.

Instead of answering, I swung the shaft of the Ice White Divine Spear and strongly struck Tang Cheon-ak’s knee.

Crack—!

“Aaaaagh!”

Tang Cheon-ak fell prostrate on the ground, screaming from the pain of his kneecap shattering.

I picked up the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection rolling on the ground and tucked it into my robe while turning my gaze behind me.

“Tang Mu-myeong.”

At my call, Mu-myeong, who had struck down the elites of the Tang Clan and left them bloodied, approached while breathing heavily.

Both of Mu-myeong’s hands were also dyed in a dense black light, just like mine.

It was the energy of the pure Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand that only the true bloodline of the Poison Venerable could emit.

I pointed toward Tang Cheon-ak with a tilt of my chin.

“It is time to pull down the fake and reclaim your place.”

Mu-myeong nodded and blocked the path of the trembling Tang Cheon-ak.

The Elders and warriors of the Tang Clan, while trapped behind the overwhelming ice wall, watched the energy of the Ten Thousand Heavens' Poison Hand rising from Mu-myeong’s hand with shocked eyes.

“T-that energy is.....”

“The one from the legends that is said to be passed down only to the true legitimate bloodline of the Tang Clan.....!”

At the trembling voices of the Elders, Tang Cheon-ak vomited blood foam and shrieked.

“Shut up! How could a beast bastard without any roots like that be of the Tang Clan’s bloodline! I am the Clan Head! I am the true one of the Sichuan Tang Clan.....!”

“Be quiet.”

The black fine needle fired from Mu-myeong's fingertip accurately pierced Tang Cheon-ak's acupoint.

Myriad Heavens Flower Rain.

Although it was not on the scale of covering the sky that I had shown, it was a perfect fundamental hidden weapon art of the Tang Clan that the martial artists of the Sichuan Tang Clan could recognize at once.

"Keo-heok……!"

Ten thousand needles were embedded into Tang Cheon-ak.

It was the vain end of the fake who had seized the clan through lies and clung to the Saphaeryeon to sell out the Tang Clan's honor.

Silence hung over the walls of the Tang Clan.

I withdrew the Ice White Divine Spear and coldly declared toward the Elders of the Tang Clan who were trembling beyond the ice wall.

"This child is the bloodline born of the Poison Venerable's great-granddaughter, and the true legitimate bloodline of the Sichuan Tang Clan. As of today, the master of the Sichuan Tang Clan shall be this Tang Mu-myeong…… are there any who have a complaint?"

No one could answer.

Before Seol Ye-rin, who was emitting a cold chill behind me, the overwhelming martial prowess that had suppressed their Clan Head in an instant, and the true martial arts of the Tang Clan shown by Mu-myeong, they all knelt at once.

"Tang Mu-myeong? The great-grandson of the Poison Venerable?"

"Then what about the Young Master?"

"I believe it will be difficult to decide on the master of the Tang Clan right this instant."

The Elder of the Tang Clan, Tang Mu-baek, stepped forward from beyond the ice wall with trembling steps.

He was the Great Elder of the Tang Clan and one of the seniors with the highest voice within the clan.

He had normally felt dissatisfaction with Tang Cheon-ak's tyranny and his collusion with the Saphaeryeon, but he had been living quietly because of Tang Cheon-ak's martial prowess and the Illusion Venerable's divine object that he held.

Tang Mu-baek's gaze passed over Tang Cheon-ak, who was lying on the ground like a lump of meat, and rested on Mu-myeong's hands dyed in dense black light.

".....That energy is, without a doubt, the source of poison and hidden weapon art of the Tang Clan. It is indeed the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand which was known to be lost."

Tang Mu-baek's hoarse voice echoed through the walls.

He slowly, very slowly approached Mu-myeong and then knelt on both knees and prostrated himself.

"Great Elder Tang Mu-baek. I greet the true legitimate bloodline who has inherited the blood of the Poison Venerable!"

As the Great Elder knelt, the other Elders and warriors who were in confusion also took their hands off their weapons and prostrated themselves on the ground all at once.

"B-but Great Elder! The Young Master, who is the bloodline of Clan Head Tang Cheon-ak, is still alive!"

One warrior shouted urgently, but Tang Mu-baek turned his head and glared at him fiercely.

"Tang Cheon-ak is a traitor who became a dog of the Saphaeryeon and sold the clan's secrets and poison to outsiders! His bloodline also has no right to lead the Tang Clan. This child, who has brought back the true power of our Sichuan Tang Clan, is the new Young Master of the Tang Clan!"

At that shout, there was no one else who raised an objection.

Mu-myeong, who had lived trapped as a strange person in a dark tomb for many years, looked back at me as if flustered, seeing the hundreds of people prostrating before him.

"Young Master..... Am I, really....."

"I promised you."

I lightly tapped Mu-myeong's shoulder with the hilt of the Blue Sword.

"That I would find your home for you. Now that the fake has disappeared, the real one should sit in that place and lead the Tang Clan. The Poison Venerable would also want that."

Mu-myeong's eyes grew red.

After bowing deeply toward Seol Ye-rin and me, he turned toward the seniors of the Tang Clan who were supporting him.

It was the moment the new master of the Sichuan Tang Clan was born, no longer a strange person inside a tomb.

Leaving that scene behind, I pulled out the Illusion Venerable's divine object, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, which I had put in my robe. My purple eyes were reflected on the brilliant surface of the mirror.

-Tsk tsk, you have collected another one.

-Oh my, the mirror of the Illusion Venerable!

-Is this the seventh one?

The voices of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint echoed alternately in my head.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist, Zither, Dark, and now the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection of the Illusion Venerable that I just obtained.

The seven energies within my qi center caused a massive resonance and began to rotate while biting each other's tails.

The end of that resonance was pointing toward one clear direction.

"Third Young Master."

Seol Ye-rin withdrew the ice wall and approached, standing by my side.

Her gaze was also directed toward the mirror held in my hand.

"What is it?"

"But why would Tang Cheon-ak have had the Illusion Venerable's divine object?"

It was indeed a question.

Usually, the Ten Venerables were always present when obtaining a divine object.

At that moment.

-Did you like my illusion art?

Someone's telepathic message reached me.

Chapter 145 : Chapter 145

Chapter 145 : War

The world is a grand illusion.

People tend to see only what they want to see and believe only what they want to believe.

The Illusion Venerable, Danmok Ryeong, ridiculed that shallow blind faith and constructed a perfect world within the divine object, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection.

However, while Danmok Ryeong lost her physical body and slept within the mirror, the person who happened to pick up this noble divine object was a worldly fake Clan Head of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

The illusion arts that Tang Cheon-ak produced were nothing but shallow.

He merely dragged out the opponent's shallow fears and decorated them with a flashy exterior.

Seeing the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection being used for such a third-rate fraud, Danmok Ryeong did not know how many times she had sneered from within the mirror.

Then, "that man" appeared.

A man who emitted pitch-black darkness and brilliant flames at the same time.

That man did not even bat an eye in the face of the horrific nightmare of his past life that Tang Cheon-ak had created by borrowing Danmok Ryeong’s power.

Instead, he ridiculed it and chewed up that brilliant barrier of illusion arts with "absolute darkness."

"Universal Phenomenon Annihilation."

That was the disgusting energy of the Dark Venerable that Danmok Ryeong knew very well.

-Did you like my illusion art?

When Danmok Ryeong broke the long silence and sent a telepathic message into the man’s head.

Far from being flustered, the man chuckled and tapped the smooth surface of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection with his finger.

“I didn’t know the Illusion Venerable was hiding in here.”

I didn't know the Illusion Venerable was hiding in here.

A cheeky brat.

But she wasn't hateful.

That spirit , which saw through the essence of illusion arts and suppressed them with power, did not fall behind any of the previous Ten Venerables under the heavens.

-Ho? You immediately noticed that I am the Illusion Venerable.

As Danmok Ryeong answered while faintly projecting an image onto the surface of the mirror, familiar and absurd voices broke into Danmok Ryeong’s mirror.

-Tsk tsk, what a fox-like woman. You were still stuck inside a mirror!

-Is it the Illusion Venerable inside here?

-Sigh, another noisy ghost has been added. My ears are ringing.

Danmok Ryeong confirmed the souls hovering around my qi center beyond the mirror and let out a stunned, hollow laugh.

-What kind of harmony is this? To think those high-and-mighty old fogies of the North Sea would be huddled together inside this narrow qi center. You, what is your true identity?

