

Myst, Might, Mayhem

#Chapter 91 - Read Myst, Might, Mayhem Chapter 91

Chapter 91

Transformation Realm.

It was the supreme martial arts realm that could only be reached by surpassing the barrier and attaining the states of Three Flowers Gathered at the Crown and Five Energies Paying Homage to the Origin.

Yet he had declared that he would reach that level in 2 years despite not having gained realization of the peak realm.

'Is it difficult?'

As if reading Mok Gyeong-un's thoughts, the Blue Spirit said,

-Die and wake up a hundred times. See if that's possible. No, if that happens, I will call you Lord for the rest of my life and attend to you.

'You're coming on quite strong.'

Mok Gyeong-un twitched the corners of his mouth.

The reason the Blue Spirit was clicking her tongue and coming on so strong was simple.

First of all, even she, who was called a genius that appeared once in a few hundred years, had taken 20 years to reach the realm of Transformation.

Of course, even this was achieved at the young age of 28, so everyone was shocked beyond words.

'It's not like the era has disappeared now.'

In the past, there was a time when the martial arts world had experienced a glorious golden age.

There was a period when an unparalleled genius appeared and led the martial arts world at a young age, known as the Little Sword Immortal, but that's not the case now.

"I hope you keep that promise."

"Pardon?"

Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, asked back as if wondering what Mok Gyeong-un's sudden words meant.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

He didn't intend to say it out loud, but it was meant for the Blue Spirit to hear.

-Wait and see after 2 years. You will know the greatness of this Venerable.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly at the Blue Spirit's bold claim.

Just from her reaction and that of Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, he realized he had made an absurd declaration, but his grandfather always said something.

[You know nothing until you try. Even your nature.....]

-Zzzt!

"Hmm."

"My liege?"

When Mok Gyeong-un brought his hand to his forehead and let out a groan, Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, asked in puzzlement.

To his question, Mok Gyeong-un slightly frowned.

What was that just now?

He was someone who never forgot something once he remembered it.

He even remembered all the words his grandfather had said to him since he was young, but he couldn't remember what he had said after those words just now.

'Why is that?'

When he tried to recall it, his head hurt as if it would crack.

He could endure ordinary pain, but this pain was so severe, as if his brain was being cut out, that he couldn't help but grimace.

'Why is this happening?'

His grandfather had said something to him afterward, but he couldn't remember.

If he tried to uncover it as if it was forcibly hidden, he got a headache.

A memory shrouded in fog.

In the end, Mok Gyeong-un stopped trying to forcibly recall it.

‘.....Could it be?’

Did his grandfather do this?

A small doubt arose.

But his grandfather had no knowledge of acupuncture or anything like that and hadn’t done anything special to him.

He felt puzzled, but now was not the time to keep thinking about it.

Mok Gyeong-un relaxed his expression and said,

“It’s nothing. By the way, may I ask a few questions?”

“Feel free to do so.”

Lee Ji-yeom, who had been looking at him with a worried face, answered.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

“Do you happen to know someone named Ghost Blade?”

To that question, Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, answered casually,

“Is there anyone who doesn’t know Ghost Blade, one of the Eight Stars?”

Ghost Blade.

Excluding the Six Heavens who stand at the pinnacle of the current martial arts world, he is one of the eight masters known to have reached the highest realm.

“I don’t know much about the current state of the martial arts world.”

“Ah.....”

Lee Ji-yeom nodded as if he understood.

The time when his ghostly liege was active was a whopping hundred years ago, so the masters who were renowned then and now could be said to be completely different.

At this, Lee Ji-yeom said,

“Ghost Blade’s sect and identity are unknown. He suddenly appeared one day and rose to notoriety by engaging in life-and-death duels with masters who were known for their righteous deeds.”

“Notoriety?”

“Yes. It couldn’t be called fame because none of those who fought him survived.”

“No one survived?”

“Yes. That’s why his notoriety was quite high.”

‘Huh?’

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head.

Mok In-dan, the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, had said he had fought him and was injured.

Could it be that that fact was hardly known?

As he was puzzled, Lee Ji-yeom exclaimed “Ah!” as if he had remembered something and said,

“There is exactly one person who survived.”

“Someone survived?”

“Yes.”

‘It must be the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.’

Mok Gyeong-un was naturally convinced of that, but he asked without showing it.

“Who is that?”

“I heard that Baek Sa-ha, the Annihilating Poison King[1], one of the Five Kings of our sect, fought Ghost Blade for dozens of moves.”

‘!?’

What?

Wasn’t it the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, Mok In-dan?

Someone completely different from his expectation was mentioned.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked back,

“He...fought Ghost Blade?”

“Yes. It’s quite a famous anecdote in our sect. I remember that the Annihilating Poison King unexpectedly fought him a few months before Ghost Blade disappeared.”

At these words from Lee Ji-yeom, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

For now, he could learn two facts from Lee Ji-yeom’s words.

One was that Lee Ji-yeom was also unaware of the fact that Mok In-dan, the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, had fought Ghost Blade and survived.

And the second fact he learned was a bit disappointing.

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un had come here thinking that Ghost Blade might be a master of Heaven and Earth Society.

But if he had fought someone called the Annihilating Poison King, one of the high-ranking executives here, they might not be on the same side but in an adversarial relationship.

‘Did I make the wrong guess?’

Should he have gone to the imperial palace if he had known this would happen?

As he was thinking that, Lee Ji-yeom asked,

“Is there a problem?”

“Ah. I had heard that Ghost Blade was a hidden master of Heaven and Earth Society. But after hearing what you said, I’m starting to think that might not be the case.”

He thought there was no need to mention the former if he didn’t know anyway.

In any case, even the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, Mok In-dan, didn’t seem to know much about Ghost Blade.

Then Lee Ji-yeom said,

“Ah! There were quite a few such rumors as well.”

“Quite a few rumors?”

“Yes. That’s because the people Ghost Blade targeted and killed were all masters of the righteous and evil sects. The only exception was the Annihilating Poison King, a master of our sect, and I heard that in the midst of a long duel, Ghost Blade stopped the fight first and withdrew.”

‘.....Withdrew first?’

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

Another possibility had arisen.

If he exceptionally clashed with a master of Heaven and Earth Society and withdrew first, there was a possibility that they were on the same side.

“So he could be a master of Heaven and Earth Society?”

“I don’t know about that. The Annihilating Poison King also glossed over what happened at that time.....But there were such rumors as well.”

“What kind of rumors?”

“There was also a rumor that Ghost Blade was a secret guardian who received secret orders from the Society Leader.”

“Secret guardian?”

-It seems they still maintain that system.

The Blue Spirit seemed to know about this as well.

Lee Ji-yeom continued,

“The Society Leader has secret guardians who constantly protect him. There are rumors that their martial arts skills are actually on par with the Five Kings.”

“If they are on par with the Five Kings.....are they strong?”

“They are strong. Among the Five Kings, there are two supreme masters who have reached the realm of Transformation, and the other three have reached the pinnacle of the transcendent realm.”

-What?

The Blue Spirit couldn’t hide her surprise at this.

That was understandable, as in the era when she was active, there were hardly any among the executive-level members who had reached such a realm.

But had it changed so much in a hundred years?

-How astonishing.

Had the level of Heaven and Earth Society risen to that extent?

Well, back then, it was the early days of Heaven and Earth Society, and it was a period when they were still gaining strength.

Considering that, it might be natural now that they had grown into one of the three giant forces dominating the current martial arts world.

“Ah! Since you said you’re not familiar with the current situation, I should tell you this. The two of the Five Kings who have reached the realm of Transformation are called the Eight Stars in the current martial arts world.”

“Hoo.”

Then it made sense to some extent.

If the Society Leader’s secret guardian was strong enough to be on par with the Five Kings, it was plausible that he might be the disappeared Ghost Blade.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

“Ghost Blade’s identity still hasn’t been revealed, right?”

“Yes. That’s right. However.....perhaps the Annihilating Poison King, who dueled with him before he disappeared, might know some clues.”

“The Annihilating Poison King might know.....I see.”

“Yes. He is the only one who survived a duel with him. But it’s not certain. By the way, why do you ask about this?”

“Ah. It’s not really important, so don’t worry about it.”

At those words, Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, showed a puzzled look but soon nodded without further questioning.

“I understand.”

Seeing his attitude, Mok Gyeong-un thought he was truly straightforward.

He could understand why the Blue Spirit cherished the people of the Lee family.

Anyway, two clues had emerged from this.

‘The Annihilating Poison King.....the Society Leader’s secret guardian.’

The Annihilating Poison King might hold clues about Ghost Blade, and the Society Leader’s secret guardian was a candidate who might be Ghost Blade.

The mark that remained on his deceased grandfather.

Mok In-dan, the head of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, who had a similar scar.

‘It won’t be long.’

Finally, some outlines were starting to appear on this journey of revenge that began with only the clues of scars and footprints.

If it was certain that the person named Ghost Blade had killed his grandfather, he was definitely a target of revenge who had to be killed.

Mok Gyeong-un’s lips twitched.

Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, who was watching this, had a glimmer of interest in his eyes.

‘Killing intent.....’

Although he was trying his best to conceal it, the subtle killing intent leaking out was no joke.

It was very intense, so to speak.

He tried not to have doubts, but it was clear that his liege had quite unfavorable feelings toward the person named Ghost Blade.

As he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Ah, by the way. What exactly is the purpose of Corpse Blood Valley?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m just going along with it to infiltrate this place, but as far as I remember, there was no such thing when I was here.”

“Ah. You can think of it as a process of sorting out the raw gems.”

“Raw gems?”

“Yes. As I told you even when you passed the second gate, the trials are a process of assigning and selecting manpower in the right places. If you pass all the way to the final gate here, you will be given a great opportunity.”

“What is that?”

“You will have the opportunity to join the subordinates of high-ranking executives or become their disciple.”

“Disciple?”

“Yes. Since you can be considered the best talent at the point of passing all the gates.”

The trials of Corpse Blood Valley are difficult to pass even for those called martial geniuses who have diligently trained in martial arts since childhood.

But if one were to pass all these trials, they could be called the best talent.

These best talents are given the opportunity to be selected by the executives attending the Final Gate.

“When you say high-ranking executives, do you mean the Five Kings?”

“It could be the Five Kings, the Three Chief Masters, and the Four Valley Masters including myself.”

The Five Kings, the Three Chief Masters, and the Four Valley Masters.

They could be considered the executives and the backbone that led Heaven and Earth Society.

‘So that’s how it was.’

Now Mok Gyeong-un understood why the boys were risking their lives in Corpse Blood Valley.

If they were chosen by the executives and became their disciples, they would gain immense power within Heaven and Earth Society and learn advanced martial arts, so how could they miss this opportunity?

There were reasons to seize it even at the risk of their lives.

Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley, cautiously said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“Please forgive me for the disrespect I have shown you so far, my liege.”

“No, it’s fine. You didn’t know, so what’s there to forgive?”

“Now that I know at least this much, I will have my subordinates pull some strings to get you out.”

“Get me out?”

“That’s right. Although the Society Leader’s order was to have you participate in the trials of Corpse Blood Valley, there was no command that you must be kept alive, so we can easily process it as if you died.”

If that happened, the Lord would be able to escape the Society Leader’s sight and have time to secretly recover his martial arts here in Corpse Blood Valley.

That’s what he thought, but Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

“No. I don’t think there’s a need for that.”

“Pardon? Why would you.....”

There was no need for his liege to suffer through this voluntarily.

If his liege, who had already reached the pinnacle of martial arts, secluded himself, wouldn’t he be able to sufficiently return to his past level?

As he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“We should make the most of this situation.”

“What do you mean by making use of this situation?”

“Didn’t you say that if I pass the trials, I can become a disciple of the executives?”

“That is true, but there’s no need to.....”

“What kind of wound do you think would be more painful?”

“Pardon?”

What did he mean by that?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and said,

“A wound that festers and bursts from the inside is really painful compared to a wound on the outside.”

‘!!!!!!’

At these words from Mok Gyeong-un, a glimmer appeared in the eyes of Lee Ji-yeom, the Master of Corpse Blood Valley.

It was because he understood what Mok Gyeong-un meant by saying this.

Thinking that he sufficiently understood, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Then shall I try to get a recommendation?”

“By recommendation, you mean?”

“In your eyes, Valley Master, whose attention would be most beneficial among those executives?”

Chapter 92

Mok Yu-cheon looked at the small, round copper tag resting on his palm with a dazed expression.

This was the item that Ma-sang had handed to him before escaping.

He didn't tell him anything about what it was or what it did.

Ma-sang had only left these words.

[You do it for me.]

It seemed to imply a lot.

A spy was bound to face death if caught.

So it seemed like he was entrusting the rest to him.

‘What on earth did I.....’

What kind of request was this?

Moreover, if he were in Ma-sang's position, he would have been very angry.

Even if they were half-brothers, it was his brother who had ratted him out, leading to this result.

But Ma-sang didn't resent him.

Of course, the situation was urgent, so there might not have been room for resentment.

"Sigh."

Mok Yu-cheon let out a long sigh.

How did he end up in this situation?

He had thought that the time when he was despised as the son of a courtesan was like hell, but now that he thought about it, that was nothing.

The real hell was outside.

-Crack!

He bit his nails.

The habit he had when he was anxious as a child resurfaced.

He had thought that his half-brother was the only one he could trust, but now he realized that wasn't the case.

That guy wasn't the same as he used to know him.

He didn't know whether he had been hiding it or not, but he was close to being an evil person himself, regardless of the righteous or evil sects.

He fit well in this shithole of a place.

'That son of a bitch. Fucking bastard.'

-Grip!

Mok Yu-cheon, who had been biting his nails, bit his fingers.

It hurts.

This is reality.

The more he accepts reality, the more painful it is.

But he couldn't give up just because it was painful.

Although Mok Gyeong-un's wickedness made him angry, that guy might be struggling to adapt and survive here in his own way.

Rather, it might be himself who was stuck in complacency.

He seemed to have believed that if he survived here, he would be able to return home and his original life would be waiting for him.

'No.....'

In the end, there's no such thing.

-Kkkkk! Drip drip!

Blood flowed from the bitten finger, and drops of blood stained his tongue.

As he tasted the hot blood, his heart felt cold instead.

-Swish!

Mok Yu-cheon brushed his hair back and straightened his posture.

He would now abandon the naive thought of simply trying to survive in a place like this.

If evil is strong, he must also become strong to overcome it.

'It's not just about surviving, I'll smash everything with my own hands.'

It was a truth he had learned even in the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

After reaching the Peak Realm, the gazes and treatment of everyone in the Yeon Mok Sword Manor changed.

That was the real truth.

To survive and be treated well as a martial artist, one had to become strong, regardless of the righteous sects.

Strength was the law of the martial arts world.

'.....Mok Gyeong-un. The one who will rise here is not you, but me.'

With his mind firmly set, Mok Yu-cheon began circulating his energy.

It was the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method.

There seemed to be some side effects, so he had stopped using it, but in the current situation, it was the only ascending cultivation method that could make him stronger quickly.

-Sssssss!

As Mok Yu-cheon practiced the cultivation method, the skin on his face gradually turned a brownish color.

“Hmm. It’s over the limit.”

Mok Gyeong-un said, looking at the 8 boys standing in front of him.

3 were brought by the Demonic Monk, who was possessing the body of Yeom Ga from Vermillion Slaughter Cave, and 5 were brought by Mo Ha-rang from Demon Fire Hall.

Mo Ha-rang looked at the ones she had brought with a troubled expression.

To save time, she had gathered members separately from the Demonic Monk, who was possessing Yeom Ga.

[If you’re possessed by a ghost, it might be difficult to gather members.]

She thought she should gather as many members as possible herself.

The maximum number of members she had gathered was 5.

In fact, this was also narrowed down from 10 people who wanted to be in her team.

She had told them that she would take responsibility for them to pass this gate since they were also selected, but it was quite troublesome.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“We don’t need anyone other than the five, so could you please leave on your own?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the 8 boys looked dumbfounded.

That was understandable, as they had joined the team believing in the reputation of Vermillion Slaughter Cave or Demon Fire Hall and thinking of them as the team leaders.

“Phew.”

One of the boys sighed and left the room as he was.

The boy was in the same team as Mo Ha-rang, so he had witnessed Mok Gyeong-un's true colors with his own eyes.

Therefore, he left the team without any hesitation.

However, coincidentally, the remaining 7 boys had not seen anything other than Mok Gyeong-un breaking a boy's neck at the first gate.

Their reactions were somewhat intense.

"Who are you to tell us to leave? I decided to join this team because of Mo Ha-rang."

"That goes for me too. If anyone should leave, it's you."