At Danmok Ryeong’s question, I calmly replied while stowing away the Blue and Red Twin Swords.

“Hyeokryeon Yeom.”

I didn't ask for your name.

“Illusion Venerable. I understand that your Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection is a divine object that reflects light and creates phantoms, but isn't the original purpose for which the Ice Emperor entrusted this mirror to you something else?”

For a moment, Danmok Ryeong was speechless.

To think I would know about the Ice Emperor.

Did I know what role the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection played when the divine objects of the Ten Venerables gathered?

-……Hmph, it plays the role of a guide, and well, it does other things too.

When Danmok Ryeong muttered, I nodded.

“Right. It reflects the locations of the other scattered divine objects and ultimately serves as the key and compass to open the door to 'the place closest to the sky' hidden by the Ice Emperor Seol Cheon-u, right?”

My eyes shone as if they would pierce through the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection.

The six energies of Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist, Zither, and Dark coiled within my qi center were creating a massive resonance toward her mirror, demanding submission.

Danmok Ryeong frowned but decided to acknowledge my spirit.

-Fine. I will allow you to use my Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection. If it is you, who even swallowed the disgusting darkness of the Dark Venerable, you will not close your eyes even before the true hell that my mirror will reflect.

Danmok Ryeong’s soul spread through the entire Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection and connected as one with the energies settled within my qi center.

When the seven divine objects gathered together, a thick mist frosted over the clear surface of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, and it soon began to reflect one distinct landscape.

-Now, look. This is your next destination.

The place reflected in the mirror was a place surrounded by rugged mountains like a folding screen, with a massive lake enveloped in mist.

It was the sight of a massive water keep where someone was engaged in a blood-soaked battle.

“……It is Dongting Lake.”

Seol Ye-rin, who had approached behind me, muttered softly as she looked into the mirror.

“The place where Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang is entrenched, and where the Twin Venerable’s bracelet is located. It was a place I had to go back to eventually.”

I deeply stowed the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection in my robe and turned my head.

My gaze passed beyond the gates of Sichuan Province and was heading toward the far-off Hunan Province.

***

Inside the carriage heading toward Hunan after leaving Sichuan.

Seol Ye-rin pretended to cast her gaze out the window while stealing a glance at me.

The new divine object stowed in my robe, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection.

The energy of the Illusion Venerable, Danmok Ryeong, who had awakened within it, was strangely bothersome.

'A fox-like woman.....'

The shout that the Cold Snow Demon Queen Jang So-ryeong had spat out toward the Illusion Venerable lingered in her ears.

Occasionally, the voices of the Martial Gods would be heard by Seol Ye-rin like this.

As if there weren't already enough people to worry about by the Third Young Master’s side, to think he would now collect a hundred-year-old female ghost.

Cool Extreme Yin Qi unconsciously rose from Seol Ye-rin’s fingertips.

The first one to notice that Seol Ye-rin’s mood was not good was Cheon Deung-jin, the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace, who was sitting opposite her.

'Miss Seol’s energy has become sharp again.'

Cheon Deung-jin swallowed a bitter smile and carefully picked up a teacup.

She, too, could not take her eyes off me.

Possessing the Fire Spirit Body , she instinctively resonated with my Extreme Yang Qi.

The Young Master, who had swallowed the darkness of the Dark Venerable in the Black Lotus Cave and now added the energy of the Illusion Venerable, was indeed changing like an unapproachable monster, but to Cheon Deung-jin, he was simply the benefactor and object of adoration she wanted to serve for the rest of her life.

“Young Master, it is a long journey, so please have a cup of warm tea. These leaves were roasted with the energy of a fire spirit, so they will help manage your qi and blood.”

Cheon Deung-jin held out a cup of tea she had carefully brewed toward me.

Warm steam rose like a haze above the teacup.

But before the teacup could touch my hand, a bone-chilling cold wrapped around it.

Crack—

“Currently, seven energies are swirling in the Third Young Master's qi center. It is much better to cool down the heat rather than have hot tea.”

As Seol Ye-rin smiled brightly and snapped her fingers, the hot tea water cooled down to a perfect temperature for drinking.

Cheon Deung-jin’s eyebrows trembled.

“Miss Seol’s ice arts are indeed wonderful, but the Young Master’s foundation is the Extreme Yang Body. Wouldn't warm heat be more comfortable?”

“It was the Third Young Master’s yang qi that saved me when I was dying, covered in ice crystals. I believe I know the harmony of that energy better, though?”

The air inside the carriage instantly turned into a crossroads of a cold blizzard and hot flames.

It was to the point where the Small Snow Squad members driving the carriage outside were breaking out in a cold sweat from the invisible battle of nerves.

At that moment, a faint purple glow flowed out from my robe.

-Ho? This is quite an interesting sight to see. A battle of nerves between the Ice Flower of the North Sea and the flame of the Western Regions over one man.

The voluptuous voice of the Illusion Venerable, Danmok Ryeong, from within the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection echoed in my head.

Of course, due to the connection of energy, that voice was clearly heard by Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin as well.

The two women’s gazes simultaneously pierced sharply toward the place in my robe where the mirror was.

“……Illusion Venerable. Please travel quietly. It won't do any good to upset these two.”

I scratched the back of my head as if troubled and tapped the mirror.

I stealthily picked up the teacup and downed it in one breath.

It was a strange taste, ice-cold yet warm as it went down the throat.

“Dongting Lake ……”

I shifted the atmosphere by turning my gaze out the window.

“Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang. Last time, when the Twin Venerable’s bracelet reacted at Yueyang Tower, I couldn't properly settle the score before coming back.”

At my words, Seol Ye-rin’s transparent eyes sank coldly.

This was because she remembered having to step back for a moment to change Murim's perception of the Ice Palace when she encountered Yong Il-gang at Dongting Lake in the past.

“I won't step back this time. Whether that man is the Saphaeryeon Leader or the Supreme Ruler…… if he blocks the Third Young Master’s path, I will freeze the entirety of Dongting Lake.”

Seol Ye-rin tightly grasped the ice sword hanging at her waist.

Cheon Deung-jin also did not back down and let her eyes shine.

“The time has come to repay the humiliation of the Twin Venerable who pursued us to Potala Palace. Just as I did at the Great Thunder Temple and the Beast Palace , I will guard your back this time as well, Young Master.”

Although the two were clashing every time because of their affection for me, at the moment they faced an enemy, the resolute fighting spirit worthy of the Young Palace Heads of the North Sea and Potala Palace was in unison.

“That’s reassuring.”

I chuckled and looked at the two of them alternately.

“Once I retrieve the Twin Venerable’s bracelet from Yong Il-gang, that makes eight. Since we have to break through the main camp of the Saphaeryeon, it’s going to get a bit noisy.”

“If it gets noisy, we can just freeze everything.”

“Burning it all down would be fine too.”

The carriage galloped relentlessly through the rugged mountain terrain into the thick mist of Hunan Province.

Thus, we arrived in Hunan Province.

The air felt as soon as we entered the boundary of Hunan Province held a heavy pressure different from the humidity of Sichuan.

As we approached Dongting Lake , which is called the lifeline of the Central Plains, refugees lined the roads, and black smoke rose from every village.

“Captain, the atmosphere is unusual.”

Baek Mu-yong, who was guarding the side of the carriage, reported as he slowed down his horse.

I opened the window and looked outside.

On the flags discarded by the roadside, the four rings, the symbol of the Saphaeryeon, were clearly marked.

“It seems the Saphaeryeon has finally revealed its true colors.”

Originally, Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang had taken the approach of gradually encroaching on the hegemony of the Central Plains Murim by emphasizing justification and power.

But the sight unfolding before my eyes now did not look like a normal expansion of influence.

“Young Palace Head.”

At that moment, Eun Bin, who had returned from scouting the surroundings, reported.

“It seems there has been a 'war'.”

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Chapter 146 : Divine Object Without an Owner

It was just as Eun Bin had reported.

The peaceful scenery of Dongting Lake was nowhere to be seen, and the villages lined up along the lakeshore were in a horrific state, no different from a battlefield.

The stench of blood vibrated between the broken houses, and those who survived were rummaging through the ashes in a daze.

“Those Saphaeryeon bastards..... did they commit such acts after discussing the order of Murim?”

Seol Ye-rin tightly gripped the hilt of her Ice Sword.

A chill bloomed around her, freezing the blood on the ground white.