"I guess everyone thinks the same way."

They all expressed hostility toward Mok Gyeong-un.

In any case, unlike the first gate, the blocked energy points had been opened, so they were overflowing with confidence.

To them, Mo Ha-rang said with a troubled expression,

".....I'm sorry, but I'm not the team leader."

"What?"

"What do you mean by that?"

At Mo Ha-rang's words, those who had considered her the team leader couldn't hide their bewilderment.

In the first place, when Mo Ha-rang gathered team members, she had said she was looking for people to be on the same team, but she hadn't mentioned that the actual team leader was someone else.

From their perspective, they had been deceived.

"Mo Ha-rang. Is that true?"

"We thought you were the team leader."

"I'm sorry. The team leader is this person here."

'This person?'

At her words, the boys frowned.

If their ears weren't wrong, Mo Ha-rang had referred to Mok Gyeong-un as "this person" as if he were her superior.

In any case, even if he was the team leader, he was only the head for this gate.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said,

"It seems that most of you came in without knowing that I was the team leader. If you're dissatisfied, you're free to leave anytime."

At those words, one boy snorted.

"Ha! I can't accept that. Mo Ha-rang. You should be the team leader instead. Then I'll definitely follow you."

At the boy's words, the other boys chimed in.

"That's a good idea. I agree."

"I agree too."

"If Mo Ha-rang is the team leader, I can follow her no matter what."

At the unanimous opinion of the boys telling her to take the role of team leader, Mo Ha-rang glanced at Mok Gyeong-un with a troubled expression.

Mok Gyeong-un still had a smiling face.

Seeing that, she was even more worried.

She had experienced that his smile was full of malice.

At this, she thought she should make it clear to avoid any trouble and said,

"I'm sorry, but I have decided to follow this person."

'!?'

As Mo Ha-rang drew a clear line, the boys' expressions changed individually.

However, the common thing was that most of them wondered why she acknowledged someone like Mok Gyeong-un as the team leader.

At that moment, one of the 3 boys who had followed Demonic Monk possessing the body of Yeom Ga from Vermillion Slaughter Cave asked,

“Don’t tell me you also acknowledge that guy as the team leader?”

“I do.”

“What?”

At the short affirmation, the 3 boys were also at a loss.

They had also voluntarily asked to be team members knowing the reputation of Vermillion Slaughter Cave.

But the very person they wanted to serve as the team leader was serving someone else as the team leader, so they didn’t know what to do.

To them, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“In any case, you’ll be choosing a team leader to pass this gate, so it seems you have a lot of concerns. Doesn’t the answer come out when you see that these two people have joined under me?”

“.....”

At those words, the boys alternately looked at Mo Ha-rang, Yeom Ga, and Mok Gyeong-un.

Although they didn’t like this guy for some reason, there must be a reason why these two people, who wouldn’t be out of place as team leaders, were following Mok Gyeong-un.

‘There’s some truth to it.’

‘Vermillion Slaughter Cave and Demon Fire Hall would have their pride.’

‘For them to follow that guy.....’

At this, they started to be swayed one by one.

However, not everyone was like that.

One boy stepped forward and said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“What have you shown to make us follow you? No matter how much I think about it, I don’t understand.”

“If you don’t have faith in me as the team leader, then you can quietly leave this room.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the boy’s expression distorted frighteningly.

The boy said while drawing energy from his danjeon,

“Who says to come and go as they please? You’re a ridiculous fellow. I can’t acknowledge you.”

“What will you do if you can’t acknowledge me?”

Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile.

Then the boy took a fighting stance and said,

“If you’re so great, let’s have a duel.”

At the boy’s sudden hostile attitude, everyone looked at each other, gauging the situation.

In fact, there was one thing they were curious about.

As they recovered their internal energy, they could roughly estimate the opponent’s martial arts level with their energy sense.

But no matter how they looked at it, Mok Gyeong-un felt like he was barely at the first-rate level.

On the other hand, it was different for Yeom Ga from Vermillion Slaughter Cave and Mo Ha-rang from Demon Fire Hall.

The energy that appeared based on their energy sense was incomparably sharp, and they judged that they were opponents they couldn’t defeat even if they attacked in earnest.

So they also wanted to confirm it rather than stop him.

They wanted to see how skilled Mok Gyeong-un really was.

It was at that very moment.

“How dare you challenge this person to a duel in this place?”

Suddenly, Yeom Ga from Vermillion Slaughter Cave frowned at the boy who had taken a fighting stance, expressing his discomfort.

At his reaction, the boys couldn't hide their puzzlement.

Like Mo Ha-rang, even Yeom Ga was acting as if he had pledged loyalty to Mok Gyeong-un.

They couldn't understand what was going on.

But then Mok Gyeong-un raised his hand and stopped him.

"Ah. Don't be like that. From his perspective, it's understandable to have doubts."

"But Lord....no, my liege. This insolent human....."

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un lightly glanced at the Demonic Monk, who was possessing Yeom Ga.

Then the Demonic Monk stopped speaking and stepped back.

'What? Did he just call him 'my liege'?'

'Why is Yeom Ga from Vermillion Slaughter Cave groveling before that guy, calling him my liege?'

'Is he really hiding his true skills?'

From the boys' perspective, it only raised more questions.

Likewise, the boy who had boldly challenged Mok Gyeong-un to a duel also started to have doubts about Yeom Ga's attitude.

Was his energy sense wrong?

As he was thinking that,

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un, who was sitting on the bed, stretched out his hand.

At that very moment,

-Whoosh!

"Huh?"

The body of the boy who had taken a fighting stance was pulled forward, and his head and upper body tilted forward.

The boy's eyes widened at the strong suction force.

But the surprise was short-lived, and to prevent himself from falling forward, the boy spread his right leg and stomped his foot.

-Thud!

“Hmph!”

As soon as he did that,

-Smack!

“Ugh!”

Mok Gyeong-un leaped up from the bed, grabbed the back of the boy's head with both hands, and kned him in the face.

The boy's body staggered backward as his face was hit by the knee.

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the hair of the staggering boy.

-Grip!

“Ah, ah. You shouldn't fall over with just this much.”

Then he smashed the head of the boy, whose nose was bleeding, directly into the floor.

-Bang!

The wooden floor shattered, and the boy's face was buried in the ground.

The force was so strong that the boy's body twitched and then stopped moving as if he had fainted.

“Oh. Did he faint already?”

Mok Gyeong-un muttered as if slightly disappointed.

‘!!!!!!’

At this sight, the boys were at a loss for words, stunned.

The boy who had just fought Mok Gyeong-un had martial arts skills at the end of the first-rate level, enough to reach the Peak Realm with just some realization.

However,

‘.....He was no match at all.’

‘What was that just now?’

Moreover, what was that thing Mok Gyeong-un had shown earlier?

When he stretched out his hand, the fainted boy’s body was pulled forward and about to fall.

‘Could it be Void Seizing?’

Void Seizing Technique.

It was a technique that could move objects with profound true energy.

Was it possible for someone who looked to be only around seventeen years old?

‘No way.’

‘That can’t be.’

They couldn’t believe it.

To the boys who couldn’t hide their astonishment, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Anyone else want to confirm?”

“.....”

No one answered this question.

They had already witnessed it with their own eyes, so who would object here?

To them, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Then no one has any objections. Good. Since one person here has been reduced, it seems we need one more person to leave.”

“.....”

At those words, everyone looked at each other.

That was because not only Mok Gyeong-un's strength but also Yeom Ga and Mo Ha-rang were masters who had reached the Peak Realm.

If they stayed in this team, passing was guaranteed, so who would easily give up?

"The atmosphere has improved. I'm glad to see you all so motivated."

Saying that, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been looking over the boys, stroked his chin as if troubled.

"We can't have them fight each other since it's a team-based gate....."

'Ha!'

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mo Ha-rang inwardly clicked her tongue.

This guy was really full of malice.

As they were thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at one boy.

Was he telling him to leave?

At this, the startled boy said,

"I, I will do my best to follow you as the team leader....."

Before he could finish his sentence,

Mok Gyeong-un approached him and stood right in front of him.

Then he smiled brightly and said,

"You're the weakest one. I'm sorry, but it seems you should leave."

"....."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the boy trembled and couldn't say anything.

In fact, it was because he acknowledged that he was relatively weaker compared to the other boys.

At this, he silently tried to turn around,

"Ah, wait a moment."

'Could it be?'

Did he change his mind?

Thinking that, he turned his head with a glimmer of hope, but,

-Smack! Crack!

At that moment, his body was suddenly staggering to the side and spinning.

Then he soon fell to the floor, hitting his head.

-Thud!

“Aaargh!” The fallen boy soon grabbed his leg and cried out in pain.

Just now, Mok Gyeong-un had kicked his ankle, and the force was so strong that his body spun like a windmill and broke at the same time.

“What are you doing? He was just about to give up and leave...”

One boy shouted at Mok Gyeong-un in shock.

Then Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head.

“Is there a problem?”

“No. He’s leaving on his own after you told him to, so why are you doing this to his leg...”

He couldn’t bring himself to say “break.”

But then Mok Gyeong-un said, “I said not to kill him. Did I ever say not to break a limb somewhere?”

“.....”

At those words, the boy was at a loss for words.

Breaking his leg here to eliminate him just because he’s no longer on the same team.

This guy is really.....

He was speechless, but Mok Gyeong-un stretched his body as if loosening up and said, “It won’t end with just this friend, so what’s the fuss?”

“What are you saying now?”

“From now on, we’ll be quite busy. Because we have to break the legs of all the other team members except our team before the gate test.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the boys’ expressions stiffened simultaneously.

Chapter 93

Five boys stood before a door, expressions taut with tension.

Their eyes fixed on the door, unease evident as they swallowed dryly.

[“From now on, we’ll be quite busy. Because we have to break the legs of all the other team members except our team before the gate test.”]

At first, Mok Gyeong-un’s words had been disconcerting.

The idea of breaking other cadets’ legs before even starting the trial felt outrageous.

However, upon further thought, there was a certain logic to this strategy.

The longer the trial dragged on, the fiercer the competition would become.

But what if most competitors were eliminated beforehand?

‘Our chances will improve.’

Only a select few could be chosen by the officers.

Considering that, there was no need to be particular about methods or means.

One boy whispered, “Will it work?”

“It should.”

There were five of them, and only two people inside this room.

With the advantage in numbers, a surprise attack would make subduing them a simple task.

[You five will move together.]

[All five of us?]

[Can’t you manage alone?]

[Well, no, but...]

[The five of you, go together.]

[Wait a second. Then you, Yeom Ga, and Mo Ha-rang will be working as a team? In that case, wouldn't it be better if we sent one or two people to support you three...]

[Why bother with such complications? We're more than capable on our own.]

[.....]

True, those who had reached the Peak Realm could handle top-tier opponents single-handedly.

It was like a puppy worrying about a tiger.

The boys exchanged glances.

“Let's do this.”

With that, they opened the door.

As the door swung open, the gazes of the two boys discussing how to form a team naturally turned in that direction.

“Who is it?”

A handsome boy entered through the open door.

Recognizing the boy's face, one of them scowled.

“You...”

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

From the very first Gateway Trial, the battle for the iron balls, he had left a strong impression on many of the boys.

One of them looked puzzled for a moment before asking hesitantly, “Are you going around gathering teammates, by any chance?”

“Aaaah. You could say that.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un quietly closed the door.

Seeing this, the scowling boy spoke without relaxing his expression, "Look. I have no intention of being on the same team as you."

"Is that so?"

"So get out."

"Hmm. That's a problem."

"What's the problem? Go find people who want to team up with you. I don't want to..."

-Smack!

Before he could finish, Mok Gyeong-un swiftly lunged forward, grabbing the boy's head and slamming it against the bed frame.

-Thud!

"Ugh!"

Then, seizing the boy's right arm as he tried to resist,

-Crack!

He twisted it backward.

"Arrrgh!"

The boy with the broken arm tried to scream, but Mok Gyeong-un had already covered his mouth, muffling his cries of agony.

Witnessing this scene, the other boy sitting across from them couldn't hide his bewilderment.

He had let his guard down, never expecting a sudden attack.

"Wh-What are you doing?"

"What indeed?"

Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly and firmly pressed his foot down on the writhing boy's left leg.

-Crunch!

-Snap!

As the ankle twisted, the bone pierced through flesh and protruded out.

“Aaaaah!”

The boy’s eyes widened, bloodshot with pain as he struggled in agony.

Unable to endure it, he soon lost consciousness.

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un do this without batting an eye, the other boy, perhaps out of fear, hastily said, “I-I’ll join your team. I will, so ple...”

“It’s fine.”

“What?”

“I’ve already gathered my teammates. I’m just here to break some limbs.”

‘!?’

What’s with this guy?

So his goal from the start was to injure them?

For a moment, it seemed absurd, but the boy knew that if he didn’t flee immediately, he would end up like his unconscious companion.

-Whoosh!

He launched himself toward the door.

However,

-Grab!

“Ack!”

His body, hurtling toward the door, was abruptly yanked back as if caught by something.

In the next instant, Mok Gyeong-un’s hand gripped the back of his neck.

‘Wh-What the...’

“I’ll make it painless.”

“Wha-What...”

-Tap tap tap tap!

Before he could utter another word, the boy's acupoints were struck, and he lost consciousness.

Laying the unconscious boy on the floor, Mok Gyeong-un stepped on his right ankle.

-Crack!

He had not merely fainted but had his acupoints sealed, so the boy did not wake up even as his leg was broken.

Looking at the boy, Mok Gyeong-un muttered, his lips twitching, "Four."

That was the number of limbs he had broken thus far.

-Are you seriously planning to break them one by one?

Cheong-ryeong's voice rang in Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

To that question, Mok Gyeong-un replied nonchalantly, "Of course."

Rather than wasting time dragging out the trial, eliminating most competitors now would render the subsequent trials unnecessary.

-Seriously, you fiend. Tsk tsk.

Cheong-ryeong clicked his tongue.

Conceiving such an idea was difficult in the first place, and even if one did, they would likely target only a few troublesome individuals.

However, Mok Gyeong-un's thinking was on a different level.

He intended to use the time given for rest and team selection to eliminate all the other cadets.

In a way, from the moment they joined Mok Gyeong-un, misfortune had befallen this batch of Corpse Blood Valley cadets.

"Now there are sixty-four left."

Out of a total of 80.

Among them, 4 had been taken as captives, 4 had their limbs broken by Mok Gyeong-un, and lastly, 8 were Mok Gyeong-un's teammates, including himself.

Excluding these, 64 remained.

Mok Yu-cheon, immersed in cultivating his internal energy cultivation technique.

After a long period of energy circulation, when Mok Yu-cheon opened his eyes, for a fleeting moment, an uncanny aura different from his usual righteousness flashed in his gaze.

However, it vanished quickly.

‘What was that just now?’

While practicing energy circulation, Mok Yu-cheon had been enveloped by a strange sensation.

Normally, the technique would bring a sense of clarity to body and mind, but this time, he had been gripped by an unprecedented pleasure.

The instant he surrendered to that pleasure, something astonishing had occurred.

‘My energy surged suddenly.’

Out of curiosity, Mok Yu-cheon examined his danjeon.

‘!?’

His eyes widened in shock.

Because he practiced energy circulation regularly, he knew better than anyone the size of his danjeon and the level of his internal energy.

Yet, the size of his danjeon had increased slightly compared to before.

‘How can this be...’

How did this happen?

No matter how exceptional the Yeon Mok Mind Transformation Method was, could it really increase internal energy this rapidly?

At this rate, if he continued practicing diligently, he could reduce the usual cultivation time by more than half.

Just as he was about to revel in the pleasant sensation, he grew uneasy.

Experiencing this peculiar pleasure for the first time while practicing left him strangely unsettled.

'Is this really alright?'

Doubts crept in about whether this deviation from the basic techniques was cause for concern.

He then shook his head.

This was no ordinary method but the Yeon Mok Mind Transformation Method, an exclusive cultivation technique for the Yeon Mok Manor's heir.

Naturally, it would differ significantly from the basic techniques.

'Right. That can't be it.'

He had been worried that improper energy circulation might lead him down the path of mental demons, but his mind remained upright and clear.

As long as he didn't waver, there should be no problem.

Just as he was about to resume his cultivation,

-Knock knock!

Someone rapped on the door.

"Who is it?"

There was no one who should be seeking him out at the moment.

Puzzled, he watched as someone opened the door and entered.

'Oh?'

It was a boy with a mature appearance, almost like a young man.

The only potential flaw on his handsome face was his sharp, narrow eyes.

'This guy...'

He recognized that face.

During the second trial, he had lost his companions and was fleeing alone when he found himself in a predicament.