Normally, I would have calmed her energy, but right now, my eyes were also filled with a purple killing intent as they sank coldly.

“It doesn't look like they started a war to expand their territory.”

My gaze turned toward Yueyang Tower, which was shrouded in thick fog in the center of Dongting Lake.

Traces of various energies remained.

-Hehe, that energy..... the bracelets of those twins, Gwak Wi and Jang Wi, are resonating like crazy.

-Third Young Master, the energy of the bracelets is running wild. It seems that man, Yong Il-gang, is trying to forcibly awaken the divine object!

-Tsk, a killing intent more poisonous than the cold of the North Sea has covered the lake.

As the heavy advice of Seol Yeong-jin, the Ice Soul Spear Saint, echoed in my mind, I adjusted my grip on the shaft of the Ice White Divine Spear.

The blue starlight embedded in the spearhead reacted to the murky demonic qi of Dongting Lake and emitted a sharp resonating sound.

Boom—!

At that moment, a massive water column soared from the direction of the water keep by the lakeshore, and an explosion was heard.

“Aaaagh!”

“A monster! A monster has appeared!”

Saphaeryeon warriors screamed as they popped out of the water.

They were not human.

They were monstrosities whose entire bodies were covered in pitch-black scales and whose pupils were slit vertically.

“.....That is!”

Cheon Deung-jin shouted in shock.

From the entire bodies of the monstrosities, an energy mixed with the blood qi of the Blood Cult, which I had seen in the Hundred Thousand Mountains, was spewing out.

“Hyeokryeon Geuk's hounds have already stretched their reach this far.”

I threw my body forward. Purple lightning cut through the atmosphere as I landed in the middle of the water in an instant.

When I struck the ground with the butt of the Ice White Divine Spear, a shockwave carrying the Fighting Venerable's pressure spread in all directions, shaking the entire water keep.

The bodies of the attacking monstrosities could not withstand the pressure and exploded in all directions.

“Kr, kraaaaagh!”

As the bodies of the water monsters exploded, dark red blood splattered everywhere.

The dark blue surface of Dongting Lake bubbled and boiled, and then an endless number of water monsters began to crawl up from the bottom of the lake.

They were horrific monsters modified by the secret arts of the Blood Cult, using the warriors of the Saphaeryeon's water keep as hosts.

“How dare these filthy things.”

Seol Ye-rin adjusted her grip on her Ice Sword and stepped to my side.

At the same time her blue hair fluttered, the humid wind blowing from the lake instantly turned into the biting wind of the North Sea.

Crackle—!

As Seol Ye-rin drew her Ice Sword through the air, hundreds of jang of Dongting Lake's surface, where the water monsters were crawling up, froze entirely.

The water monsters that had half-emerged from the water were trapped in the massive ice just like that and let out monstrous screams.

“Third Young Master, I will take care of the small fry!”

Cheon Deung-jin leaped above them.

The Fire Spirit Qi spewed from her fingertips became red flames and poured down onto the heads of the frozen water monsters.

Freezing with Extreme Yin and burning with the flames of Extreme Yang.

As the ice and fire intersected, the water monsters could not even resist once before turning into ashes and scattering over the lake.

The Saphaeryeon warriors who barely survived and were fleeing slumped down, losing their souls at that overwhelming destructive power.

“Ple, please save us……! We only took the pill the Alliance Leader gave us, but our comrades suddenly turned into monsters……!”

I looked down at him with cold eyes and assessed the situation.

'A pill of the Blood Cult. The Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang, that arrogant old man, eventually became blinded by power and swallowed the demonic hand of the Blood Cult with his own feet.'

At that moment, a faint light leaked from within my robes.

It was the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, the divine object of the Illusion Venerable Danmok Ryeong.

-Oh my, how horrific. I don't want to reflect such hideous things in my clear mirror.

Danmok Ryeong's voluptuous yet sharp telepathy rang in my head.

-Look at that tower over there. A wicked energy is coiling its nest.

The mirror surface of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection reflected Yueyang Tower in the center of Dongting Lake.

In my eyes, Yueyang Tower, which had only appeared as thick fog, was clearly seen through the mirror as pulsating while surrounded by a horrific blood-colored formation.

In the center of that formation, Yong Il-gang was running wild, trying to forcibly synchronize the Twin Venerables' bracelets with his own qi and blood.

“Saphaeryeon Leader. You coveted the divine object of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, and it seems your vessel is finally breaking.”

I roughly swung the Ice White Divine Spear to shake off the blood on the tip.

“Eun Bin, Baek Mu-yong, Wi Ji-yeong!”

“Yes, Captain!”

The members of the Small Snow Squad who followed behind all drew their weapons and lined up.

“Clean up all the remnants of the water keep and the water monsters, and if there are people still breathing, save them. Build a base so the Divine Physician and Miss Seong can treat them.”

“We will follow your orders!”

After finishing my instructions, I immediately kicked off the frozen surface of Dongting Lake and shot toward Yueyang Tower.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin also followed my side without hesitation.

Whoooooosh—!

Purple lightning, blue chill, and red flames became one and dashed across the frozen Dongting Lake.

The goal was Yueyang Tower, where the wicked energy was pulsating.

But it was before they could even reach the entrance of Yueyang Tower.

Boom—!

The thick ice surrounding the front of Yueyang Tower soared as if exploding, and a massive water column rose.

Amidst the falling debris, a man of huge stature, easily ten cheok tall, blocked the way.

“I cannot let you interfere with the Alliance Leader's sacred work!”

It was Gam Pae, the Mad Wave Water Ghost and the Chief Boss of the Waterways who oversaw the waterways of Dongting Lake.

But his appearance was no different from the water monsters that had fallen earlier.

Having swallowed the high-quality blood pill bestowed by the Saphaeryeon Leader, his entire body was covered in dark red scales, and the flesh on both sides of his neck was torn like gills, exhaling a bizarre breath.

In his hands, he held a massive anchor that would easily weigh thousands of geun.

“A man who is a boss of the Saphaeryeon has eventually degenerated into a monster of the Blood Cult? Do you believe that to be a sacred work even after seeing your own state?”

I laughed as I leveled the Ice White Divine Spear.

Gam Pae's vertically slit pupils distorted with rage.

“Shut up! This overwhelming power is the true end of martial arts promised by the Alliance Leader! I will dye the front of Yueyang Tower red with your blood!”

Thump!

As Gam Pae swung the massive anchor, a blood-colored wave mixed with the murky qi of the Blood Cult rose like a tsunami and swept toward my group.

It was a wave of deadly poison that made the qi and blood rot.

“How dare you try to splash filthy water on the Young Master!”

Cheon Deung-jin tried to step forward while exploding her Fire Spirit Qi.

But I stepped forward a beat earlier and adjusted my grip on the Ice White Divine Spear.

“Miss Cheon, please step back. It is cleaner to freeze and shatter such rotten water than to burn it.”

My eyes flashed.

In my qi center, the pressure of the Fighting Venerable, the energy of Extreme Yang, and the darkness of the Dark Venerable tangled together and flowed into the Ice White Divine Spear.

Having accepted my energy following the spear saint's, the Ice White Divine Spear began to spew out a chill.

Heaven Breaking Ice Flame Spear.

The moment I thrust the spear, the noise of space stopped.

A purple beam shot from the spearhead, cut through the blood-colored tsunami, and collided accurately with Gam Pae's anchor.

Crackle—! Crash!

“Wh, what……!”

Gam Pae's eyes were dyed with horror.

His anchor, which boasted absolute destructive power, froze white as soon as it touched my spear strike, and then shattered into pieces like a glass window.

But the trajectory of the spear did not stop there.

Stab!

“Ke, huk……!”

The razor-sharp blade of the Ice White Divine Spear pierced through Gam Pae's thick scales and accurately penetrated his heart.

The extreme cold and the darkness of the Dark Venerable that infiltrated through the spearhead froze and corroded all the demonic qi of the Blood Cult flowing through his veins.

“Do you think you can face us…… with power obtained from picking up and eating a single pill?”

As I roughly pulled out the spear, Gam Pae's massive body became ice fragments mixed with black ash and scattered vainly in the front yard of Yueyang Tower.

It was a death too fast and one-sided for the final end of the Chief Boss of the Waterways who had commanded Dongting Lake.

“Now, then.”

I tapped the shaft of the Ice White Divine Spear on the ground and walked toward the firmly closed massive wooden doors of Yueyang Tower.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin also stood by my side, leaving behind the scattered remains without regret.