At that time, a group had appeared, led by this friend who helped him.

His name was definitely...

“Mu Jang-yak!”

“Hey. You remember me well.”

“How could I forget the one who saved my life?”

Mok Yu-cheon rose from his seat and greeted him with a cupped fist salute.

In response, Mu Jang-yak waved his hands, saying, “No need for that. It’s unfitting for peers of the same age to exchange such formalities. Just greet me like a friend.”

“Still, if not for you, I...”

He might have truly lost his life there.

That was why he felt genuinely grateful.

Mu Jang-yak looked at Mok Yu-cheon, his eyes filled with interest, and said, “You... Your complexion doesn’t look too good.”

“My complexion?”

Puzzled by this, Mok Yu-cheon wanted to check his face, but the room was practically bare, with only two beds, making it impossible to do so.

“Is it that bad?”

“It has a bit of a brownish tint?”

“Brown?”

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon furrowed his brows.

This time, he had continued practicing the Yeon Mok Mind Transformation Method without stopping, and it seemed the side effects had resurfaced.

Although it concerned him, there was nothing he could do about it at the moment, so Mok Yu-cheon shook his head and said, “It’s fine. I might just be very tired.”

“That’s a relief, then.”

“Anyway, what brings you here?”

In response to Mok Yu-cheon's question, Mu Jang-yak closed the door and spoke with a somewhat serious expression, "A small problem has arisen."

"Problem?"

"I was supposed to meet up with a friend who agreed to be on the same team, to practice energy circulation and convene in the evening. However, he never showed up, so I went to his room and found him unconscious with a broken leg."

"What?"

What on earth was he talking about?

As Mok Yu-cheon looked puzzled, Mu Jang-yak continued in a meaningful tone, "Suspecting something, I checked a few rooms and found others with broken legs as well."

"Don't tell me..."

"It seems someone has been causing trouble."

"But why would they do that?"

"It's rather absurd, but they're probably trying to reduce the number of competitors in advance as much as possible."

"By breaking everyone's legs?"

"Precisely. There's a prohibition on killing, but no explicit rules against injuring each other."

"Ha!"

Mok Yu-cheon clicked his tongue at those words.

It seemed there was truly no concept of fair play in this place.

Everyone was eager to stab others in the back at any moment.

"Crazy..."

"Indeed. Definitely the work of a madman. That's why I came to propose something to you."

"A proposal?"

“Have you found a team yet? Or are you planning to be a team leader?”

When Mu Jang-yak asked, Mok Yu-cheon shook his head.

He had no ambitions to become a team leader anyway and had been practicing energy circulation with the intention of joining any team.

At this, Mu Jang-yak smiled faintly and said, “If you haven’t joined a team yet, would you like to join mine?”

“What?”

“Unfortunately, it seems the friend who was supposed to be on your team was taken as a captive?”

“...”

Mok Yu-cheon fell silent at his words.

He must have witnessed that.

Then Mu Jang-yak waved a hand and said, “Ah. I’m not suspecting you. If I did, I wouldn’t have made this offer in the first place. Besides, I had already proposed it back then.”

“Right. You did.”

After saving him, Mu Jang-yak had offered him a spot on his team, mentioning a vacancy.

However, at that time, Mok Yu-cheon had declined, stating that he needed to stay with his scattered teammates.

But this time, the situation was different.

“I...”

“Honestly, it would be better to join a team. I’ve already asked my teammates to gather in one room for safety.”

“Ah...”

“That way, we can watch out for each other’s well-being. What do you think?”

Faced with Mu Jang-yak’s reasonable suggestion, Mok Yu-cheon saw no reason to refuse.

Even though he had reached the Peak Realm, he had noticed a few cadets with cultivation levels similar to his own, so he couldn't afford to let his guard down.

In that regard, perhaps it would be better to stick together with them, as Mu Jang-yak said.

“Alright. If you'll have me, I'll do my best.”

At Mok Yu-cheon's words, Mu Jang-yak extended his hand.

“I'm the one who should be grateful. To have such an outstanding friend like you join us.”

-Clasp!

The two shook hands.

However, the moment their hands touched, Mok Yu-cheon couldn't help but be surprised.

‘...This guy.’

He hadn't realized it before, but the energy he sensed from Mu Jang-yak's hand was not inferior to his own, and might even surpass it.

Perhaps Mu Jang-yak had also tried to gauge his level in that brief moment, revealing his energy and allowing Mok Yu-cheon to perceive it.

“As expected, you're strong.”

“So are you.”

In response to Mu Jang-yak's words, Mok Yu-cheon nodded in agreement, acknowledging the same.

Then, he asked curiously, “By the way, are you left-handed?”

The hand Mu Jang-yak had extended was his left hand, not his right.

At Mok Yu-cheon's question, Mu Jang-yak chuckled and said, “Who knows.”

And so, a night passed.

Early morning, at the beginning of the chen hour (7-9 AM).

The time for selecting team leaders and members had concluded, and it was now the moment to gather in the plaza behind the dormitory.

Someone urgently knocked on the door of the Corpse Blood Valley Leader's office.

-Bang bang!

-Leader! Leader!

At the knocking, the senior warrior assisting beside him said, "It seems they're ready."

"So it appears. Come in."

Soon, a young warrior wearing a red belt entered hastily.

Noticing the warrior's somewhat tense expression, the senior warrior, sensing something amiss, asked, "What's the matter?"

"Well, there's a small issue... no, a big problem has arisen."

"A problem?"

"I think you should head to the plaza right away."

What could have happened to warrant such a reaction?

Wondering, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom nodded and rose from his seat.

In any case, he needed to check who had become team leaders and oversee the proceedings of the third trial, the Sword Evaluation.

And so, Lee Ji-yeom and the senior warrior followed the warrior out of the office.

They had to go to the plaza behind the dormitory building anyway.

As they arrived,

'!?'

Both Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom and the senior warrior simultaneously halted, bewildered by the sight before them.

Only 16 individuals were present outside.

There were only two teams.

The senior warrior frowned and asked the warrior, "Why are only these kids here?"

"Well, that's..."

"Speak quickly."

"Well, that's..."

"Speak quickly."

Urged by the senior warrior, the warrior spoke with a troubled expression while glancing at the dormitory, "The rest are all unable to participate in this trial due to broken legs."

"What?"

For a moment, the senior warrior doubted his own ears. All the absent individuals had their legs broken?

"What nonsense are you spouting?"

"...I checked a few rooms, and those who truly couldn't come out all had broken legs."

"How on earth..."

As the senior warrior reacted in disbelief, the gaze of Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, visible through the gaps in his mask, turned toward someone standing in the plaza with his hands clasped behind his back, unlike the senior warrior.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Lee Ji-yeom recalled the words Mok Gyeong-un had spoken yesterday.

[Would it be alright if I reduced the number of people a little?]

Were there fellows that needed to be kept in check separately for the trials? Well, if that was the case,

[As long as you adhere to the constraints, there won't be significant issues.]

[Oh-ho. That's quite fortunate.]

He had said that, but to think Mok Gyeong-un would go this far.

'Isn't this a little... excessive?'

Chapter 94

The senior warrior exploded with anger and asked the ordinary red-belted warrior, “Just who the hell pulled this stunt?”

“Well.....”

The warrior quietly turned his head and gestured with his eyes toward someone standing in formation in the square.

Seeing who it was, the senior warrior was dumbfounded and at a loss for words.

“Is it that bastard again?”

Again, that bastard.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

He had left a strong impression and obtained the top position in the first and second stages, so even if they didn’t want to remember him, they had no choice but to do so.

“There’s no way he could have done it alone with so many trainees. Did that bastard and his teammates do it together?”

“It seems that way.”

‘Ha.’

It was truly absurd.

The process of finding team leaders and members that took place last night.

It was designed to voluntarily allow the trainees to find team leaders and members among themselves, to see who had the qualities of a leader.

Of course, they had expected a fierce competition for team members due to the four vacancies caused by the dropouts.

And the reason they had only imposed the restriction of no killing was to allow a certain degree of fighting among them.

But this was a completely unexpected outcome.

‘Damn it.’

They had expected at least five or more Unit Leader-level trainees to be selected.

But only two had been chosen.

After the first and second stages, the trainees had already proven their qualifications and mental fortitude to a certain extent, so the goal was to have as many of them advance as possible.

However, because of that bastard Mok Gyeong-un, things had gotten completely twisted.

The senior warrior cautiously said to the Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom, "Valley Master, this won't do."

"What do you mean?"

"It has gone too far."

"Too far?"

"Isn't that right? Out of eighty, no, seventy-six, only sixteen have formed teams. If we leave them be, more....."

"More what? What's the problem?"

"Pardon?"

The senior warrior was baffled by Lee Ji-yeom's words.

If they failed to properly filter out the suitable ones by the end of the stage, those higher up might take issue with it.

To the worrying senior warrior, Lee Ji-yeom said, ".....It may be excessive, but no rules have been broken. On what grounds can we stop it?"

The senior warrior frowned.

Just yesterday, the Valley Master had said they should keep a closer eye on Mok Gyeong-un.

But why was he suddenly being so lenient?

"Valley Master.....That fellow is not from our sect and is a hostage brought from the righteous faction's Yeon Mok Sword Manor. If the process of selecting the best is ruined because of him, the Sect Master and the executives will surely take issue with it. Perhaps the Society Leader had anticipated this."

"....."

At the senior warrior's words, Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom let out a faint sigh.

Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi.

He was like his left arm.

So he knew better than anyone how the Sect Master and the main castle were always finding fault and taking issue with the Blood Valley's events.

That was why he was offering this opinion.

".....That may be the case. But it doesn't matter. In any case, it was the Sect Master who sent that....fellow. It will be difficult for them to hold me responsible for something caused by his whim."

"But....."

"We will proceed as planned."

".....I accept your command."

At the resolute words of Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi finally stopped questioning and accepted the order.

However, his lowered gaze was directed toward Mok Gyeong-un.

-How does it feel to be backstabbed for the first time?

Cheong-ryeong's voice resonated in Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

Why was Cheong-ryeong saying this?

It was because of what happened last night.

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head to look at the eight people standing in formation next to their team.

Among them, the ones who stood out were a boy with a quite mature appearance and sharp, narrow eyes, and Mok Yu-cheon.

'Interesting.'

Last night, Mok Gyeong-un had intended to break the legs of everyone except his own team, making them fail.

If that happened, there was a high probability that the third stage would be the last, and all other stages would be skipped, moving directly to the final procedure.

However, a variable arose at dawn.

[Oh, no. Something terrible has happened.]

One of the boys who had been sent in a group of five came to him urgently and said.

[Where are the others, and why have you come alone?]

[.....Well, that's.....]

[It seems something happened, right?]

[.....I'm sorry.]

The boy, thinking Mok Gyeong-un would reprimand him, spoke with great nervousness.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and gently reassured him.

[Is anyone going to eat you alive? Where are the others?]

[They were all captured.]

[Captured.....you say?]

[Ye, yes. There was no way around it. We went to the last room, but we had no idea eight people were hiding and ambushing us.]

[Eight people were lying in ambush.....]

This was unexpected.

It meant that someone had noticed their plan and had prepared for it.

Come to think of it, it was impossible for no one to notice while they were breaking legs one room at a time.

There were even four people who had noticed it midway and came to attack him.

It seemed there was a clever fellow among them.

[Let's go.]

Mok Gyeong-un, possessing the body of Yeom Ga who was finishing up on the upper floor, joined forces with Ma-seung and Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall and headed to the room where their teammates were said to be captured.

In front of the room, in the corridor, two boys were standing as if keeping watch.

Upon seeing Mok Gyeong-un, they were surprised and opened the door.

Then, four people rushed out from inside.

One of them was the narrow-eyed fellow named Moo Jang-yak, and another was none other than Mok Yu-cheon.

As soon as Mok Yu-cheon saw Mok Gyeong-un, he cursed.

[You crazy bastard. Are you even resorting to this kind of thing now?]

[This kind of thing?]

[It's different from the previous stages. We just need to pick a team leader and cooperate among teammates to conduct the inspection, so why are you doing this....]

[Is it wrong to do this?]

[What?]

[In what way is it wrong?]

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, Mok Yu-cheon replied with an exasperated expression.

[Are you even saying that now.....]

[I didn't break the rule of no killing, and trainees were going to be eliminated at each stage anyway, so what's the problem with just hastening it a bit?]

[You!]

Mok Yu-cheon was at a loss for words at Mok Gyeong-un's statement.

In fact, the idea of breaking everyone's legs was absurd, but it wasn't entirely correct to say it was unconditionally wrong.

After all, this was a competition in the first place.

-Gnash!

Realizing that arguing logically in this way was meaningless and that words couldn't do anything, Mok Yu-cheon said.

[Yeah. There's no point in arguing with you about this.]

With those words, Mok Yu-cheon exchanged a glance with Moo Jang-yak beside him.

Then, Moo Jang-yak raised one hand and opened his mouth.

[Hello.]

[Yes. Hello.]

[You've come to find your teammates, right?]

[That's right. If it's alright with you, I'd like you to kindly send our teammates back to us.]

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Moo Jang-yak shook his head, smiled, and said.

[I'm sorry, but that might be a bit difficult.]

[You just need to hand them over, so in what way is it difficult?]

[If we return the teammates to you, you'll try to break the legs of our teammates, just like you did in the other rooms. How can we allow that?]

[You know well.]

Mok Gyeong-un also smiled and replied.

The sight of the two of them smiling and conversing at a critical moment made their respective teammates unable to hide their tension.

However, the advantageous side was Moo Jang-yak's.

After all, they had hostages.

[For now, can you leave? We don't want to needlessly fight with your team and exhaust our strength.]

[Is that so?]

[Yes. If you do that, we'll kindly return the captured teammates tomorrow morning.]

An unexpectedly smooth proposal.

In fact, although it seemed like a concession, this was the best proposal for Moo Jang-yak's side.

They were certain that the moment they returned the teammates, Mok Gyeong-un would definitely target them.

At that moment, Mo Ha-rang whispered.

[It's unfortunate that it's different from the goal, but it seems best to do it that way for now. This time, they have the upper hand.]

The number of uninjured trainees was 16.

In this situation, if their teammates got hurt, it would be advantageous for the other side.

However, even they couldn't easily do that.

Because if the numbers were maintained, there would be no fight, but if they injured Mok Gyeong-un's teammates, they would have to pick a fight to fill the remaining spots.

'They've thought it through well.'

The other side considered this their best option, so they had created this setup.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un said.

[Well, that's fine, but isn't there a possibility like this?]

[Possibility?]

[Yes. If you break our teammates' legs tomorrow morning and return them, won't we have no choice but to be eliminated?]

[Ah.....]

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mo Ha-rang let out a sigh.

Come to think of it, that was a possibility.

If the other side continued to hold the hostages, they could easily backstab them right before the team leader selection.

At that moment, Mok Yu-cheon snorted and said.

[Do you think we're like you? At least we won't backstab.]

[Of course, you can say that in front of us. But situations always force you to make the rational choice.]

[Is breaking a promise the rational choice?]

[Because it's advantageous for your side.]

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mok Yu-cheon clicked his tongue.

He had thought they would meekly follow their proposal in this situation, but he hadn't expected them to bring up a possibility they hadn't even considered.

Mok Yu-cheon glanced at Moo Jang-yak beside him.

Moo Jang-yak shrugged his shoulders and then opened his mouth.

[It's natural to have such suspicions, but you have no choice but to trust us anyway. Other than that.]

In response, Mok Gyeong-un said.

[That might be difficult.]

[You'll be at a disadvantage if this proposal falls through, though.]

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

[No way. Now that it has come to this, we just need to keep eight out of sixteen people safe. Then, won't it go according to my original plan?]

-Flinch!

The trainees listening to Mok Gyeong-un's words were dumbfounded.

Who would have expected him to abandon his own teammates in this situation and come out saying that as long as the numbers match, it's fine?

Does that guy have no attachment to his own team?

Mok Yu-cheon shouted in an angry voice.

[Don't you have any sense of camaraderie? The teammates who trusted and followed you.....]

-Swish!

Moo Jang-yak extended his hand toward Mok Yu-cheon and shook his head.

Then, turning his head toward Mok Gyeong-un, he said.

[I had a feeling, but I didn't expect you to react like that. When I heard from Yu-cheon, I wondered if you would really go that far.]

Moo Jang-yak had heard from Mok Yu-cheon about what had happened at the end of the second stage.

So he had his doubts, but it turned out just as he had heard.

Mok Gyeong-un said to him.

[Is that so? Then you know well that my words are not empty threats.]

[That's right. It's a good thing we prepared for the worst-case scenario.]

[What?]

Preparing for the worst-case scenario?