Boom—!

With a single kick of mine, the heavy doors of Yueyang Tower were pulverized and blown away.

Through the thick dust, the three of us who entered the first floor of the pavilion were struck by a stench of blood so foul it was hard to breathe.

“Aaaagh! I…… I, the great Yong Il-gang…… do you think I will be consumed by this kind of power!”

In the center of the pavilion.

The Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang, who once commanded the Central Plains and dreamed of being the best under the heavens, was rolling below the throne and vomiting blood.

Embedded in Yong Il-gang's right arm were the Twin Venerables' bracelets.

The divine object was losing its light.

The murky demonic qi of the Blood Cult had contaminated the bracelets, and the bracelets were conversely sucking in Yong Il-gang's qi and blood, mutating his arm into the form of a dark red monster.

I looked down at the Saphaeryeon Leader crawling on the floor and spoke.

“That's why greedily taking a divine object without an owner always leads to trouble.”

At my voice, Yong Il-gang stood up, his bloodshot eyes flashing.

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Chapter 147 : Two Divine Objects

“Th, this fellow..... Hyeokryeon Yeom.....!”

Yong Il-gang's voice was no longer that of the Supreme Ruler who once commanded the Central Plains.

A metallic sound mixed between his torn vocal cords, and his entire body was twisting as if screaming as the dark red demonic qi and the golden energy emitted by the Twin Venerable's bracelets collided.

-Hehe, what a sight. Coveting a divine object without knowing your own vessel, now your arm is being eaten whole by the divine object.

-Third Young Master, be careful! Yong Il-gang's qi and blood are already ruined, but the repulsive force emitted by the divine object as it runs wild cannot be ignored!

-Tsk, cut off that filthy forearm entirely with my spear. I cannot stand to see a noble divine object being contaminated by such disgusting murky qi.

At the sound of Seol Yeong-jin the Ice Soul Spear Saint clicking his tongue, I spun the Ice White Divine Spear in my grip and nodded.

“I agree. It is best to cut out such rotten parts as quickly as possible.”

“Kraaaaagh! Arrogant brat! I, I am the best under the heavens!”

Yong Il-gang glared with bloodshot eyes and kicked off the floor, springing upward.

The dark red demonic qi spewing from his right arm transformed into the shape of a giant beast's claw and poured down over my head.

The golden enhanced qi emitted by the Twin Venerable's bracelets mixed bizarrely with the murky qi of the Blood Cult, creating a pressure that crushed the ceiling of Yueyang Tower and seemed to weigh down space itself.

“Young Master!”

“Third Young Master!”

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin tried to raise their ice and fire arts from behind, but I raised my hand to stop them.

“Forget being the best under the heavens, you are merely a greedy ghost who does not even know the size of your own vessel.”

My purple eye light sank coldly.

The Extreme Yang Qi, the darkness of the Dark Venerable, and the North Sea's extreme cold qi unique to the Ice White Divine Spear tangled together in my qi center and shot toward the tip of the spear.

Heaven Breaking Ice Flame Spear.

Dark Abyss Slash.

I slashed the spear diagonally upward.

A flash of light mixed with purple lightning and pitch-black darkness sliced through Yong Il-gang's blood-colored claws like cutting tofu.

Crackle—! Slash!

“Kraaaaaaagh!”

Along with Yong Il-gang's piercing scream, his right arm, which had turned into a monster after being contaminated by the demonic qi of the Blood Cult, soared into the air.

The severed surface instantly necrotized due to the cold ice and purple flames without being able to shed a single drop of blood.

Thud, roll.

As the arm fell to the floor, the Twin Venerable's bracelets that had been embedded in the flesh bounced out and rolled to my feet.

“My, my bracelets! My power……!”

Yong Il-gang rolled on the floor and grabbed his severed right arm with his remaining left hand.

However, as the divine object fell away, the demonic qi of the Blood Cult that had been forcibly fused lost control and began to eat his body in reverse.

His skin burned black, his qi and blood boiled, and his entire body swelled up.

It was a truly miserable and horrific end for the Supreme Ruler who had dreamed of being the best under the heavens.

“Sa, save…… me. I, I will give everything of the Saphaeryeon to you……!”

“I have no need for something like the Saphaeryeon. Take the evil karma you sowed and gather it in the afterlife.”

When I gave a nonchalant kick, Yong Il-gang's body turned into blood-colored dust and scattered into the wind of Yueyang Tower.

As the situation ended, I withdrew the Ice White Divine Spear and picked up the Twin Venerable's bracelets that had fallen on the floor.

It was a bracelet that emitted a murky light due to being contaminated by the demonic qi of the Blood Cult, but when I breathed in the Extreme Yang Qi from my qi center and the Buddhist power of the Buddhist Venerable obtained from the Great Thunder Temple, a sizzling sound occurred and the blood-colored mist began to be purified.

Wooooooong—!

Finally regaining its original brilliant golden light, the Twin Venerable's bracelets caused a massive resonance with the other divine objects settled in my qi center.

-Hehe, we've recovered another one with this.

-Oh my, that crazy old man finally died by falling for his own trick. I feel so refreshed!

-Since the Saphaeryeon Leader has ended up in such a state, the Central Plains will be noisy for a while.

The voices of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint rang out in succession.

I tucked the purified bracelets into my robes and looked back.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin were approaching while letting out sighs of relief.

“Are you hurt anywhere, Third Young Master?”

“Yeah. It ended more simply than I thought. He was just a shell consumed by the Blood Cult's medicine.”

I replied calmly and looked out the window of the smashed Yueyang Tower.

The monsters that had occupied the water keep of Dongting Lake and the remnants of the Saphaeryeon had already been neatly cleaned up by the efforts of the Small Snow Squad and the two women.

“With this, the leadership of the Saphaeryeon that invaded the Hundred Thousand Mountains and the legacy of the Twin Venerable have all fallen into my hands.”

My gaze crossed the thick fog of Dongting Lake toward the far-off horizon.

Now, there were not many divine objects left to find to confirm the true hidden arrangement left by the Ice Emperor Seol Cheon-u.

“……It is the eighth one.”

There were two divine objects left.

I felt like I would have to rack my brains again to figure out where these two divine objects could be found.

***

The shore of Dongting Lake.

The temporary base was previously built by Eun Bin and Baek Mu-yong.

In that place where the stench of blood had not vanished, Seong I-han the Holy Hand Divine Physician and his granddaughter Seong Sang-ah were moving without rest.

They were in the middle of detoxifying and treating the survivors of the Saphaeryeon who had avoided mutating into monsters because they had not completely swallowed the blood pill of the Blood Cult.

“Young Master! You were safe!”

Wi Ji-yeong, who was the first to discover my party approaching from afar, stopped bandaging and waved her hand.

Tae Un-seo, who was boiling medicinal soup with a pot hung in a corner of the camp, and Eun Bin and Baek Mu-yong, who were guarding the perimeter, also approached at once and bowed their heads.

“What happened to the Saphaeryeon Leader?”

At Eun Bin's question, I took out the purified Twin Venerable's bracelets from my robes and showed them.

“He was consumed by the Blood Cult's medicine and broke by his own doing. It is safe to assume the leadership of the Saphaeryeon was annihilated as of today.”

Hearing those words, Seong I-han stopped his hands that were mashing herbs and let out a hollow laugh.

“Hoho..... for the Supreme Ruler who handled one axis of the Murim to collapse so vainly. Truly, the sound of the landscape of the Jianghu being overturned can be heard all the way here.”

“Are you disappointed, Elder?”

“What is there to be disappointed about? It is merely the end of one who became drunk on power and joined hands with a wicked group called the Blood Cult.”

I nodded calmly and then turned my gaze to look at Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin.

Both women had beads of sweat on their foreheads due to having fought a fierce battle, but their eyes were still full of life.

“Everyone worked hard. Since we have cleaned up the magical beasts of Dongting Lake, take a breath.”

After saying that, I sat down on a flat rock on one side of the camp.

Within my qi center, eight energies were causing a massive resonance and vomiting another craving.

The final two keys to go to 'the place closest to the sky,' the true legacy left by the Ice Emperor Seol Cheon-u.

I took out the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, the divine object of Danmok Ryeong the Illusion Venerable, which was emitting a brilliant light from within my robes.

“I forgot that the compass was already in my hand.”

I lightly tapped the smooth surface of the mirror with my finger.