What does that mean?

As Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled, Moo Jang-yak said.

[The possibility you mentioned earlier about breaking our teammates' legs, we didn't consider it from the beginning, but we did prepare for the chance that you might react like this.]

[Prepare.....what exactly did you do?]

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, Moo Jang-yak pulled something out from his wrist.

It was a thin needle about the size of a finger joint.

It was even smaller than the gold shackle embedded in the gate.

[.....What is that?]

[The four captured members of your team, and all of our team members, we've inserted this into the acupuncture point on their waists.]

[.....]

[If this cartilage needle is inserted for half a day, they will limp for about ten days. In severe cases, they won't be able to walk for half a month.]

'!?'

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

He had inserted that needle not only into our teammates but also into their own teammates?

[.....How can I believe that?]

Then, Moo Jang-yak told Mok Yu-cheon to take off his upper garment and show his back.

Accordingly, Mok Yu-cheon removed his top.

As he undressed, Moo Jang-yak began striking the acupuncture points on Mok Yu-cheon's back, out of sight.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

And not long after,

-Pop!

The needle popped out from Mok Yu-cheon's back.

Seeing that, even Mo Ha-rang clicked his tongue in disbelief.

Who would have predicted that they would go so far as to insert cartilage needles into their own teammates to prepare for this situation?

Moo Jang-yak smiled at Mok Gyeong-un with narrow eyes and said.

[Now, what are you going to do? Even if you take Mok Yu-cheon with you after removing the needle, if I don't cooperate, everyone will be unable to walk properly after half a day. Then, you and your entire team will be eliminated.]

It was a do-or-die kind of countermeasure.

Of course, this countermeasure was extremely effective.

Because it would result in both teams failing to fill eight spots, leading to everyone's elimination.

‘.....His mind is truly exceptional.’

Even Mo Ha-rang couldn't help but admire the exquisite move.

It was a strategy that accurately read the unpredictable Mok Gyeong-un.

This time, it seemed that even Mok Gyeong-un had no choice but to accept it.

However, Mok Gyeong-un muttered with twitching lips.

[This is really interesting.]

She frowned.

It was as good as losing the battle of wits against Moo Jang-yak, yet he found this situation interesting?

As she was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un said to Moo Jang-yak.

[It's a tough decision.]

[Is there a need to ponder? No matter what tricks you use, in this situation.....]

[No. I'm deliberating whether it would be better to kill you now or let you live.]

‘!?’

Chapter 95

Mu Jang-yak always maintained a cheerful and bright demeanor, which naturally lifted the moods of those around him.

Even now, with a smile on his face, the team members' spirits remained high.

However, although he tried his best to conceal it, Mu Jang-yak's eyes kept darting toward Mok Gyeong-un when no one was looking.

In the end, he had successfully protected his team members.

As a team leader, he had performed his role excellently from the very first day.

‘...Mok Gyeong-un.’

The events of last night had completely etched Mok Gyeong-un into his mind.

No, he was considerably preoccupied with him.

Mu Jang-yak recalled what had transpired the previous night.

[No. I'm deliberating whether it would be better to kill you now or let you live.]

[Crazy bastard!]

[Do you even realize the situation you're in?]

Mu Jang-yak's team members were dumbfounded by Mok Gyeong-un's absurd words.

In the current situation, Mok Gyeong-un had no choice.

If he dared to touch even one person, they would ensure that everyone was eliminated from the trial.

Yet, he was spouting such nonsense, which was nothing more than a bluff.

[Do as you please!]

[If you're trying to get us all disqualified, do you think we'll just sit back and let it happen?]

[Bring it on!]

Mu Jang-yak's team members, who had been waiting confidently in his strategy, couldn't hold back any longer and assumed fighting stances, preparing for battle.

Mok Yu-cheon was no exception.

In contrast, Mu Jang-yak, who had devised this plan, silently observed Mok Gyeong-un, unlike the others.

'What the hell?'

What could he be relying on to act this way?

Mu Jang-yak had heard from Mok Yu-cheon, his half-brother, about what had occurred during the second trial and realized that Mok Gyeong-un was no ordinary person.

That was why he had devised such a flawless plan.

'No matter how I think about it, there are no loopholes in this plan. Yet, what's with that attitude?'

Mu Jang-yak had been exceptionally intelligent since childhood.

He was skilled at reading others' minds, discerning their emotions and thoughts through their eyes, actions, and various factors.

However, Mok Gyeong-un's gaze and tone of voice made it difficult to decipher his emotions.

'I can't tell if it's a bluff or genuine.'

What could it be?

Was he simply unable to control his own emotions, leading him to say such things?

Although it seemed excessive, Mok Gyeong-un possessed a cunning disposition, much like himself.

In fact, although he hadn't disclosed it to everyone, if the first tactic had succeeded, he had intended to break the legs of Mok Gyeong-un's team members at daybreak, just as Mok Gyeong-un had said.

That way, they could naturally eliminate him and his team.

In the end, only Mok Gyeong-un had seen through his intentions.

Perhaps that was why Mu Jang-yak found Mok Gyeong-un's words from earlier unsettling.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at him, chuckled, and said, [Let's end it here for now.]

[What?]

Mok Yu-cheon retorted in response to Mok Gyeong-un's words, as if they were absurd.

Was he babbling as if bestowing mercy, even though he was in a disadvantageous position?

Although they had followed Mu Jang-yak's plan, there were three individuals on their side who had reached the Peak Realm.

Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate, who was guarding the hostages in the room, Mu Jang-yak himself, and Mok Yu-cheon.

They outnumbered the other side and held the advantage in a fight, certainly not in an unfavorable situation.

[Stop bluffing, Mok Gyeong-un.]

[Think what you will. Send two of your members over here. To be fair, we should also hold hostages until morning.]

[We're the ones holding the knife, yet you dare...]

[Fine.]

[What?]

Just as they were about to refuse, Mu Jang-yak readily accepted the proposal.

His team members, including Mok Yu-cheon, couldn't hide their puzzlement at his attitude.

Why was he accommodating them when there was no need to do so?

Mu Jang-yak explained to them, [They've made a concession, so there's no point in further provoking them.]

[But...]

[Trust me.]

In the end, both sides agreed to exchange hostages and hold them, and the night passed peacefully.

However, Mu Jang-yak heard Mok Gyeong-un muttering quietly, [What a pity. I had hoped you wouldn't be so wise.]

-Flinch!

The moment he heard those words, a strange chill ran down his spine.

Just who was this fellow?

He had prided himself on the fact that among his peers, there was no one worthy of his attention.

He didn't consider Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate, Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave, Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall, or even Mok Yu-cheon, whom he had recently met, to be particularly special.

Yet, for the first time, a feeling of wariness toward someone had emerged within him.

And that person was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

'If he becomes an enemy, perhaps I should kill him...'

An unprecedented situation where nearly a quarter of the cadets were eliminated before even taking on the trial.

Although it sparked considerable controversy, since no rules were violated, the issue was not pursued, and the trial proceeded.

Of course, due to this incident, an additional constraint was introduced.

"From now on, until all trials are completed, any private fights or acts of harming each other among the cadets are strictly prohibited."

It was to prevent further variables from arising.

As previously announced, the third trial was a sword formation test where one had to subdue their opponent.

The name of the sword formation was Heaven and Earth Eight Inscriptions Formation.

It was a sword formation based on the changes of the Eight Trigrams, developed by the previous leader of the Heaven and Earth Society. Perfectly executing it and subduing the opponent would result in passing the trial.

The allotted practice period was a mere three days.

Those three days passed quickly.

The remaining two teams, sixteen individuals, were the most skilled among the cadets who had entered Corpse Blood Valley.

Naturally, both teams easily passed the third trial.

The one who received the top score in the third trial was not Mok Gyeong-un but Mu Jang-yak.

Although Mok Gyeong-un's team had also utilized the sword formation well to subdue their opponents, Mu Jang-yak's team had perfectly overwhelmed their opponents without a single injury.

In conclusion, there were no flaws.

As a team leader and in terms of his judgment in operating the sword formation, he was considered superior, which allowed Mu Jang-yak to obtain the top score in this trial.

The fourth trial involved traversing a trap-filled maze in the darkness.

The criteria were simple.

Burning an incense stick that could measure time, if one emerged before a third of it burned out, they would gain the qualification of a unit leader and pass this trial, allowing them to proceed to the final trial.

If they emerged before two-thirds of the incense burned out, they would earn the qualification of a Daeju but forfeit the right to take the next trial.

Naturally, those who failed to pass through would be eliminated with the qualification of a senior warrior.

Originally, the trial scheduled for this round was supposed to utilize the iron balls obtained during the iron ball competition, but due to the mere sixteen remaining participants, it was inevitably skipped, moving directly to the fifth trial.

This was exactly what Mok Gyeong-un had intended.

And so, the sixteen cadets took on the fourth trial.

The results were as follows: 6 individuals emerged within one-third of the incense burning time, 5 individuals within two-thirds, and 5 individuals failed to emerge within two-thirds, totaling 10 individuals who were disqualified from the final trial.

Those who failed to pass the trial were disappointed but had to be content with the qualification of a senior warrior, while the 5 who emerged within two-thirds could at least earn the qualification of a Daeju.

Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi said to Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom, "Although there were two variables, the expected individuals passed."

The two variables Gwak Mun-gi referred to were the hostages from the righteous faction's Yeon Mok Sword Manor Clan, sent by the Society Leader.

He had naturally assumed that these two would not even survive the first or second trial.

However, that expectation had been completely shattered.

"I see. It's them."

The six individuals standing side by side in the plaza.

Those who had passed the fourth trial were Mok Gyeong-un, Mok Yu-cheon, Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave, Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate, Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall, and Mu Jang-yak.

“Who passed through the maze the fastest?”

“...It was Mok Gyeong-un.”

“Mok Gyeong-un?”

‘As expected of him.’

Lee Ji-yeom nodded, as if he had anticipated it to some extent.

No matter how much he had lost his former martial arts prowess, he naturally believed that someone like him would easily pass the trial.

[TL/N: At this point Lee Ji-yeom thinks that Cheong-ryeong, former lord of Lunar Vein, is possessing MC's body. While I could use she/her pronouns to indicate its Cheong-ryeong he's talking about, I think that's gonna confuse people more. So I'm sticking with he/his pronoun from hereon. After all, you guys do know who's he talking about right?]

“How much time did he take?”

“He emerged when the incense had burned about one-sixth, not one-third.”

“One-sixth?”

At those words, Lee Ji-yeom's eyes gleamed with interest.

He had expected Mok Gyeong-un to pass the fastest, but this was beyond expectations.

At this level, it was almost as if he had simply run straight through flat ground instead of a maze.

“...We were also greatly surprised.”

Gwak Mun-gi had been dumbfounded upon seeing the incense.

No matter how exceptional one's qi sensitivity was, this was absurdly skillful.

It was incomprehensible how someone who appeared to be at most a first-rate level could emerge faster than those who had reached the pinnacle realm.

‘Did he conceal his martial arts?’

No, that couldn't be.

If that were the case, he would have to be at a higher realm than himself, who had reached the pinnacle, but he was certain that Mok Gyeong-un, who was merely seventeen years old, couldn't possibly be at that level.

Just what kind of brat was he?

As they were pondering, Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom clicked his tongue and asked, "Who emerged second fastest?"

"It was Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave."

"Oh-ho."

"Yeom Ga passed through the maze when about half of the incense had burned."

This could also be considered a remarkable achievement.

In fact, throughout the history of the maze trial, no one had ever passed within half of the incense burning time.

Today, both Mok Gyeong-un and Yeom Ga had broken that record.

These two individuals had passed through so swiftly, as if they had traversed a well-lit path rather than darkness.

"The Vermillion Slaughter Cave has sent a capable talent."

"It seems so."

However, they appeared to be unlucky this time.

Due to the presence of Mok Gyeong-un, a complete monster, they were unable to receive the spotlight.

"Who was third?"

"Mu Jang-yak and Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall passed before a quarter of the incense burned out, while Mok Yu-cheon and Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate passed within one-third."

"The level of this year's cadets has significantly improved."

Although many variables had come into play, this was the first time since Lee Ji-yeom had taken charge of Corpse Blood Valley that more than one or two individuals had passed within a quarter of the incense burning time.

In fact, passing within one-third alone could be considered an indication of exceptional qi sensitivity.

From that perspective, for the officers seeking the finest talents, this selection process could be regarded as successful.

“What shall we do? The top score is evidently...”

“Isn’t it already determined?”

“...Indeed.”

Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi reluctantly replied.

A hostage from the righteous faction had pushed aside all the talents of the main sect and was about to receive the top score for the third time.

It was only natural to find it unpleasant.

‘Yeon Mok Sword Manor...’

Just how did they train their disciples that not one, but both of them had reached the final trial of Corpse Blood Valley?

However, if two individuals, who were mere hostages despite being sent by the Society Leader’s orders, were to assume positions within the main sect, would the sect’s warriors be able to accept it?

-Tap!

Standing on the platform in front of the plaza, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom held up the top score plaque and said, “Mok Gyeong-un, step forward.”

“Yes.”

Mok Gyeong-un walked up to the platform.

Lee Ji-yeom gave him a brief glance and handed him the top score plaque.

Then, he spoke as if addressing everyone, “The fourth top score is awarded to Mok Gyeong-un, who passed through the trial the fastest.”

At his words, the five individuals standing side by side gazed at Mok Gyeong-un with varying expressions.

In fact, since this was the third time, most of them had no particular feelings about receiving the top score.

However, they couldn't help but react to the words that followed from Lee Ji-yeom.

"Prior to the final trial, those who have received top scores will be rewarded by our sect."

'!?'

Rewards?

Wasn't it simply an honorary title?

However, there were only two individuals here who had received top scores.

Mok Gyeong-un and Mu Jang-yak.

Among them, three were in Mok Gyeong-un's possession.

Regardless of what the benefits were, it was almost as if he had a monopoly on them.

"Those who have obtained one top score will be rewarded with the Heavenly-Earth Pill, crafted from our sect's secret method."

'!!!!'

At these words, Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate and Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall couldn't hide their astonishment.

The Heavenly Earth Pill was a medicinal pill made from the Heaven and Earth Society's secret method, and they had heard that the production and maturing process alone took ten years.

Moreover, the medicinal ingredients that went into a single pill were said to be worth a thousand gold, so the quantity was quite limited.

Yet, to think it would be given as a reward...

'How fortunate.'

Although Mu Jang-yak didn't show it, he was delighted inwardly.

Consuming the Heavenly Earth Pill, a refined medicinal pill, could grant one internal energy equivalent to nearly 10 to 15 years of cultivation.

-...Damn it. He changed the name.

'The name?'

Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled by Cheong-ryeong's sudden remark.

Cheong-ryeong then snorted and said, -It's not Heavenly Earth Pill, but Moonlight Pill[1]. The Heaven and Earth Society's secret method, my ass.

Judging by her anger, it seemed there was some untold story behind this that only she knew.

As they were contemplating, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom continued, "Here is the benefit for those who possess two top score plaques. They may enter the Corpse Blood Valley Treasure Vault and obtain a secret manual of their choice. Naturally, most of them are secret manuals of the Ascending Martial Arts."

'Ascending Martial Arts[2]!'

At the mention of the second benefit, everyone's interest was piqued for the first time.

Chapter 96

'Ah...'

At the mention of the Ascending Martial Arts, Mu Jang-yak's expression turned regretful.

That was because he had heard rumors about the Corpse Blood Valley Treasure Vault.

He had heard that it contained copies of numerous secret manuals of the Ascending Martial Arts from the Heaven and Earth Society's main headquarters, along with various martial arts secret manuals that were partially absent even in the main headquarters.

Any martial artist who didn't show interest would be the strange one.

'The Ascending Martial Arts of Corpse Blood Valley...'

This interest was shared by Mok Yu-cheon as well.

In his case, he had always been passionate about martial arts, so he couldn't help but be curious.

These were the Ascending Martial Arts of the Heaven and Earth Society, which currently dominated a third of the martial arts world.

One couldn't help but wonder what kind of techniques they possessed.

On the other hand,

'Is this really considered a special reward?'

Mok Gyeong-un didn't have any particular feelings about it.

Although his goal was to cultivate martial arts and become stronger for the sake of revenge, he had doubts about whether learning many techniques would truly be helpful.

-The more, the better.

'The more, the better?'

As if reading his thoughts, Cheong-ryeong said,

-Learning many martial arts doesn't necessarily make one vastly stronger, but the more martial arts one knows, the broader their perspective becomes, and their range of experience also expands.

'Hmm.'

Broadening one's perspective, huh?

In that sense, would it be beneficial to learn as many martial arts as possible?

As they were contemplating, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, who was on the platform, spoke again.

"It's been quite a while since someone obtained three top score plaques."

"It seems so. Has it been about 8 years? That guy... no, it's not that guy anymore. It's been a long time since then."

"Indeed. Is this the third time?"

Since the establishment of Corpse Blood Valley, Mok Gyeong-un was the third person to obtain three top score plaques.

At this point, Mok Gyeong-un, who was standing in front, asked out of curiosity,

"I'm just asking out of curiosity, but has anyone ever obtained four or more?"

Considering just the trials themselves, there were a total of six trials in Corpse Blood Valley.

However, in reality, there were no top score plaques for the fourth and final trials.

Therefore, if one were to obtain the maximum number of top score plaques, it would be possible to acquire four.

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi frowned and said in a displeased tone,

"How dare you ask the Valley Master..."

"Gwak-daeju. Right now, he is a unit leader[1]."

Just as Gwak Mun-gi was about to lash out, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom reminded him of this fact.

At this, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi bit his lip.

As a unit leader, Mok Gyeong-un held a higher position than himself, who could be considered a senior warrior, but in his mind, he still didn't acknowledge this brat.

However, he couldn't make a mistake in front of the Valley Master, so he adjusted his tone to show a little more respect.

"Unit Leader Mok. The trials are not over yet, so please refrain from casually asking questions to the Valley Master."

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un silently looked at Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom.

Seeing this, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi was dumbfounded and distorted his expression fiercely, but,

"Since the establishment of Corpse Blood Valley, there has been only one person who acquired all the top score plaques."

'Valley Master?'

Gwak Mun-gi glanced at Lee Ji-yeom with a slightly perplexed expression.

Normally, he wouldn't have responded to the cadets in a gentle or soft manner, even if they were about to enter the final stage.

Yet, he was answering such a question.

'Why is he acting this way?'

Could it be because he considered this fellow to be a spy sent by the Society Leader?

If that were the case, it would be understandable to show him some courtesy, but why would the Society Leader use a hostage brought from the righteous faction to test or monitor the Valley Master?

In any case, the Valley Master's attitude was quite unexpected.

'Someone acquired all of them?'

Interest gleamed in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

He himself had never experienced a formation before and had never controlled anyone, so he hadn't received the top score in the sword formation trial.

Yet, there was someone who had obtained all of them...

'They must be incredible.'

In fact, although Mok Gyeong-un himself wasn't aware of it, even though he had only properly cultivated martial arts for a short time, obtaining this many top score plaques was truly remarkable.

Perhaps if he had properly cultivated martial arts from the beginning, he might have become the second person to obtain all the top score plaques since the establishment of Corpse Blood Valley.

'It's too scary to ask.'

Out of pure curiosity, he wanted to ask who had achieved such a feat, but Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi was glaring at him with fiery eyes, making it difficult to inquire further.

Perhaps noticing this, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom said,

"If your doubts have been resolved, I will now announce the reward for those who have obtained three top score plaques."

"Yes."

"Those who have obtained three top score plaques..."

The gazes of the cadets concentrated on Lee Ji-yeom's face.

If this was the level of reward given for obtaining two top score plaques, what kind of benefits would be bestowed upon those who had acquired three?

“Apart from the final trial, they can request guidance from one of the sect’s top masters, namely the Five Kings, Three Chief Masters, or the Four Valley Masters, the Twelve Elders.”

‘!!!!!!!’

As soon as those words were uttered, everyone’s expressions changed drastically.

Of course, by everyone, it was mainly Mu Jang-yak, Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate, and Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall who directly reacted.

They were under the Heaven and Earth Society and knew better than anyone how incredible this benefit was.

‘To be able to request guidance from one of the Heaven and Earth Society’s top masters?’

‘They provide rewards to this extent?’

‘...Ah.’

Throughout one’s life, how often would one have the opportunity to receive guidance from Peak Realm masters or those supreme masters at the Transcendent Realm?

Moreover, those extraordinary masters were among the most prominent figures in the Heaven and Earth Society.

This was something they couldn’t help but envy.

Even Mok Yu-cheon, who had initially listened without much thought, noticed their envious gazes and suddenly realized it.

‘Ah!’

Among the Heaven and Earth Society’s executives, two of them were part of the Six Heavens and Eight Stars.

The Six Heavens and Eight Stars were regarded as the supreme masters, regardless of faction, and two of the Five Kings were included among those Eight Stars.

A true grandmaster at the Elder level who had surpassed the Transcendent Realm and reached the realm of Transformation.

If the benefit was to receive guidance from one of them...

'Damn it.'

Having left the righteous faction's camp, this was somewhat enviable.

It was unclear whether one would become a disciple or learn some of their martial arts, but the opportunity to receive guidance from such peerless experts was a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

In fact, it could be considered an incredible fortune.

-There's no need to think about this, mortal.

No need to think about it?

-There are two experts in the realm of Transformation. Choose one of them and learn from them what you can't learn from this venerable one. As they have surpassed Transcendent Realm, it will greatly aid your enlightenment.

Even Cheong-ryeong seemed to consider this a considerably good benefit.

If that was the case, it wasn't bad.

As they were contemplating, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom continued,

"If there is someone you desire, it would be wise to consider it in advance. If you enter the main headquarters, the opportunity will be given."

"Yes."

"The final trial will be conducted once you arrive at the main headquarters tomorrow. Before that, the holders of the top score plaques will receive their rewards, and the rest will have time to rest."

With those words, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom was about to step down from the platform.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said,

"May I ask what benefits are given to those who have obtained all the top score plaques?"

'This brat again!'

Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi frowned.

He was asking the Valley Master questions again without restraint.

It was really displeasing...

“They can receive guidance from the Society Leader.”

At that moment, silence fell.

Although he didn't understand why the Valley Master was showing such leniency to this guy, seeing their reactions was quite amusing.

Gwak Mun-gi could see what those below the platform were thinking.

‘Why is he doing this?’

On the other hand, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't comprehend their reactions.

Why were they so surprised?

“Since the Valley Master has left, unit leader Mok should also step down from the platform.”

Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi said to him in a strained voice.

As Mok Gyeong-un descended, he asked Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall with a puzzled look,

“Is receiving guidance from the Society Leader such a shocking matter?”

‘!?’

At those words, Mo Ha-rang looked at him as if asking if he truly didn't know.

Why was he acting like this?

As he was wondering, she spoke in a slightly trembling voice,

“The Society Leader is one of the Six Heavens, regarded as the pinnacle of the current martial arts world. Putting everything else aside, to receive guidance from one of the six strongest individuals in the world...”

She couldn't finish her sentence.

That's how astonishing the reward was for obtaining all the top score plaques.

Of course, no one in this batch had achieved it, but if they had known about this prerequisite from the beginning, everyone might have faced the trials with the determination to die.

That's how supreme the reputation of the Six Heavens was.

'Is it that incredible?'

Judging by their even more intense reactions compared to receiving guidance from the executives, it seemed to be a truly remarkable thing for them.

As they were contemplating, Cheong-ryeong's voice rang in his ears.

-Six Heavens? Ha...

Her voice was filled with irritation.

In fact, through Mo Ha-rang's words, she had also learned that the Heaven and Earth Society's Leader was one of the Six Heavens, regarded as the pinnacle of the current martial arts world.

Upon discovering this, she seemed considerably displeased.

Well, it was quite understandable.

For her, the existence of the Heaven and Earth Society's Leader, whether in the past or present, was akin to the final destination of her grudge.

'...The challenges have grown significantly.'

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue inwardly.

The Heaven and Earth Society's Leader was someone close to the pinnacle of the martial arts world...

Although he wasn't particularly bound by it as his grandfather's revenge took priority, fulfilling her grudge was becoming increasingly difficult.

In the forest not far from the main building of Corpse Blood Valley.

Mok Gyeong-un was following Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi.

Gwak Mun-gi found Mok Gyeong-un unpleasant, so he remained silent throughout the journey.

Soon, they reached a steep cliff.

Pointing at the cliff that seemed difficult to climb even with lightness skills, Gwak Mun-gi spoke without looking back,

“Follow closely.”

-Whoosh!

Gwak Mun-gi utilized his lightness skills and ascended the steep cliff.

He quickly found footholds as if he were familiar with it, climbing at a considerable speed.

‘Let’s see if he can properly keep up.’

Come to think of it, he had never properly witnessed the fellow’s lightness skill proficiency.

Could he truly follow along on such a steep cliff?

Just as he was thinking that,

-Tap tap tap!

‘Huh?’

Gwak Mun-gi glanced down.

Mok Gyeong-un had already caught up to him, right beneath him.

‘This bastard...’

It was absurd.

He himself had been wandering around Corpse Blood Valley for a long time, so he could move faster than anyone else anywhere, but this fellow was different.

Moreover, with mere first-rate martial arts, how could he climb the cliff at a speed similar to his own?

Of course, the reason was simple.

‘There, there it is.’

Mok Gyeong-un was following along by memorizing the spots where Gwak Mun-gi had stepped.

Wherever Gwak Mun-gi had passed, there were undoubtedly footholds to step on and climb, so by remembering them and following along, it wasn't particularly difficult.

Because of this, Gwak Mun-gi was annoyed and kept clicking his tongue.

'Damn bastard.'

He had intended to teach him a lesson, but it didn't work, making him even more irritated.

He had planned to reprimand him, saying that a unit leader couldn't even do this much if he couldn't keep up properly, but that idea had become meaningless.

-Tap!

Finally, Gwak Mun-gi, who had been climbing the cliff, abruptly entered somewhere that seemed blocked.

It was clearly blocked, but his body naturally passed through.

'A formation?'

Thanks to diviner Jo Ui-gong, Mok Gyeong-un had experienced formations before, so without any hesitation, he followed Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi and entered through the cliff.

Upon entering,

-Whoosh!

A large cavern with torches lit in various places was revealed.

In the center, a man who appeared to be in his fifties, covered in scars, was sitting on a stone chair with his arms crossed.

In front of him was Gwak Mun-gi, who had entered earlier,

'Tsk.'

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un pass through the blocked wall and enter in one go, he couldn't hide his disappointment.

As they were standing there, the scar-covered man stood up and said,

“I wondered what was going on, but it’s been a while.”

“Yes, it has.”

“It’s been about eight years since then, right?”

“That’s correct. So, I brought him here for the reward and to let him enter the treasure vault.”

At Gwak Mun-gi’s words, the scar-covered man turned his gaze toward Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, with a puzzled expression, he said,

“He’s a peculiar brat. He appears to be at most a first-rate level, but how did he obtain three top score plaques?”

Based on the man’s qi perception, Mok Gyeong-un’s level was at most barely reaching the first-rate realm.

Yet, to come here, one needed three top score plaques.

It shouldn’t have been possible with mere martial arts of this level.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Excuse me, but who are you?”

“Are you referring to me?”

“Yes.”

“Hahahahaha. I am the guardian of the treasure vault here in Corpse Blood Valley.”

“The guardian?”

As Mok Gyeong-un questioned, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi spoke in a warning tone,

“He is Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, who is in charge of the treasure vault. If you displease him, you may end up trapped in the mechanical traps of the treasure vault, so show some respect...”

“Ah, ah. That’s enough. Since when have I cared about such things?”

“...”

Their dynamics were quite mismatched.

As they were conversing, the scar-covered man, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, waved his hands and said,

“You may leave now.”

“What?”

“Or are you planning to keep waiting here? You should know that it’s not allowed.”

“...I understand. I will step back and wait below.”

“Good.”

At guardian Yang Mu-won’s order to leave, Gwak Mun-gi passed through the illusory cliff wall created by the formation and went outside.

As he left, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won asked Mok Gyeong-un,

“Shall we finish the conversation we were having earlier? How did you manage to obtain three top score plaques?”

In response to his question, Mok Gyeong-un slightly tilted his head and said,

“Naturally, I obtained them because I performed better than others, right?”

“...”

At these words, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, who had been frowning, suddenly laughed heartily.

“Hahahahaha. Right. That’s a valid point. The Valley Master wouldn’t have given the top score plaques to someone worthless.”

“...”

Mok Gyeong-un showed no reaction.

Seeing this, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, who had been laughing boisterously, felt awkward and scratched his head.

‘Oh my.’

The person who had come eight years ago at least had some level of communication, but this kid’s reactions were somewhat dull, making it uninteresting.

Well, it was regrettable, but his task wasn't to engage in conversation.

Unit Leader Yang Mu-won turned his body and gestured.

"Follow me."

"Yes."

Mok Gyeong-un followed behind him.

Then, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won pointed his finger towards the depths of the cave and said,

"If you go inside, there is a treasure vault containing secret manuals. As you may have heard, you can only take out one secret manual from the treasure vault. Even then, you must copy it here before leaving with it."

"Yes."

"You will be given about one sichen (two hours) to carefully make your selection. If you fail to choose anything within that time, you must leave empty-handed according to the rules. Understood?"

"Yes."

"Ah. And there is a place marked with a red line. It's best if you don't enter there."

"What?"

As Mok Gyeong-un questioned, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won spoke as if trying to scare him.

"In the past, something happened there... No. You don't need to know that much. Anyway, if you cross the red line, you'll see something truly terrifying. So, don't ignore my warning."

'Something terrifying?'

He was rambling incoherently, making it difficult to understand what he meant.

As he was puzzling over it, a large iron door came into view.

Unit Leader Yang Mu-won placed his hand on the empty wall beside it and fiddled with something.

-Creak! Thud!

The iron door opened on its own, revealing the interior.

Inside, there was a cavern much larger than the entrance, and the entire walls on all sides were densely filled with secret manuals.

Pointing inside, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won grinned and said,

“If you haven’t thought about it beforehand, just selecting the desired secret manual will be quite a headache. I’ll let you know when the time is up, so remember, one sichen.”

“Yes.”

“Now, go inside.”

As Mok Gyeong-un was about to step inside,

He suddenly paused and said,

“Ah! May I ask one thing?”

“What is it?”

“I can only take out one secret manual, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Just skimming through them shouldn’t be a problem, right?”

“What kind of question is that? Of course, you need to skim through the contents to choose a suitable secret manual. We won’t make an issue out of something like that.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un’s lips curled as he said,

“That’s quite fortunate.”

Chapter 97

Mok Gyeong-un couldn’t help but be inwardly astonished by the number of bookshelves surrounding the entire cavern and the abundance of secret manuals filling them.

Apart from martial arts, it seemed to be the first time he had seen such a vast quantity of books since his birth.

Moreover, all of these were secret manuals.

Which sword technique, which footwork method, which palm technique, which cultivation method...

The sheer number was so vast that he couldn't even fathom where to start.

'One shichen, huh.'

Before seeing this place, he had thought it was quite a generous amount of time.

However, upon witnessing the immense collection of martial arts books, he realized that the time might not be as ample as he had initially thought.

Just then, Cheong-ryeong's voice rang in his ears.

-They're all useless.

"What?"

Mok Gyeong-un replied in a whisper.

She then said,

-The ones placed around the perimeter are all secret manuals that would only be coveted by those aiming for third-rate or at most first-rate martial arts.

"Is that so?"

-Can't you tell at a glance?

"I can't tell at a glance."

-...Well, it's impossible for a mortal like you who has just entered the path to have discerning eyes.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and said.

However, this wasn't Mok Gyeong-un's fault.

Thanks to various fortuitous encounters, his transcendent memory, and a body that could manifest it, he was growing at an incomparable speed compared to ordinary geniuses, but considering the short time since his initiation, his insight couldn't be that broad.

-You should be grateful to this venerable one, mortal.

"Is that so?"

-With your insignificant insight, you wouldn't be able to discern the martial arts that are somewhat useful, would you?

"Well, that's true."

Mok Gyeong-un readily agreed.

At his response, Cheong-ryeong felt deflated.

In fact, from Mok Gyeong-un's perspective, there was no reason to assert his pride in such matters.

"Will you choose for me?"

-Didn't I tell you? With your insight, you would only waste time, so this venerable one will select the useful ones for you.

"That's something to be grateful for."

-First, go to the upper floor.

"Upper floor?"

Was there an upper floor here?

As he wondered, Cheong-ryeong said,

-Can't you see that the bookshelves reach the ceiling?

"Ah."

Upon closer inspection, there were supports placed between the bookshelves at intervals, allowing one to walk up to about two or three floors high.

However, judging from her tone, it seemed as if she was well-acquainted with the structure of this place.

So, as Mok Gyeong-un moved, he asked,

"Have you been here before?"

-Impossible.

"But you seem to know quite a lot. Telling me to go upstairs without properly examining the secret manuals."

Did she know what was up there and tell him to go up?

At this, Cheong-ryeong chuckled and said,

-Judging from the structure here, they have replicated the treasure vault from the main headquarters.