“Illusion Venerable Elder. I think it is time for you to earn your keep.”

-Oh my, earn my keep. Do you think I am an old person who just takes up space inside your qi center?

The surface of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection shimmered with a faint purple light, and the voluptuous voice of Danmok Ryeong the Illusion Venerable echoed in my head.

-This fox-like girl. Stop playing hard to get and find the path quickly!

-That's right, Sister Illusion Venerable! I am also curious about where the next divine object is.

As the Snow Wind Sword Venerable and the Cold Snow Demon Queen joined in from within my mental world, Danmok Ryeong acted as if she couldn't win and raised a thick fog on the mirror's surface.

-What a bunch of noisy ghosts. Now, look. Since eight divine objects have gathered, my mirror can clearly reflect the locations of the remaining energies.

Swirl.

The fog that rose over the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection cleared, and a single landscape began to be drawn.

What appeared in the mirror was the scenery of a rugged mountain range draped in clouds and a huge, majestic temple situated halfway up that mountain.

A clear and pure energy dwelled over the roof of the temple, but the bottom of the mountain had a bizarre form where countless beggars had set up huts and gathered.

“……That place is?”

Baek Mu-yong, who was peeking at the mirror from behind my back, widened his eyes.

“It is Mount Song in Henan Province. It is the Shaolin Temple, called the leader of the Murim, and the Beggar's Gang which has its headquarters at the foot of that mountain.”

A faint smile spread across my lips.

“Henan Province. It is the heart of the Nine Sects One Gang and the general headquarters of the Orthodox factions. To think the remaining two divine objects would be gathered in the most annoying place of all.”

In the past, I had avoided visiting Henan Province, the center of the Nine Sects One Gang, because I was of the Demonic Cult bloodline.

Although I had obtained the status of the Ice Palace's live-in son-in-law and had been interacting with the sects of the Orthodox faction, Mount Song, where the Shaolin Temple and the Beggar's Gang were located, had a different meaning.

-Hehe, isn't it the perfect place to go and break the pride of those Orthodox fellows?

-Imagining the sight of someone from the Demonic Cult walking confidently toward those bald old men of Shaolin is already fun.

At the telepathy of the excited Martial Gods, I tucked the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection back into my robes and stood up.

“If it is a path that cannot be avoided anyway, it would be polite to walk in through the front gate confidently.”

My gaze turned toward the northeast, where Henan Province was located.

Seol Ye-rin also stepped up and stood by my side while touching the Ice Sword at her waist.

“It doesn't matter where it is. Whether it is Shaolin or the Imperial Palace. If it is the path the Third Young Master takes, I will lay down the ice for you.”

“Do not forget me as well!”

Cheon Deung-jin and even Seong Sang-ah stepped forward while packing their bags.

The party from the North Sea Ice Palace, having pacified Dongting Lake where the hideous conspiracy of the Saphaeryeon dwelled, now began to prepare to move toward Mount Song in Henan, the heart of the Murim, to recover all the remaining divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

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Chapter 148 : Divine Beggar

Henan Province Mount Song.

The heart of Murim , where the Shaolin Temple , called the origin of the world's martial arts, and the headquarters of the Beggar's Gang, the peak of the world's information, were located.

As I reached the entrance of the majestic Mount Song, hundreds of human shadows blocked my path along with a thick cloud of dust.

“The bloodline of the Demonic Cult and the group from the North Sea can no longer set foot on Mount Song!”

They were men dressed in rags but with eyes that shone brilliantly.

They were the warriors of the Beggar's Gang.

When the Dog Beating Staffs in their hands struck the ground in unison, a massive Dog Beating Formation unfolded at the entrance of Mount Song.

It was clear that the news of the Saphaeryeon Leader's death and the pacification of Dongting Lake had already reached this place through the Beggar's Gang's information network.

“Ho, the welcome greeting is quite intense.”

I leaned the Ice White Divine Spear against the ground and smiled leisurely.

The members of the Small Snow Squad following behind immediately drew their weapons, and Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin also tried to gather Extreme Yin Qi and Fire Spirit Qi in their hands.

“Wait.”

I raised my hand to stop the group.

Massacaring the beggars of the Beggar's Gang in the heart of Murim would do more harm than good.

Since the key to opening this gate without shedding blood was already in my pocket.

I searched through my robes and pulled out a wooden token hanging from an old leather strap.

It was one of the tokens of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens that the Holy Hand Divine Physician, Seong I-han, had given me in exchange for saving his granddaughter.

“Will you still block my path even after seeing this token?”

I flicked the token with my finger and sent it flying toward the old beggar standing at the very front of the Beggar's Gang warriors.

The eyes of the old beggar who caught the token with his Dog Beating Staff, the Boss of the Beggar's Gang, Drunken Beggar Jo Il-bang, grew wide as if they would tear.

“T, this is..... the token of the Divine Beggar, the former Boss of our Beggar's Gang! Are you saying the Holy Hand Divine Physician passed this token to you?”

“If you are a sect that knows gratitude, you should know the meaning of that token well.”

In my calm voice, the killing intent of the Beggar's Gang that filled the entrance of Mount Song vanished like a lie.

Jo Il-bang's hand holding the token trembled, and soon he let out a deep sigh and withdrew his Dog Beating Staff.

“.....Disband the formation.”

“Boss! But that man is from the Demonic Cult .....!”

“It is the token of the benefactor who saved the Divine Beggar's life. The Beggar's Gang will not become bastards who betray gratitude. Open the way!”

Hundreds of Beggar's Gang warriors split to the left and right, opening the path up Mount Song.

The path was open, but the air was by no means light.

The eyes of the Beggar's Gang disciples lined up on both sides were still filled with wariness and distrust.

“Follow me. Having the token doesn't mean you can grasp all of the Divine Beggar's arrangements.”

Boss Jo Il-bang led the way, leaning on his Dog Beating Staff.

The place he led us to was not the neat stairway leading to the Shaolin Temple.

It was a narrow and rough mountain path beside a rugged cliff of Mount Song, barely wide enough to place a single foot.

After climbing for a long time, a massive natural cave appeared beneath a sheer cliff.

Old liquor bottles were scattered messily at the cave entrance, and in the center, an old man sat leaning against a rock, snoring as he slept.

“……Elder. The owner of the token has arrived.”

As Jo Il-bang paid his respects with utmost courtesy, the snoring old man opened his eyes.

Dressed in filthy rags and scratching his sparse white beard, he looked exactly like a neighborhood beggar.

However, my eyes narrowed slightly.

-Heh heh, he resembles that old geezer.

-I agree.

Inside my qi center , the voices of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen poured out a mix of shock and welcome.

He was the descendant of the Beggar Venerable of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, the Divine Beggar Dan Cheon-u.

“Mmm…… Token? Did that old Holy Hand Divine Physician finally send a disciple?”

Dan Cheon-u scanned me with blurred eyes.

In an instant, the air inside the cave cracked, and an immense pressure weighed down on me.

“Huh? It's not a disciple but…… a monster carrying a bunch of ghosts in one body?”

Dan Cheon-u jumped up from his seat.

In his hand was an old bamboo staff riddled with holes.

It began to emit a transparent light, resonating with the eight divine objects in my robes.

“Have you come to take this divine object? If so, prove yourself in the way of the Beggar's Gang. I will draw three lines on the ground with this staff. If you cannot cross those lines and are pushed out, then leave your life behind and get out, token or not.”

Dan Cheon-u lightly drew on the ground with the tip of his staff.

Chiiiiik—!

From the three lines drawn on the floor, along with the pure internal energy of the Beggar Venerable, the aura of obsession emitted by tens of thousands of beggars rose up as a massive barrier.

“Third Young Master, it's dangerous! The energy is twisted!”

Seol Ye-rin warned and tried to step forward, but I adjusted the Ice White Divine Spear on my back and walked out empty-handed.

“Is it a trial? Fine. Let's see how tenacious the Beggar's Gang's arrangement is.”

I stepped onto the first line.

Kuuuuung!

In an instant, a pressure that felt as if all of Mount Song was shaking tightened around my entire body.

A weight as if a massive mountain was settling on my shoulders.

However, I calmly pulled up the darkness of the Dark Venerable and the ambition of the Fighting Venerable.

“You've passed the first one.”

My feet dug into the ground and were fixed.

An interested light swirled in Dan Cheon-u's eyes.

“Ho? You handle the Dark Venerable's divine object quite well. Then how about this?”