“The main headquarters?”

-Yes. There is also a treasure vault in the main headquarters. It seems they have brought copies of the secret manuals from there and placed them here.

“Ah, is that so? It seems like a hassle when only a few people would properly see them.”

They could have just brought the good secret manuals.

Then, Cheong-ryeong snorted and said,

-Ha! If you don't know, just stay quiet.

“What?”

-The fact that they created a treasure vault filled with copies deep in the mountains and cliffs, rather than in the main headquarters, is probably a precautionary measure.

“Precautionary measure?”

-Perhaps in case of an unexpected invasion?

“Invasion? You mean in case the main headquarters is attacked?”

-Yes. Think about it. No matter how powerful a martial arts sect is, as time passes and generations change, it's common for them to weaken and collapse, like the natural order of things.

“Ah, so they made copies in advance?”

-Probably. If the main headquarters were to be attacked, it would be natural to burn or destroy the treasure vault to prevent it from falling into enemy hands.

“While destroying it is easy, moving or protecting it is difficult, so they prepared in advance.”

-Indeed. I don't know whose idea this was, but it's a good strategy.

“I agree.”

Mok Gyeong-un nodded in agreement.

Having learned to some extent how much martial artists cherished and coveted martial arts secret manuals, he recognized that they were a significant asset to them.

Considering that it would be impossible to move this vast treasure vault all at once, it was the right choice.

-Creak!

“...It seems they don't maintain it as much as I thought.”

The wooden frame leading to the upper level creaked and swayed.

Unlike the main headquarters, the treasure vault within Corpse Blood Valley was not frequently used, so perhaps that was the reason.

-What are you going to do?

“What do you think I'll do?”

-Knowing your personality, you won't be satisfied with just one or two necessary items.

“Since we're here, it would be nice to look for useful things all around.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Cheong-ryeong chuckled.

Mok Gyeong-un's transcendent memory was helpful wherever he went, but in situations like this, it could be considered the best.

‘I was curious, so this is perfect.’

Cheong-ryeong had been wondering about the extent of Mok Gyeong-un's memory, which could perfectly memorize something after seeing it once.

It seemed like a good opportunity to test how much he could memorize.

As they were contemplating, the guardian Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, who was about to light an incense stick and measure time at the entrance of the treasure vault below, gazed at Mok Gyeong-un with a puzzled expression.

‘That kid...’

How did he go up there so quickly?

In fact, the lowest shelves of the treasure vault contained basic techniques and secret manuals suitable for martial artists ranging from third-rate to first-rate.

The real deal started from the second-floor shelves, but as soon as he entered, he barely glanced at the lower section and went straight up.

'Hmm.'

Anyone who saw him would think he had been here several times, given how natural his movements were.

After a moment of puzzlement, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won decided to ignore it.

In any case, his task was to be the guardian of the treasure vault, and all he had to do was ensure that the child didn't secretly take out any unauthorized manuals.

Just then,

'Did he find something useful?'

He noticed Mok Gyeong-un pulling out a secret manual from the bookshelf.

No matter how good one's inner strength and eyesight were, it was impossible to know exactly what he had taken out from this distance.

However, from the second floor onwards, there were quite a few Ascending Martial Arts.

There were secret manuals aimed at the Peak Realm and above, so whatever he chose would be beneficial to him.

-Rustle rustle rustle!

Mok Gyeong-un was seen flipping through the secret manual as if skimming it.

He was flipping through it quite quickly, but could he properly read the contents written inside like that?

Just then, after going through the entire book, he placed it back on the shelf.

'Huh?'

Did he even read it properly?

Why was he skimming through it like that?

Even if he only had one shichen, if he had the discernment to go straight to the second floor, he could have carefully selected from there...

-Tap!

Mok Gyeong-un was seen pulling out another secret manual.

Then, just like before, he started flipping through the pages at an incredible speed, rustling the pages.

'...What is he doing?'

At that speed, he wasn't skimming but merely turning the pages.

Could he even understand the contents by reading like that?

However, it wasn't only Unit Leader Yang Mu-won who was thinking this way.

'This brat?'

Was he really examining it properly?

He was flipping through the book too quickly, almost to the extent of simply opening and immediately turning the page rather than reading.

Cheong-ryeong asked, just in case.

-Mortal. Are you really memorizing it? If you flip through it so quickly...

-Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Tap!

Mok Gyeong-un closed the last page of the secret manual and whispered,

"Yes. Of course, I'm memorizing it."

-!?

Memorizing... it?

No matter how good one's memory was, didn't they need to read the text to some extent to memorize it?

In Cheong-ryeong's eyes, Mok Gyeong-un wasn't even skimming but merely opening the book and immediately turning to the next page.

However,

“If I’m not trying to understand it right away, I can memorize it just by looking at it.”

-What?

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Cheong-ryeong was momentarily at a loss for words.

He was reading the contents so quickly that it was almost like skimming, no, it was closer to just looking at it, yet he claimed to have memorized everything?

For a moment, she was dumbfounded.

Even as a spirit, her memory was different from humans, but it was still difficult to do that.

‘...An absurd memory.’

She had initially thought his memory was already at an unbelievable level, but this surpassed human limits.

Mok Gyeong-un asked her, who was stunned and speechless.

“What’s the next useful secret manual?”

-Next? You really...

“Really what?”

For a moment, she almost asked if he was truly human.

Not only his acceptance of the energy of death but also his memory was beyond extraordinary, surpassing the level of ordinary humans.

It might be strange for a spirit like her to say this, but he really didn’t seem human.

Cheong-ryeong, who had been staring intently at Mok Gyeong-un, finally came to her senses and said,

-The... next one is... Huh? Why is that there?

“What are you looking at?”

-Look at the third shelf from the bottom on the right, where you’re currently looking.

“Profound Mystic Foot Technique[1]?”

Judging from the characters “각법, Foot Technique”, it seemed to be a martial art that utilized the feet.

Cheong-ryeong said to Mok Gyeong-un,

-It's the foot technique of the Myeongsun School[2]. It was offered by a school that joined the Heaven and Earth Society in its early days. It's a foot technique that excels in agility and variation, and with a little modification, it can be classified as an Early Ascending Martial Art.

“Early Ascending?”

According to Cheong-ryeong, martial arts that aimed for the Peak Realm or early-stage of Transcendent Realm were classified as Ascending Martial Arts.

And martial arts that had the potential and insight to go beyond the early stage of Transcendent Realm were supposed to be classified as Early Ascending Martial Arts.

In that case,

“Why is this here?”

She had said it should be on the third floor.

At this question, Cheong-ryeong also muttered as if she couldn't understand.

-Who knows? This venerable one had originally classified the Profound Mystic Foot Technique as an Early Ascending Martial Art and placed it on the third floor.

But if it had been moved down,

‘...Could it be him?’

There was a possibility.

After all, he had denied and overturned everything about himself.

Clicking her tongue as if it was absurd, she said,

-Anyway, it would be good for you to learn the Profound Mystic Foot Technique. This venerable one guarantees that it's hard to find a foot technique as good as this within the entire Heaven and Earth Society.

That's how versatile and swift it was, making it the most suitable for attacking and seizing opportunities.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un flipped through the Profound Mystic Foot Technique and memorized it.

She stuck out her tongue as if she couldn't get used to it no matter how much she looked.

It was truly a crazy memory.

It took about fifteen counts to memorize an entire book.

-Rustle! Tap!

"Next?"

-Fifth from the bottom on the right.

"Yes."

At this rate, it seemed like he could memorize dozens, no, even hundreds of books before leaving.

Although it was questionable whether there was a need to memorize that many, if he did, it would be an opportunity to greatly expand his insight into martial arts.

Wasn't it said that in ancient times, an imperial official named Hwangsang became a peerless expert by simply reading thousands of Taoist secret manuals, opening his meridians and attaining enlightenment about qi?

Each secret manual contained its own insights, so if this mortal fellow truly had talent, he would gain something from it.

-Rustle! Rustle! Tap!

"Next."

It was really hard to get used to.

It was instantaneous.

-The one next to it... Hmm.

"Why? Is there another martial art like the Profound Mystic Foot Technique?"

-No, that's not it, but the Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm[3] over there is a palm technique of the Wudang Sect.

“Wudang Sect? Is that also a martial arts school?”

-...I'm constantly witnessing the limits of your knowledge.

He really knew nothing about the martial arts world, even to an excessive extent.

So, Cheong-ryeong said,

-The Wudang Sect can be considered the pinnacle of Taoist martial arts, and among the righteous factions, it is called the supreme martial arts school, surpassing even the famous schools.

“It must be an incredible place.”

-Indeed. It's not one of the Nine Schools and One Sect for nothing.

“What are the Nine Schools and One Sect?”

-I don't have time to explain every single thing, so to put it simply, there are nine martial arts schools and one sect that are regarded as the best even among the righteous factions. The Wudang Sect is one of them.

“Is that so? Then it would be better to learn this as well.”

-No. Actually, I was going to tell you not to learn it.

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un asked in puzzlement,

“Why? If it's a martial art from such an incredible place...”

-Of course, it would be useful. However, for you, Taoist martial arts might actually be...
Hmm.

“Why?”

-It's because it could be poisonous to you.

“Poisonous?”

-Most of the energy occupying your body is the energy of death. However, Taoist martial arts are based on the principles of nourishing life. So, if you carelessly learn it, it might clash with the death energy, which is why I was hesitating.

“Ah, is that so?”

It made sense for Cheong-ryeong to be contemplating.

In that case, it might be better not to learn it, but,

“...Still, I’ll memorize it.”

-What? Why...

“No. How do you know if it might come in handy?”

-Come in handy?

“Didn’t you tell me before, Cheong-ryeong?”

-What did I say?

“That just by looking at the wounds or traces left by martial arts, you can identify which school it belongs to and what type it is.”

-I did say that.

“Couldn’t this be used in a similar way if utilized well?”

-You couldn’t possibly...

Mok Gyeong-un smiled.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

Whenever this fellow learned something, the ways he thought of utilizing it were truly beyond what others could imagine.

He would be a really troublesome individual to have as an enemy.

As Mok Gyeong-un was about to pull out the secret manual of the Wudang Sect’s Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm,

“Uh... Hm?”

Mok Gyeong-un looked puzzled as he examined the book.

That’s because a part of the secret manual was dark red, as if it had been stained with blood.

Moreover, the secret manual seemed quite old.

So, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

“Didn’t you say they only collected copies?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Cheong-ryeong also found it strange.

The book currently grasped in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand was probably,

-...It seems to be the original.

Chapter 98

“It doesn’t seem to be a copy?”

-Yes. At least not this one.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s query, Cheong-ryeong said as if it was unexpected.

That’s because even if it was a copy, it was natural for a book to become worn out after a long time.

However, since it was newly transcribed and not frequently used, there was no way traces resembling bloodstains would remain.

“That makes sense. Well, there could be various reasons. Either they accidentally placed the original here, or the copy was clean, so they kept it in the main headquarters...”

-The original wouldn’t be mixed up for such reasons.

Cheong-ryeong firmly denied Mok Gyeong-un’s speculations.

“What?”

-You may not know yet, mortal, but the original holds a special meaning.

“Meaning? In what way?”

-Most original secret manuals are written by the creator of that martial art.

“In that case, it would have value as the creator’s original work.”

He seemed to have heard this from his grandfather.

The value of a poem transcribed from Confucius and a poem directly written by Confucius was different.

It seemed to be in that sense.

As they were conversing, Cheong-ryeong continued,

-While the creator's value and such can be a reason, what's more important are the engraved characters.

"Characters?"

-The strokes are traces. What did this venerable one tell you when teaching you martial arts, mortal?

"Traces are..."

-The martial art itself.

Would Mok Gyeong-un be able to accurately understand why she said this?

The breadth of understanding varies depending on one's enlightenment.

Even if one's cultivation reaches the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm, if their enlightenment is still lacking, they may not understand what she means at all.

However,

"Nothing contains as much as the strokes. Each trace within them may contain the habits of the martial art's creator. Those habits would also include the trajectory of the techniques."

'!?'

Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her surprise at Mok Gyeong-un's words.

She hadn't had high expectations.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un had given the exact answer she wanted to hear.

'This brat...'

He didn't merely possess a superhuman memory.

His comprehension was also exceptional.

A little brat who had only learned martial arts for a short time was naturally speaking about the principles of Ascending Martial Arts, which would be somewhat understandable for those entering the early Transcendent Realm.

Of course, it wasn't as if he had truly attained enlightenment, but it was quite astonishing.

'...I wonder what would have happened if this kid had started cultivating martial arts at a younger age.'

Perhaps he might have displayed the remarkable feat of reaching the early Transcendent Realm before even coming of age.

Mok Gyeong-un's talent was so fearsome that it felt frightening, regardless of whether she liked him or not.

As she was marveling, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

"Was I wrong?"

"...Well, you somewhat understood."

She didn't want to praise him excessively, as it could lead to complacency.

However, at her response, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

After he spoke, it took her a while to answer, so how could it be considered somewhat understanding?

'I must have been accurate.'

However, he had no intention of boasting about it.

For him, mastering martial arts was merely sharpening a blade for the sake of revenge.

Cheong-ryeong said to Mok Gyeong-un,

—Ahem... Anyway, as you said, the original contains the creator's true intention in each stroke, so it's almost like condensed enlightenment. That's why even high-level experts strive to broaden their insight by reading various original martial arts secret manuals.

"I see. I learned something valuable."

-In any case, the presence of this secret manual here doesn't seem to be a mistake.

Since copies didn't contain the creator's true intention, she believed it wasn't a mistake or a replacement due to the book being dirty.

Mok Gyeong-un nodded and said,

“I understand. Since we don’t have much time, I’ll continue memorizing.”

-Go ahead.

-Rustle! Rustle!

Mok Gyeong-un turned the pages.

Just like before, he tried to imprint it with his eyes, as if stamping a seal,

‘Strokes...’

The human consciousness sometimes moves in ways contrary to one’s intentions.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had come to understand the meaning of strokes through Cheong-ryeong, started memorizing not only the characters but also the appearance of the strokes.

‘The thickness of the strokes...’

The movement of the wrist could be seen based on the thickness.

Then, at some point during the process of imprinting, a peculiar phenomenon occurred in Mok Gyeong-un’s mind.

This was something even Cheong-ryeong had not anticipated.

‘Ah!’

In Mok Gyeong-un’s mind, he saw an old Taoist with an unseen face softly tracing the trajectory of palm techniques as if dancing.

They were the techniques of the Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm.

It was an astonishing occurrence.

While reading the text, how could each movement be seen so accurately?

He could even see where strength was applied and released.

It was truly a bizarre event.

Thanks to this, the most primitive techniques intended by the martial art’s creator were directly imprinted in Mok Gyeong-un’s mind.

At that moment, a mnemonic chant flashed through Mok Gyeong-un’s mind.

-Rustle! Rustle!

When he turned the last page, Mok Gyeong-un's expression was somewhat elated.

'What is this?'

It was an emotion he had never felt before.

It was as if, for a brief moment, he had become one with the creator of this martial art and tasted the true flow of the Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm's techniques.

It was a completely different feeling compared to when he thought he would simply imprint and follow with his body.

'Not bad.'

He wanted to savor this feeling again.

However, unfortunately, apart from this Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm manual, most of the other martial arts secret manuals would be copies.

In that case, he might not be able to experience this feeling.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had a disappointed expression, asked,

"...What would be good to learn next?"

-Not here. Look at the sixth from the bottom on the next bookshelf.

"Sixth..."

This time, it was a sword technique manual called Immeasurable Fifteen Swords[1].

As Mok Gyeong-un opened the secret manual, he naturally thought it was a copy, but due to the habit he had developed earlier, he couldn't help but meticulously imprint the strokes engraved in the characters.

However,

'Huh?'

In Mok Gyeong-un's mind, he saw a middle-aged master displaying sword techniques again.

The middle-aged master's sword techniques were performed with a heavy sword, and each time he swung the sword, the force carried at the tip of the sword soared abruptly, as if it were immeasurable, just like the name.

For Mok Gyeong-un, who had never learned a heavy sword with weight, this sword technique was a new experience.

-Squirm!

'...This guy?'

Cheong-ryeong, who had been watching Mok Gyeong-un turn the pages, couldn't hide her puzzlement.

That's because Mok Gyeong-un's speed of turning the pages had slowed down a bit compared to before.

Now, it took about twenty-five to thirty counts to skim through a single secret manual, slightly slower than before.

Of course, even the slower speed was still incomparably faster than ordinary people.

"Ah..."

-Why are you doing that?

"It took a bit more time, right?"