As Dan Cheon-u swung his staff, thousands of phantom Dog Beating Staff poured out from the second line and began to strike my entire body.

It was an illusionary strike that gnawed away at not just the physical body but the spirit.

-Kid! Use the Illusion Venerable's mirror! This is a mental battle!

At Danmok Ryeong's shout, I lightly tapped the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection in my robes.

The violet mist emitting from the mirror swallowed and neutralized the phantom Dog Beating Staffs.

“……Is this the last one?”

I stood before the final third line.

No aura could be felt there.

However, the most dangerous things are often invisible.

Dan Cheon-u aimed the staff at my heart and murmured lowly.

“The last one is my question. What do you intend to become by gathering these divine objects? A Demon God who will destroy the world, or a Martial God who pretends to be noble?”

Simultaneously with the question, a massive dragon figure containing the true essence of the Beggar's Gang's ultimate art, the Eighteen Subduing Dragon Palms, soared from Dan Cheon-u's entire body.

It was certain that the moment I crossed the line, that dragon would swallow me if the answer was wrong.

I took a step toward the last line, facing Dan Cheon-u's blurred but sharp gaze head-on.

Kuoooo—!

The aura of the Subduing Dragon soaring above my head roared as if it would tear me apart at any moment.

Every bone in my body screamed, and the eight divine objects settled in my qi center caused different resonances, urging for my answer.

A Demon God or a Martial God.

It was a topic that those who wished to become the absolute rulers of Murim would have agonized over their entire lives.

Someone chose the demonic path to place the world under their feet, and someone acted out the path of Dao or divinity to become an idol for all.

However, I let out a smirk.

“I have no interest in being a Demon God or a noble Martial God.”

Dan Cheon-u's eyebrows twitched.

The momentum of the Subduing Dragon became even more intense, pressing down on my shoulders, but I continued speaking without yielding.

“I am just a person who wants to return to the North Sea with my people and eat a warm meal. If there's a bastard blocking my path, I'll trample them more cruelly than a Demon God, and if I have to protect my people, I'll just wield my sword and spear like a Martial God.”

I tapped the shaft of the Ice White Divine Spear slung across my back.

“What's important is not what I become, but how I live, isn't it? Old beggar geezer.”

In an instant, the golden dragon figure that had been surging as if to swallow me vanished like a lie.

The ferocious pressure that shook Mount Song disappeared, leaving only the stale smell of liquor and the empty laughter of the old beggar in the cave.

“Hahaha! A single meal! A single meal! That's the most practical answer I've heard in a hundred years!”

Dan Cheon-u withdrew his staff and sat on the ground.

He picked up a liquor bottle rolling nearby, took a sip, and tossed the old bamboo staff toward me.

I lightly caught the flying bamboo staff.

The sensation against my palm was rough and cold.

Yet strangely, I couldn't feel the explosive power in this staff like the other divine objects I had collected so far.

It just felt like an ordinary wooden stick stained with the grime of time.

“This doesn't seem like a divine object.”

I asked indifferently, and as he gulped down the liquor, Dan Cheon-u wiped his mouth with his sleeve and cackled.

“Divine object? Are your eyes broken? That's just a staff I use to walk because it's hard for me to climb mountains.”

My brow furrowed.

The faces of Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin, who were tense beside me, were also clearly filled with bewilderment.

However, beyond Dan Cheon-u's playful eyes, some deep arrangement was hidden.

“The real divine object left by the Beggar Venerable is not a club that anyone can wield like you think. It is something that only reveals its form once ‘hearts’ are gathered.”

Dan Cheon-u continued as he pointed his chin toward the stick.

“That stick is the guide to the real divine object. The true legacy of the Beggar Venerable is hidden at the point where the lowest and highest parts of Mount Song meet.”

-Heh heh, I thought so. That old geezer would never have left such a precious thing entirely to this filthy guy.

-Third Young Master, try reflecting the staff in the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection. There will be some kind of reaction.

At the Demon Queen's advice, I pulled the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection from my robes and reflected the staff.

Then, a violet mist frosted over the clear surface of the mirror, and a 3D topographical map of Mount Song emerged.

In the topographical map within the mirror, the end the staff pointed to was showing the back mountain of the Shaolin Temple, namely, the ‘Forbidden Area of Shaolin’.

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Chapter 149 : Forbidden Area

“Shaolin's Forbidden Area. In the end, it means I have to dance around with those bald old men.”

A thick smirk hung on my lips.

The Shaolin Temple was a place like the North Star of the Murim and the leader of the orthodox factions.

The fact that I, who was from the Demonic Cult, would set foot in the Forbidden Area of such a place was a major event that would shake the entire Jianghu.

“Heh heh, don't be too scared. If you have that staff, at least the Abbot monk of Shaolin won't be able to drive you out recklessly,” Dan Cheon-u added while shaking his liquor bottle.

I gripped the old bamboo staff in my hand again.

The wooden stick, which had looked ordinary, began to pulse while harboring a faint green glow when it received the light of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection.

“Let's go. I'll have to see for myself whether Shaolin will show mercy or draw the sword of demon-subduing.”

I turned my body and stepped out of the cave.

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin followed closely behind me, and the Small Snow Squad members also organized their weapons with grim determination.

On the mountainside of Mount Song, the massive One Pillar Gate of the Shaolin Temple, which held a thousand years of history, revealed its majestic appearance.

However, only a strange silence lingered in the grounds where the sound of Buddhist scriptures should have echoed normally.

“Young Master, the atmosphere is unusual,” Baek Mu-yong warned lowly.

My brow furrowed.

The gatekeeping monks who should have been guarding the One Pillar Gate were not to be seen.

Instead, an extremely pure yet sharp energy was pouring down from above the stairs like a waterfall.

[Anti-Demon Barrier]

“Stop! This is a sanctuary of Buddhist law. Those who harbor demonic qi cannot set foot in here even for a single step!”

With a thundering Lion's Roar, old monks wearing golden cassocks and about a hundred monks holding heavy iron staves blocked the stairs.

The person standing at their center was the Hall Leader of the Hall of Discipline, who was in charge of Shaolin's rules, Great Master Gong Heo.

-Heh heh, that bald old man's face is familiar. Is he a descendant?

-Third Young Master, be careful. The barrier that the old monk deployed is specialized in suppressing the energy of the Demonic Cult.

The Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen warned simultaneously.

I snorted and stepped forward.

Every time my foot touched the ground, it collided with the golden barrier of Shaolin and sparked flames.

“I didn't come to Shaolin to fight. I've only come to fulfill the promise left by the two elders, the Beggar Venerable and the Buddhist Venerable.”

I held up the bamboo staff I received from Dan Cheon-u.

Then, a green jade-colored energy erupted from the tip of the staff and began to gently push back the barrier of Shaolin.

“T, that is……!”

Great Master Gong Heo's eyes were filled with shock.

“The guide to the divine object of the Beggar Venerable, the Green Chalcedony Staff! How could that be in the hands of a demonic practitioner……!”

“I told you. I've come to fulfill a promise.”

It was then.

Boom—!

From the back mountain of the Shaolin Temple, namely the side of the 'Forbidden Area' that the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection had shown, a massive blood-colored pillar pierced the sky.

Simultaneously, an ominous vibration that shook all of Shaolin echoed.

“Could it be…… the seal?”

Great Master Gong Heo's complexion turned pale.

I instinctively gripped the Ice White Divine Spear.

“Hey, Great Master. I don't think it's time to be worrying about a barrier? It looks like a hole was punched into the Forbidden Area you were protecting so dearly.”

I kicked off the One Pillar Gate without hesitation and flew toward the Forbidden Area.

My form became a purple lightning bolt and crossed over the One Pillar Gate of Shaolin Temple.

Following me, Seol Ye-rin, who emitted a sharp chill, and Cheon Deung-jin, who was clad in red flames, as well as the Small Snow Squad members, rushed in without hesitation.

“S, stop them……!”

The gatekeeping monks were flustered and tried to deploy a formation, but Great Master Gong Heo hurriedly raised his hand to stop them.

“Do not stop them! They are currently clad in pure Buddhist power, not demonic qi! Besides, that blood-colored pillar just now was definitely from the direction of Dalma-dong. It's certain that a sinister group has seeped into the Forbidden Area! All units, disarm! Follow them quickly!”

With Great Master Gong Heo's command, the warrior monks of Shaolin also hung massive prayer beads around their necks and began to chase after me.