-...Even though it's slower than before, didn't it only take you about twenty-five to thirty counts?

"Was it only that much?"

-Yes.

At Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un was inwardly surprised.

Just like with the Supreme Ultimate Soft Palm, he had felt as if he had become one with the creator of this Immeasurable Fifteen Swords and experienced the feeling of performing the techniques together, so it seemed like time was passing very slowly.

Yet, it had only been that much?

"It's peculiar. To think it only flowed that much."

-...Wait, are you saying you felt as if time was passing slowly?

“Yes.”

-Ha.

She let out a sigh as if dumbfounded.

Mok Gyeong-un asked in puzzlement,

“Why are you reacting like that?”

-It’s a state of selflessness.

The state of selflessness *mu-a ji-gyeong, 무아지경 (無我之境).

As the name suggests, it refers to a stage where one’s mind is immersed in something, forgetting oneself.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un, who still lacked enlightenment, fell into a state of selflessness while reading mnemonic chants.

Such cases were extremely rare.

‘Should I be happy about this?’

She wasn’t sure what to say to him.

Whether it was an ordinary genius or a martial arts genius, when learning martial arts, the order of learning and direction of enlightenment tended to flow in a somewhat similar manner.

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s order was completely jumbled.

Falling into a state of selflessness not during meditation but while memorizing martial arts secret manuals?

Had there ever been such a case?

‘But what did he immerse himself in?’

The process of memorizing secret manuals was even faster than speed reading, so what could he have immersed himself in during that brief moment?

Although she was curious, there wasn’t much time, so,

-Don’t be conscious of falling into a state of selflessness. It means you’re gaining something from it.

“Is that so?”

-Rather than that, let's hurry and memorize other secret manuals. We need to quickly finish the second floor and move to the third floor.

The second floor could be considered a taste of the Ascending Martial Arts.

On the third floor, there were some Early Ascending Martial Arts that even she acknowledged.

If he memorized all of those, Mok Gyeong-un's insight into martial arts would become incomparable to before entering this place.

‘What a pity.’

Cheong-ryeong suddenly couldn't help but feel regret.

If this were the main headquarters' treasure vault, she knew of a few hidden secret manuals.

However, since this place was a collection of copies, there was no way those hidden ones would have been transcribed here.

In this manner, Mok Gyeong-un memorized 45 martial arts secret manuals on the second floor of the treasure vault during those few moments.

Originally, he would have read a larger quantity, but as he fell into a state of selflessness for a longer duration with each book, it took this much time.

Although it wasn't a very long time, it felt lengthy to Mok Gyeong-un.

-Now, let's go to the third floor.

“Yes.”

Having memorized all the useful ones on the second floor, they went up.

Upon going up, unlike the bookshelves on the lower floor, some empty spaces could be seen here and there.

Unlike the secret manuals on the lower floors, most of the ones on the third floor were Ascending Martial Arts, with occasional Early Ascending Martial Arts mixed in, so there was naturally a limit to the quantity.

‘...They really replicated it almost identically.’

Looking at the bookshelves on the third floor, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

That's because although some parts were different or the number of secret manuals had increased, it was quite close to the arrangement she remembered.

Even though they were copies, they were organized well enough to remind her of the past.

If this memory was correct, in the original library, on the top right end of the third bookshelf from the right, there should be that secret manual she had hidden...

'!?'

For a moment, Cheong-ryeong doubted her eyes.

Exactly in that position, the secret manual called Yang White Sword Technique, which she had placed on the bookshelf, was there.

'They made a copy of that too?'

That couldn't be.

Except for the two torn pages hidden inside, it was a sword technique manual with a composition that would only be helpful for second-rate or first-rate practitioners.

There was no way they would have transcribed it as a copy.

Even if they did, excluding the damaged part, they would have moved it to the first floor, not the third floor.

"...Ryeong."

-...

"Cheong-ryeong."

-Ah!

"Which secret manual would be good to look at next?"

At that question, Cheong-ryeong said, just in case,

-Take out the one on the top right end of the third bookshelf from the right.

"Yang White Sword Technique?"

-Yes.

Following her instructions, Mok Gyeong-un went to the third bookshelf and took out the secret manual called Yang White Sword Technique from the top right end.

However, the ink on the outer part of the book was smudged, and the front page was slightly curled up.

-Ha!

Seeing this, she let out a fake cough as if dumbfounded.

Mok Gyeong-un asked in puzzlement,

“Why are you reacting like that?”

-...Why did I realize it only now? This venerable one is quite foolish.

“What are you talking about?”

-They moved it here.

“What do you mean by moved?”

-The secret manuals here are the originals.

“What? Are you saying these are the originals?”

-Yes. I thought something was strange. Now that I’ve seen the secret manual in your hand, I’m certain. Sigh.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

In fact, although he hadn’t mentioned it to her, Mok Gyeong-un had also fallen into a state of selflessness while memorizing the secret manuals she had selected for him.

So, he had inwardly questioned whether the secret manuals here were really copies.

However, judging from her words, it seemed the secret manuals here were indeed the originals.

But Mok Gyeong-un didn’t show it and opened the secret manual.

Then,

“Hm?”

A folded piece of paper was inserted between the pages of the secret manual.

-Ah, ah. It was still here.

“You know about it?”

-How could I not know? This venerable one personally placed it here. To think it remained until now.

“You seem quite delighted.”

-Ahem.

“That’s understandable. But what is this?”

Mok Gyeong-un said as he took out the folded piece of paper.

Then, she spoke in a somewhat meaningful tone,

-It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that this is where this venerable one’s completed Sword Techniques of the Moon began.

“Oh-ho.”

Curious, Mok Gyeong-un unfolded the piece of paper.

Upon unfolding it, the front and back of the paper contained mnemonic chants of sword techniques.

On the front, the name of this sword technique and the techniques were written first.

“Moonless Void Sword[2]...”

-Consider it your fortune. These are the only remaining sword techniques of the Moonless Void Sword, one of the Five Great Sword Techniques that once symbolized the Old Martial Arts World.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un visually imprinted the sword techniques.

Then, in his mind, he saw someone with a pale face and a scholar-like appearance holding a sword and displaying the techniques.

-Shudder!

For a moment, goosebumps rose all over Mok Gyeong-un’s body.

The sword techniques were on a different level from the ones he had seen so far, bringing a thrilling sensation.

Chapter 99

Moonless Void Sword – Moon Fragrance Defeating Sword.

The moment he imprinted this technique, Mok Gyeong-un saw someone with a pale face and a scholar-like appearance holding a sword and displaying the technique in his mind.

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

The sword path resembled a full moon, and upon seeing it, goosebumps rose all over Mok Gyeong-un's body.

Since entering the Treasure Vault of Corpse Blood Valley, he had experienced a state of selflessness through imprinting the sword techniques Cheong-ryeong had told him to memorize, but this sword technique evoked an incomparable thrill compared to those.

Mok Gyeong-un stared blankly at the technique.

Watching Mok Gyeong-un, who was so immersed, Cheong-ryeong thought to herself,

'He has just started, but to enter a state of selflessness immediately upon seeing it.'

His concentration is remarkable.

Judging from his trembling eyes, it seems this mortal brat is also quite astonished by the sword technique, which is on a different level from what he has seen so far.

It's understandable.

Even she herself had marveled at it when she saw it during her lifetime.

Moonless Void Sword – Moon Fragrance Defeating Sword.

It was the sword technique of a peerless swordsman, one of the top five in the world, during the lost era of the Old Martial Arts World, which was known as the most fierce.

Although only two techniques remained, all of them damaged, she had gained so much enlightenment from seeing them that she completed her unfinished Sword Techniques of the Moon.

'If he grasps even a little of the true value contained in the strokes, his insight into the sword will improve by leaps and bounds, regardless of the duration of his cultivation.'

Of course, it was uncertain to what extent Mok Gyeong-un's level would allow him to discern it.

However, unlike before, the state of selflessness was considerably long.

Most of the other books had ended around thirty counts, but he was still gazing at this technique.

-Spark spark!

'There's no excess.'

Mok Gyeong-un kept exclaiming in admiration as he watched the middle-aged man perform this technique.

The sword technique techniques he had seen so far often had unnecessary movements or sword paths that caught his eye, but this sword technique had none of that.

Each trajectory was beautiful, but it was thoroughly focused on killing the opponent.

'Ah...'

It was like looking at a work of art.

There was a charm to staring at it intently.

For Mok Gyeong-un, this sword technique possessed the aesthetics of the sword and death.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un assimilated with the middle-aged man in scholar's attire and began to display the sword technique together.

At that moment,

-Swoosh!

The energy of death, the death qi, flowed out from Mok Gyeong-un's body.

-What?

While this wouldn't be visible to the eyes of an ordinary person, it was clearly visible to Cheong-ryeong's ghostly eyes.

The surging death qi was rapidly spreading to the surroundings.

-You...

Cheong-ryeong, who had been about to call out to Mok Gyeong-un, stopped.

Thinking about it, the death qi wasn't something that living beings could perceive, and judging from Mok Gyeong-un's current state, it seemed he had gone beyond a state of selflessness and attained some kind of enlightenment.

'What did he realize to make the death qi flow out of his body and take shape?'

She was curious.

The flowing death qi swayed and rippled like waves.

Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her inner astonishment upon seeing this.

Although it appeared to be a simple ripple, to the eyes of those who had surpassed the peak and had depth in martial arts, like her, it looked like a sword qi.

'This guy... Could it be?'

Was he assimilating with the strokes written in the sword technique and visualizing the technique in his mind?

Cheong-ryeong was dumbfounded.

It was something absolutely impossible at Mok Gyeong-un's level.

Only when one reached the early-stage of Transcendent Realm could they visualize and implant an image in their mind by looking at characters or sword traces.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un, who hadn't even attained enlightenment at the Peak Realm, was doing it?

'...How many times is he going to surprise me in a single day?'

Drawing an image through the sword technique and gaining enlightenment from it.

Something she hadn't expected at all was happening at this fellow's level.

As Cheong-ryeong was waiting,

-Clank! Clank!

At the end of the third floor where the bookshelves were displayed, there was an entrance in the form of a cave excavated from the cavern to the inside.

A red line was drawn there, and one of the bookshelves inside started to make a clanking sound.

However, the sound wasn't very loud, and neither Cheong-ryeong, who was inside the wooden doll, nor Mok Gyeong-un, who had entered a state of selflessness, heard it.

“Phew.”

Corpse Blood Valley's Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi let out a sigh with an irritated expression.

Only he and Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom knew the location of this place in Corpse Blood Valley, so he had no choice but to guide them personally instead of ordering his subordinates.

As a result, he had to wait here for a sichen.

He was filled with dissatisfaction because he had to do this for a fellow who was not only a hostage from the righteous faction but also someone he didn't particularly like.

'I don't understand. Why is the Society Leader doing this, and why is the Valley Master acting like so?'

The Society Leader's whims were nothing new, so that could be overlooked, but Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom, although not openly showing it, didn't really like the Society Leader.

Yet, he couldn't understand why he was extending courtesies to someone who could become an arrow aimed at him, unlike his usual self.

'What could he be thinking?'

His mind was filled with doubts.

-Rustle!

'!'

At the sound of rustling leaves coming from somewhere, Gwak Mun-gi flinched and turned his head.

At that moment, his eyes widened.

Suddenly, behind him, there was someone with a slender build wearing a straw hat with a veil, and a handsome young man who appeared to be in his early twenties with a large sword on his back.

'Who dares?'

This was Corpse Blood Valley.

Just who were these people to intrude here?

Gwak Mun-gi was about to move his hand to the sword hilt at his waist.

Right at that moment,

-Pak!

'What?'

Before he could even draw his sword, the young man firmly pressed down on the back of his hand.

"This..."

"Judging from your belt, you seem to be a warrior of Corpse Blood Valley. Calm down."

At the young man's words, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi frowned.

This young man knew his identity.

Not only did he possess extraordinary lightness skills to block him before he could draw his sword in an instant, but he also seemed to be a member of the main sect.

So, Gwak Mun-gi asked,

"Who are you?"

Then, the young man took out a plaque from his bosom and showed it to him.

'!!!!'

Upon seeing it, Gwak Mun-gi's eyes widened.

The pattern engraved on that plaque was none other than the emblem of the Bright Blade King.

Sitting on a chair and staring intently at the incense stick, the guardian Unit Leader Yang Mu-won yawned loudly.

Then, he lowered his head diagonally and shifted his gaze away from the incense stick to somewhere else.

It was a treasure vault filled with secret manuals.

'Hmm.'

The person he was looking at was Mok Gyeong-un, who was holding a book and staring at it intently.

Until now, he seemed to be skimming through the secret manuals rather carelessly.

However, unlike the other secret manuals, he was holding this one and concentrating on it, so it seemed he had finally found the right secret manual.

'That's good.'

He might have come out before completing a sichen.

Just then,

The person who had been watching Mok Gyeong-un flinched and stood up, looking behind him.

'What is it?'

He felt someone's presence.

It didn't seem to be Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi who had come.

The person who had just entered was a master of a much higher level than Gwak Mun-gi.

At this level, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say they were almost at the Unit Leader level.

'Who could it be?'

If it wasn't Gwak Mun-gi, who had entered?

-Step step!

As he was on guard, the sound of footsteps could be heard.

In his sight, he saw someone with a slender build wearing a straw hat with a veil, and a handsome young man walking slightly behind.

So, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won spoke in a voice loud enough for them to hear.

“Who are you?”

For now, there was a high probability that they had come from the main headquarters, considering they knew the location of this place.

However, even if they were from the main headquarters, no one could enter this place without permission.

At that moment, the handsome young man took something out from his bosom.

And showing it, he cupped his hands together in a salute and said,

“Are you the one in charge of the treasure vault? I am Yeop Wi-seon, a disciple of the Bright Blade King.”

‘A disciple of the Bright Blade King?’

Interest gleamed in Unit Leader Yang Mu-won’s eyes.

For a disciple of the Bright Blade King, one of the Five Kings who led the Heaven and Earth Society, to come here...

What on earth was going on?

‘To think he’s only in his early twenties and at this level.’

It was surprising.

The rumors that most of the Five Kings’ disciples were masters at the Unit Leader level or above were not unfounded.

Just based on his qi sensitivity, it seemed impossible to guarantee victory against him.

Then who was the person beside him?

‘...Even though they’re close by, their presence is barely detectable. I can’t even judge their level based on qi sensitivity.’

A master.

Even higher than himself, who was currently at the Peak Realm.

So, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won was about to ask who the person beside the disciple of the Bright Blade King was.

“I am Unit Leader Yang Mu-won, the guardian of the treasure vault. The person beside...”

“You’re the one in charge of the treasure vault, right? Then, there’s a secret manual I’m looking for inside. May I enter?”

Before he could even ask, the disciple of the Bright Blade King asked if he could enter the treasure vault to find something.

Unit Leader Yang Mu-won shook his head and replied,

“I apologize, but according to the rules, no one can enter this place freely.”

“Rules? Corpse Blood Valley’s...”

“No. The sect’s rules. I don’t know how you, a disciple of the Bright Blade King, found out about this location, but according to the rules, this place is not accessible except in special circumstances. If there’s something you’re looking for, please go to the treasure vault in the main headquarters...”

“I need the original.”

“...”

At Yeop Wi-seon’s words, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won’s eyes narrowed.

He didn’t know where they had obtained this information, but they knew the secret of this treasure vault.

Who had revealed this fact to them?

Wondering, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won shook his head again.

Even if they knew the truth that this was a treasure vault containing the originals, according to the rules, he couldn’t let them enter.

“I’m sorry. Even if you’re a disciple of one of the Five Kings, you can’t enter this place, so please leave...”

“Oh my. I really didn’t want to say this, but Unit Leader Yang. Do you know who this person in front of your eyes is?”

How could he know when their face was covered?

As he was puzzled, the person in the veiled straw hat lifted the hem of their robe and revealed a round plaque made of jade.

‘!!!!!’

-Pak!

The moment he saw it, Yang Mu-won knelt on one knee.

Then, he cupped his hands together in a salute and said,

“Unit Leader Yang Mu-won greets the...”

“Shh. Quiet.”

The person in the straw hat revealed their voice.

It was the voice of a woman, not a man.

At the command of this veiled person, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won stopped speaking.

‘Why is she here?’

Although Unit Leader Yang Mu-won tried his best not to show it, he inwardly clicked his tongue.

Was this woman the famous one?

He had heard rumors about her, but it was quite surprising.

‘Was she at this level?’

Based on his qi sensitivity, it was impossible to gauge her level, so the circulating rumors were true.

Overwhelmed by the veiled woman’s imposing presence, the disciple of the Bright Blade King, Yeop Wi-seon, spoke,

“Then, may we enter?”