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The back mountain of Shaolin Temple, a sanctuary where generations of high monks and eccentrics performed isolated training.

That place, where the clear sound of Buddhist scriptures and pure energy should have lingered normally, was now reminiscent of a picture of hell.

“Aaaaargh!”

“Maintain the formation! We must never hand over the seal of Dalma-dong…… Cough!”

The elder high monks of Shaolin who were protecting the Forbidden Area collapsed on the ground while vomiting blood.

In front of them, dozens of Blood Cultists wearing pitch-black blood-colored robes were forming a bizarre formation, and at its center stood the Third Blood Lord of the Blood Cult, the Blood Sword Demon Jeok Mu-seong.

“Kekeke, you bald old men of Shaolin. You've grown old for nothing. But it's too late. The Anti-Demon Barrier has already melted away under my blood qi!”

Jeok Mu-seong's mad laughter cut through the air of Dalma-dong.

His gaze passed the fallen high monks of Shaolin and was aimed toward a flat rock placed in the deepest part of Dalma-dong.

A crude wooden bowl that had become glossy from the touch of many hands over a long time, the very Alms Bowl used when begging for food.

“To think the true divine object of the beggar bastards who crawl on the lowest ground would be enshrined in the middle of the sanctuary of Shaolin, which prides itself as the highest place under the heavens! Isn't it a truly laughable sight!”

Jeok Mu-seong reached his hand toward the Alms Bowl with a greedy expression.

It was the moment the dark red blood qi flowing from his fingertips was about to contaminate the Alms Bowl.

“They say you'll be struck by lightning if you recklessly touch someone else's rice bowl with bloodstained hands.”

Someone's voice echoed in Dalma-dong, tearing through the blood-colored formation.

“Who is it!”

The moment Jeok Mu-seong turned his head in shock, I, wrapped in purple flames, struck down from the air like a meteor.

Boom—!

When I struck the ground, the blood-colored formation Jeok Mu-seong had deployed cracked like a spiderweb and was shattered.

The Blood Cultists were swept up in that overwhelming air wave and were thrown in all directions with screams.

-Heh heh, that crude wooden bowl was the true legacy of that smelly old man!

-Oh my, the smell of blood is vibrating. Be careful not to splatter blood on my mirror, Third Young Master.

-They are Blood Cult bastards! Please pierce through them in one breath!

The voices of the Sword Venerable, the Illusion Venerable, and the Spear Saint echoed in my mind.

I slowly raised my body while feeling the nine divine objects oscillating in my qi center.

In one hand, I held the old bamboo staff I had obtained from the Boss of the Beggar's Gang, the Green Chalcedony Staff.

The Green Chalcedony Staff was shaking violently while resonating with the Alms Bowl deep within Dalma-dong.

“Y, you are..... Hyeokryeon Yeom? How are you in the Forbidden Area of Shaolin!”

“When you bastards are trying to steal my things, the owner can't just stay still.”

Jeok Mu-seong's red eyes were distorted with anger and shock.

He had already heard the reports that the high-ranking Blood Lords of the Blood Cult had their heads taken off one after another by Hyeokryeon Yeom's hands.

However, he had never dreamed that I would appear here after piercing through Shaolin's layered Anti-Demon Barrier, and even while accompanied by Shaolin's monks.

“Insolent brat! The legacy of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens already belongs to Lord Hyeokryeon Geuk, who is walking the path of a God-Demon! Blood Sword Formation!”

When Jeok Mu-seong waved his hand, the blood of the fallen Shaolin monks soared into the air and was shaped into hundreds of blood-colored swords.

“Die!”

Swoosh—!

Hundreds of blood swords rushed in as if to pierce through my entire body.

However, I didn't even think about dodging and pulled out the Vajra of the Buddhist Venerable that I had obtained from the Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple from my robes.

“Since I've come to Shaolin, it's only polite to do the cleaning in the way of the Buddhists.”

My purple eyes flashed with a golden light.

The Extreme Yang Qi in my qi center merged with the Buddhist power of the Buddhist Venerable and erupted explosively through the Vajra.

Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art.

Wisdom King's Purification.

Roar—!

A massive golden wave erupted from the Vajra and pushed out like a tsunami while mixed with purple flames.

As soon as the hundreds of blood swords touched that holy yet destructive energy, they made a sizzling sound and evaporated into black ash.

“This is impossible……! How can the bloodline of the Demonic Cult use the divine art of the Buddhists!”

Jeok Mu-seong recoiled in shock.

Taking advantage of that opening, Seol Ye-rin and the Small Snow Squad members who arrived afterward broke into the battlefield.

“The rats of the Blood Cult, don't let a single one of them go back alive!”

With Wi Ji-yeong's shout, Eun Bin, Baek Mu-yong, and Mu-myeong began to slaughter the remaining Blood Cultists, and Seol Ye-rin swung her ice sword to set up an Absolute Ice Wall around the fallen high monks of Shaolin to protect them.

“Third Young Master! I will freeze that man!”

“No, I will cut that guy down myself.”

I pulled out the Ice White Divine Spear and launched myself.

Realizing there was no place to escape, Jeok Mu-seong attempted a final struggle by plunging his blood qi toward his own heart as a sacrifice.

“I can't die like this! Using my blood as a sacrifice..... Cough!”

However, even before his spell could be activated, my Ice White Divine Spear, which had approached like a shadow through the Dark Venerable's footwork, ruthlessly pierced Jeok Mu-seong's qi center.

“Don't emit miscellaneous demonic qi in front of a divine object. It's disgusting.”

Stab—!

The absolute chill emitted from the Ice White Divine Spear instantly froze Jeok Mu-seong's blood-colored demonic qi, and the flames of Extreme Yang completely burned his interior.

The body of the Third Blood Lord of the Blood Cult, Jeok Mu-seong, turned into grayish ash and crumbled away in vain.

Simultaneously with the end of the battle, the Green Chalcedony Staff held in my hand emitted an intense light and flew through the air by itself, landing with a thud inside the Alms Bowl on the flat rock.

Whirrrr—!

The moment the bamboo staff and the wooden Alms Bowl combined into one, the crude wooden bowl transformed into a clear and transparent jade color and emitted a massive energy that encompassed all of Mount Song.

The true legacy of the Beggar Venerable, the Alms Bowl of Myriad People, revealed its true form.

“The bowl that holds the hearts of the lowest people was the true divine object.”

I reached out and grabbed the Alms Bowl of Myriad People.

At that moment, the eight energies settled in my qi center (Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist, Zither, Dark, Twin, Illusion) and the Beggar Venerable's energy I had just obtained meshed perfectly.

The pure life force of great nature emitted by the Alms Bowl of Myriad People pierced through my entire body.

My qi center began to form a single massive universe now.

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Chapter 150 : Hundred Thousand Mountains

The blood-colored conflict that had filled Dalma-dong receded like the ebbing tide.

As Jeok Mu-seong's ash scattered in the wind, the Alms Bowl of Myriad People placed on my palm transformed from a crude wooden bowl into a brilliant jade bowl, emitting a faint pulsation.

“This was..... the true arrangement of the Beggar Venerable.”

Seol Ye-rin, who was tending to the high monks of Shaolin from beyond the ice wall, looked at the scene with eyes of wonder.

In my entire body, purple lightning, golden Buddhist power, and green jade-colored life force formed a strange harmony and swirled.

-Heh heh, the old beggar's bowl has finally found its owner. Now that your qi center is full, is it hard to even breathe?

-Oh my, Third Young Master. It feels as if nine suns have risen inside your body.

The voices of the Sword Venerable and the Illusion Venerable were tinged with a tension unlike usual.

Gathering nine divine objects in one body was an unprecedented event in Murim history.

I felt a pressure as if the meridians in my entire body were expanding and about to burst.

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“Amitabha..... the karmic connection is truly strange.”

The elder of Shaolin who had collapsed, Zen Master Un-am, barely managed to raise his body with Seol Ye-rin's support.

Zen Master Un-am adjusted his blood-stained cassock and sat before me as if kneeling, joining his hands in prayer.

“We were wary of you because of your demonic bloodline, but how can we block the one whom the sacred object of the Beggar Venerable chose personally? Patron, you have just saved Shaolin and the world's Murim from the demonic clutches of the Blood Cult.”

“Keep your thanks. I only came to find my things.”

It was the moment I replied calmly and was about to put the Alms Bowl of Myriad People into my robes.

Whirrrr—!

A massive resonance occurred deep within my qi center.

The energy emitted by the nine divine objects, regardless of my will, shot toward the deepest wall of Dalma-dong, the stone wall that had been firmly closed for a thousand years.

“T, that place is.....!”

Zen Master Un-am's eyes rolled back in shock.

That was the Gate of No Gate, the highest holy ground of Shaolin Temple where Bodhidharma was said to have attained enlightenment after nine years of wall-facing meditation, and where the final arrangement of the Buddhist Venerable was hidden.

As the nine energies touched the stone wall, a massive pattern was engraved on the rock surface that had no gaps, and it began to slowly split open.

What was engraved on the stone wall as the nine energies intertwined was not Shaolin's mandala, but the image of nine venerable ones holding different weapons and drawing a single circle.

Rumble—!

The stone wall that had been silent for a thousand years pushed to the left and right, revealing the space inside.

However, what erupted from there was a nauseating, foul smell of blood that stung the nose and a gloomy demonic qi that sent chills down one's spine.

“How can this be..... how can such impurity be in the Gate of No Gate!”

Zen Master Un-am shouted in shock.

My brow furrowed deeply.

The nine divine objects in my qi center were resonating as if they were screaming.

It was evidence that the deepest root of Shaolin was rotting from the inside.

“Third Young Master, be careful. The energy inside there..... it harbors a resentment much older and deeper than that of the Blood Cult.”

Seol Ye-rin gripped her ice sword and stepped to my side.

I nodded and stepped into the darkness.

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Inside the Gate of No Gate, a massive golden Buddha statue was placed.

However, that Buddha statue was split in half, and through the split gap, dark red blood-vessel-like stems were stretching out along the earth veins of Shaolin Temple.

And right beneath that Buddha statue, an old monk who had become half-mummified while sitting in a lotus position was visible. It was the Abbot of the Shaolin Temple, Zen Master Gong-mun.

“Abbot Zen Master!”

Great Master Gong-heo, who had arrived late, screamed.

A pitch-black large nail was driven into Zen Master Gong-mun's chest, and the demonic qi flowing from that nail was twisting Shaolin's pure energy in reverse, turning it into nourishment for the Blood Cult.

-Heh heh, that's a Heavenly Demon Blood Nail. It's a very wicked method of growing the Blood Cult's demonic arts using Shaolin's Buddhist power as fertilizer.

-Oh my, Shaolin's collapse until now wasn't because of an external enemy. It was eating away at Shaolin's foundation by using the Abbot's body as a host.

At the explanation of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen, killing intent flickered in my eyes.

Those Blood Cult bastards had already released poison into Shaolin's heart a long time ago.

“Step aside. If that nail isn't pulled out, Shaolin will become a demonic land worse than the Demonic Cult as of today.”

I floated the Alms Bowl of Myriad People in the air.

The Alms Bowl, the legacy of the Beggar Venerable, rotated and began to suck in the impurity spread within Shaolin's grounds.

Simultaneously, I held the Buddhist Venerable's Vajra and approached Zen Master Gong-mun.

“Stop! If you touch him recklessly, the Abbot brother's pulse will be cut!”

Great Master Gong-heo tried to block me, but my purple eyes overwhelmed him.

“It's already on the verge of being cut. Right now, the Abbot of Shaolin isn't enduring with his sanity, but is barely hanging onto life with the final mercy left by the Buddhist Venerable's divine object.”

I placed the Vajra against Zen Master Gong-mun's forehead.

Sizzle—!

Golden Buddhist power and the Dark Venerable's darkness poured in simultaneously.

The polar opposite energies collided and began to forcefully push out the blood nail driven into the Abbot's body.

“Uuuugh……!”

Zen Master Gong-mun, who had lost consciousness, let out a painful groan and shed tears of blood.

But I did not stop.

I purified the blood qi tangled in Shaolin Temple's earth veins through the Alms Bowl of Myriad People and shattered the Heavenly Demon Blood Nail with the destructive power of the Vajra.

Boom—!

As the black nail scattered into powder, a waterfall of black blood poured out of Zen Master Gong-mun's body.

Simultaneously, the golden Buddha statue that had been split in half resonated and emitted a dazzling radiance.

“Amitabha..... Amitabha!”

The surrounding monks all knelt and chanted the Buddhist name.

The ominous blood-colored mist that had been pressing down on all of Mount Song lifted, and a refreshing energy once again enveloped Shaolin Temple.

I breathed heavily and withdrew the Vajra.

Operating nine divine objects simultaneously was no small burden even for me.

“.....Patron, you have truly re-established the pillar of Shaolin.”

Zen Master Gong-mun grabbed my sleeve with a trembling hand.

Zen Master Gong-mun's eyes had become clear, but because they had been eroded by demonic qi for many years, not much life force seemed to remain.

“I told you to keep your thanks.”

At my words, Zen Master Gong-mun smiled with difficulty and nodded.

Zen Master Gong-mun pulled an old scripture wrapped in a cassock from his robes and handed it to me.

“This is the secret technique left by the Buddhist Venerable and the only clue that tells where the tenth divine object is. Hundred Thousand Mountains..... In the deepest darkness of that place, there is the final arrangement left by the Ice Emperor.”

My gaze rested on the scripture. Finally, the whereabouts of the last piece were revealed.

My home, and the place where the first founder of the North Sea Ice Palace stayed for the last time.

“In the end, I have to return there again.”

I packed the scripture away and stared past Mount Song toward the far-off Hundred Thousand Mountains.

***

The Heavenly Demon Palace of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Sitting on the throne of that place, where an eternal ink-mist that never lifts throughout the year was spread, the Heavenly Demon, Hyeokryeon Hwi, closed his eyes and lightly tapped the armrest with his finger.

Tap, tap, tap.

Every time the steady pulse echoed in the quiet pavilion, the hearts of the demon heads who were holding their breath in the shadows also thumped.

No one dared to raise their heads.

The rebellion was suppressed.

Now that Hyeokryeon Geuk, who had risen above the Young Cult Leader, had left the cult.

The actual power was bound to return to Hyeokryeon Hwi once again.

There would still be many of Hyeokryeon Geuk's hidden forces, but it would be enough to weed them out.

“……The Anti-Demon Barrier of Shaolin has been lifted?”

As the single sentence was uttered lowly, the air in the pavilion froze.

The head of the Black Shadow Unit, who was kneeling beneath the throne, bowed his head to the floor and replied.

“Yes, Cult Leader. A group from the Blood Cult led by a Blood Lord of the Blood Cult raided Dalma-dong but…… there is a message that they were annihilated by Hyeokryeon Yeom who appeared suddenly.”

Yeom.

When the name of Hyeokryeon Hwi's youngest son came up, his closed eyes slowly opened.

The air where his eye-light passed sizzled and burned.

“He killed a Blood Lord? The Blood Lords of the Blood Cult are monsters who received forbidden secret arts in the Blood Sea. They must have been venomous types that even those bald old men of Shaolin couldn't handle.”

“That is…… it is reported that the Young Master handled the divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens freely and even performed the secret techniques of Shaolin.

It is reported that the monks of Mount Song currently praise the Third Young Master as the ‘Incarnation of Demon-Subduing’ and follow him.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi let out a smirk.

Hyeokryeon Yeom.

The fellow whom he had only hoped would at least stay alive when he was kicked out to the North Sea had grown rapidly.

Whirrrr—

The Demon Stone, which contained the thoughts of successive Heavenly Demons, oscillated.

The Demon Stone was also feeling it.

That massive wave that had spread from Mount Song.

Hyeokryeon Hwi slowly raised his body from the throne.

Black demonic qi swirled like a storm around the throne, making the roof tiles of the Heavenly Demon Palace rattle.

“Since he has gathered the divine objects, only one thing remains now.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi's gaze turned past the stone wall in front of him, toward the deepest and darkest Forbidden Area even within the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

An arrangement left by Seol Cheon-u, the first founder and legend of the North Sea, who entered this place and took his last breath hundreds of years ago.

The real reason our Hyeokryeon family has protected the Hundred Thousand Mountains for generations, and the tenth piece that craves the divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

The divine object called the ‘Heart of the Heavenly Demon’ is here.

“Yeom, you will eventually come here.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi murmured as he gathered the massive demonic qi.

“Come. I will personally confirm whether you will become a monster drunk on power..... or one who can surpass this father.”

The voice of Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi vibrated throughout the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

The flame that started in the North Sea was now spreading to the heart of the Demonic Cult.