As he said that, he tried to enter with the veiled person, but,

-Pak!

Unit Leader Yang Mu-won hurriedly stood up and blocked them.

“What is the meaning of this?”

“I apologize. But inside, there is currently...”

“I know. Isn’t there a cadet who obtained top score plaques in the Corpse Blood Valley trials and entered to receive a martial arts secret manual?”

“How do you know that?”

“I heard it from the Senior Warrior of Corpse Blood Valley at the bottom of the cliff.”

They had already heard it from Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi.

So, Unit Leader Yang Mu-won said with a troubled expression,

“If you already know, could you please wait a little longer? Inside the treasure vault, at a time...”

“We will quietly find what this person is looking for and leave. Surely, Unit Leader, you’re not telling this person to wait just for a mere cadet to choose a secret manual?”

“That’s...”

Unit Leader Yang Mu-won was in a difficult position.

According to the rules, if someone was already inside the treasure vault, those who wanted to enter next had to wait.

However, Yang Mu-won couldn’t stop the veiled woman in front of him.

She possessed that level of authority.

“...I understand. Please enter. However, since there are rules, I kindly request that you quietly find what you’re looking for and leave. And...”

And try not to disturb the cadet who is selecting a secret manual.

He was about to say that but didn’t.

He judged that people of their caliber wouldn’t deliberately bother a cadet who had received top score plaques and come to receive a reward in Corpse Blood Valley.

“Hohoho. I understand. Let’s go in.”

And so, they finally entered the treasure vault.

They paid no heed to Unit Leader Yang Mu-won's restless demeanor.

Once inside, the disciple of the Bright Blade King, Yeop Wi-seon, said to the veiled woman in amazement,

"Oh my. It's really similar."

"Indeed."

The veiled woman also nodded in agreement.

She had heard that the structure of the main headquarters' treasure vault had been replicated here, but it felt like it had been almost entirely transplanted.

As they looked around, they soon headed towards the upper floor of the treasure vault.

The secret manual they were looking for was on the second floor.

"That person up there seems to be the cadet who received three top score plaques."

At that, the veiled woman's gaze also turned to Mok Gyeong-un on the third floor.

Watching Mok Gyeong-un, who was concentrating on something, the veiled woman spoke,

"Three top score plaques in Corpse Blood Valley. That's impressive."

At her words, the eyebrows of Yeop Wi-seon, a disciple of the Bright Blade King, twitched slightly.

Then, he smiled and said, "He seems quite capable. However, among the disciples of the Five Kings, there is no one who couldn't achieve that level. No, wouldn't they have obtained more than three?"

"..."

Yeop Wi-seon naturally mentioned the disciples of the Five Kings, implying that if he, who was included among them, had participated in the Corpse Blood Valley trials, he would have obtained not just three, but all of the top score plaques.

Even though she understood his intention, the veiled woman showed no particular reaction.

Instead, she muttered while looking at Mok Gyeong-un, "A cadet who obtained three top score plaques is likely to become a disciple of one of the executives."

“That’s...”

Probably true.

At the point of obtaining three top score plaques, he had the highest probability of being the most outstanding among the cadets.

With this level, he would likely pass the final trial smoothly and be chosen by one of the executives.

However, in response to her continued interest, Yeop Wi-seon replied, “If his abilities are truly exceptional, that may be the case. But the executives also have their own preferences, so it’s uncertain what will happen.”

“Still, for a talent of that caliber, it would be good to make his acquaintance lightly for the future.”

At her words, Yeop Wi-seon felt displeased inwardly.

He had gone through the trouble of creating this opportunity, but she was showing interest in a mere cadet who had participated in the Corpse Blood Valley trials, which didn’t sit well with him.

Yeop Wi-seon raised his head and looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Seeing him concentrating on something, Yeop Wi-seon soon said to the veiled woman, “Then, Young Lady, please wait a moment.”

“There’s no need...”

“It’s beneath your dignity to personally approach a mere cadet. I will bring him to you.”

“...Alright.”

Having said that, Yeop Wi-seon went up to the third floor where the bookshelves were.

Upon reaching the top, Yeop Wi-seon snorted.

He had suspected it, but after coming up, he realized that this cadet fellow had fallen into a state of selflessness.

If that weren’t the case, he would have at least been aware and glanced at them on the lower floor, but he never directed his gaze at them even once.

Yeop Wi-seon found this strange.

'What should I do?'

Yeop Wi-seon glanced at the veiled woman waiting on the lower floor.

He was displeased that she was showing interest in a mere cadet.

So, he was conflicted.

'...Enlightenment, huh.'

The fact that he was staring at the book with such a blank expression, completely unaware of his presence even though he had come right next to him, meant that he had undoubtedly gained some kind of enlightenment.

It was likely in progress at the moment.

Usually, in such a situation, one would either not interfere or, if they had a close relationship, set up a protective formation to prevent anyone from disturbing him.

That's because if the enlightenment was mistakenly disrupted while it was in progress, it could lead to becoming a living dead or, in severe cases, falling into a state of delusion.

'...Well, it's none of my business.'

His only intention was to bring this fellow to the Young Lady.

The Young Lady couldn't wait for this bastard.

Yeop Wi-seon raised the corner of his mouth, smirking.

'Don't blame me. It was just your bad luck.'

If the Young Lady hadn't shown interest, he wouldn't have deliberately disrupted the enlightenment.

And so, Yeop Wi-seon reached out his hand towards Mok Gyeong-un.

'Just a light touch, and that enlightenment...'

Right at that moment,

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been blankly concentrating on the secret manual, slowly turned his head to the side while keeping his upper body still and looked at him.

“What are you doing?”

‘Huh?’

For a moment, Yeop Wi-seon couldn’t hide his bewilderment as their eyes met.

Did this fellow’s consciousness return at this very moment?

This was extremely awkward.

It was right before his hand was about to touch Mok Gyeong-un’s head, so what should he say about this?

For now, he had to make up an excuse.

“Uh... This is...”

“Intentionally touching someone during a state of selflessness or visualization is said to be an act of deliberately inducing mental demons, isn’t it?”

“...”

For a moment, he was at a loss for words.

Why was this fellow, who had just emerged from visualization, so quick to grasp the situation?

Feeling like a thief whose foot was tingling, Yeop Wi-seon was perplexed about what to say, but,

“You did it knowingly, didn’t you?”

“Hey, Cadet. You’re misunderstanding something...”

“No need for discussion.”

“What?”

-Pak!

“Ack!”

There was no time to block or do anything.

In an instant, Yeop Wi-seon’s head was struck hard on the larynx by the blade of the hand between the thumb and index finger, causing his head to tilt back.

Chapter 100

'This...'

Cheong-ryeong hesitated as she saw a tall, handsome young man approaching Mok Gyeong-un.

Judging by the look in the approaching young man's eyes, he did not seem to have good intentions.

Currently, Mok Gyeong-un was in a state of oblivion, having gained enlightenment during his meditation.

Beyond simply being immersed, if disturbed incorrectly in this state, there was a risk of the energy flowing in reverse, potentially leading to qi deviation, also a deviation of cultivation.

'Could it be that he intends to disturb Mok Gyeong-un?'

It certainly seemed that way.

She hesitated, wondering if she should break out of the wooden puppet and intervene.

As Mok Gyeong-un's servant spirit, their fates were intertwined.

-Swish!

As expected, the young man was reaching out his hand.

'Damn that mortal. To do this at such a crucial moment...'

Just as she thought this,

-Swoosh!

In that instant, a portion of the death energy, the killing intent that had escaped Mok Gyeong-un's body, was suddenly sucked back in as if nothing had happened.

Along with it, Mok Gyeong-un's blank eyes came back to life.

'Ah!'

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes now shone with a radiant light and had gained depth.

She had been worried about a heart demon appearing, but it seemed he had achieved some success.

Confirming this, she hurriedly shouted,

-Look to your right!

At her cry, Mok Gyeong-un instinctively turned his head to the side.

As he turned, someone was bringing their hand towards his forehead, nearly touching it.

“What are you doing?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the tall young man, no, Bright Blade King’s disciple Yeop Wi-seon, couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

It was natural, as he had reached out with ill intentions.

-Can’t you see? That mortal was trying to disturb you.

‘Disturb?’

-When you’re in a state of meditation or oblivion, if you’re disturbed, you may fall into a heart demon. If that happens, the heart demon will arise, and the energy will flow in reverse, causing adverse effects.

That is precisely qi deviation.

Hearing this, Mok Gyeong-un looked coldly at Yeop Wi-seon in front of him.

It was the first time seeing his face, yet he had approached with malice.

“I’ve heard that touching someone during a state of oblivion or meditation is an intentional act of causing a heart demon. Is that correct?”

“...”

There was no answer.

With just this, Mok Gyeong-un reached his own conclusion.

“You did it on purpose, didn’t you?”

“That, that’s...”

“No need for explanations.”

“What?”

-Pak!

“Ugh!”

Suddenly, Yeop Wi-seon's head was thrown back as Mok Gyeong-un's thumb and index finger struck his Adam's apple.

It could be said that he had let his guard down due to the shock of being caught trying to intentionally cause a heart demon, but the speed of that strike just now was incredibly fast.

‘This, this bastard?’

What was that?

Based on his perception, Yeop Wi-seon only felt like a first-rate expert.

But how could his hands be so fast?

However, now was not the time to be surprised.

‘Damn it, he just had to hit the throat...’

Among the vital points, when struck on the throat, one's breath is momentarily blocked, making it difficult to circulate energy freely.

Thus,

-Pak!

“Cough, cough!”

Yeop Wi-seon coughed and performed a somersault in the air, spinning and utilizing footwork to distance himself.

Having been caught off guard, he needed a moment to recover.

However, Mok Gyeong-un seemed to have no intention of allowing that.

-Pat! Tatatatatak!

Mok Gyeong-un leaped up and unleashed a series of kicks.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her inner astonishment.

The footwork Mok Gyeong-un was displaying was the fourth stance of the Shadowless Flash Kick[1].

-Papapapak!

'Damn it!'

Yeop Wi-seon hadn't even drawn his sword yet, and the incoming kicks forced him to use his fist techniques.

Even though Bright Blade King Son Yun was renowned for his sword techniques, there was no way he wouldn't have prepared for situations involving hand-to-hand combat.

-Swish!

He managed to block the kicks, but Yeop Wi-seon's feet were pushed back.

This caused Yeop Wi-seon to be unable to hide his inner bewilderment.

Even though he couldn't properly circulate his energy after being hit in the throat, for someone who had reached the peak of the transcendent realm to be pushed back while blocking kicks?

'Who the hell is this guy?'

He was perplexed by the unexpected level of skill.

However, thinking that the 'Young Lady' downstairs was witnessing this scene, anger suddenly surged within him.

It couldn't be helped that the original plan had been ruined, but this was a proper humiliation.

Thus,

"Huff!"

While deploying his defensive fist technique, Yeop Wi-seon switched to a simplified stance with his left hand.

It was a difficult task to block Mok Gyeong-un's kicks with a single fist, so while transitioning, he was hit in the chest and left shoulder, but,

-Thud!

At the same time, he was able to draw the large sword strapped to his back.

-Shing!

As soon as he drew the sword, Yeop Wi-seon immediately unleashed a sword technique.

Bright Single Blade Technique[2], Third Stance: Single Strike Sword Rotation[3].

Faced with the domineering sword energy infused with sharpness, Mok Gyeong-un twisted his body to the side and instantly created a brief moment of aerial time.

-Papapapak!

-Crash!

No sooner had he done that than five sections of the bookshelf behind him were split in half.

The range of the sharp energy was wider than expected.

However, seeing the secret manuals that were cut in half along with the bookshelves, Yeop Wi-seon's face turned pale.

'Gasp!'

In the heat of the moment, he had thought to cut down the guy with his sword, but he had ended up cutting nearly thirty secret manuals in half.

Fortunately, the third floor didn't have the bookshelves fully filled with secret manuals, so only this many were cut, but cutting the original secret manuals with sharp energy was a huge mistake.

'Damn it!'

Even though his master was one of the Five Kings, he might still receive a severe punishment for this.

Thinking about that, Yeop Wi-seon became even more enraged.

Because of this bastard, things had become thoroughly messed up.

'This won't do.'

-Pak!

Yeop Wi-seon stabbed his sword into the ground.

Then, he concentrated his energy into one hand, forming a sharp blade of energy.

The giant sword he had received from his master was too large, so unleashing sword techniques with sharp energy would cause too much damage to the surroundings.

Even if there was some energy consumption, it was better to use his bare hands to control the sharp energy.

'I'll kill you in one strike.'

Now that things had come to this, he had to kill the guy.

That way, there wouldn't be any talk about him disturbing the guy's meditation.

'It's not meant to be used in a place like this, but...'

Yeop Wi-seon assumed an extraordinary stance.

The Bright Single Blade Technique consisted of a total of 11 stances and had 5 hidden ultimate techniques.

His master, Bright Blade King Son Yun, had said,

[Only use the ultimate techniques on those you must kill.]

That was because each of those ultimate techniques was a sure-kill move.

Most martial artists wouldn't want their stances to be known or analyzed by others, but this was even more true for ultimate techniques.

The less they were analyzed, the more they held the meaning of certain death.

-Pat!

Yeop Wi-seon launched his body.

'Bright Single Blade Technique, Second Ultimate Technique: Fatal Retribution[4]!'

The trajectory of the sword instantly split into five branches, converging like a whirlwind towards the center, and the sword strokes concentrated on a single point as they charged forward.

Among the ultimate techniques, this was his favorite stance, and if one was hit by it, their chest would be completely blown away, resulting in certain death.

'Die!'

It was at that very moment.

-Shimmer!

As Mok Gyeong-un clenched his sword fingers, the air around his fingertips shimmered like a mirage.

It was a phenomenon caused by the manifestation of sharp energy.

-You!

Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her surprise.

This meant that Mok Gyeong-un had attained enlightenment and had reached the complete peak realm.

'This guy can use sharp energy?'

Yeop Wi-seon also saw this.

Seeing the sharp energy emanating from Mok Gyeong-un's sword fingers, he realized that Mok Gyeong-un was at least at the mature peak realm or above.

'He's hiding his true skill.'

Then, it was all the more reason to do his utmost to kill the guy.

In that fleeting moment, Mok Gyeong-un's concentration reached its peak.

'I can see it.'

It was a strange occurrence.

Perhaps it was because he had experienced various stances while becoming one with the universe through a state of oblivion?

In Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, he could see how the sword strokes of the Fatal Retribution stance unleashed by Yeop Wi-seon would complete their trajectory.

Upon seeing this, he noticed a faint opening.

-Pat!

Without any hesitation, Mok Gyeong-un moved towards the opening he had spotted.

It was incredibly fast.

Yeop Wi-seon curled his lips bitterly.

'Foolish fellow.'

The only way to break the Fatal Retribution stance was to maintain a distance and aim for the gap when the sword strokes converged and then dispersed again.

Approaching this closely would only make the stance more powerful, and it was no different from throwing away one's life.

-Swoosh!

Mok Gyeong-un's sword fingers entered the very center of his sword stance.

The five branches of sharp sword energy wrapped around Mok Gyeong-un's sword fingers, wrist, shoulder, waist, and chest, attempting to split his entire body into five pieces.

It was at that very moment.

-Papapapapang!

The moment before they touched Mok Gyeong-un's body, the five branches of sharp sword energy were deflected as if bouncing off.

'What?'

The opening became even more apparent.

Mok Gyeong-un's sword fingers accurately aimed for that opening.

The opening was Yeop Wi-seon's left eye.

The sword fingers infused with sharp energy flew towards the left eye like a bolt of lightning.

'This, this can't be!'

It was too fast to avoid.

It was at that very moment.

-Pak!

'!?'

Just as Mok Gyeong-un's sword fingers were about to touch the eye, someone grabbed his wrist.

At the same time, Yeop Wi-seon's wrist, who was unleashing the sword technique, was also grabbed by that someone.

It was a slender woman wearing a bamboo hat.

"Young Lady?"

-Thud!

"Ugh!"

Yeop Wi-seon's wrist was twisted, and he was forced to kneel on the ground.

Startled by this, Yeop Wi-seon raised his head, trying to say something, but he was suddenly at a loss for words.

The eyes visible through the veil were cold beyond description.

It was as if those eyes were telling him to shut his mouth.

-Swish!

The woman who had silenced Yeop Wi-seon turned her head.

There was a glint in her eyes behind the veil.

It was because Yeop Wi-seon, the second disciple of Bright Blade King, one of the Five Kings, couldn't withstand her martial power and was forced to kneel, but Mok Gyeong-un was different.

Rather than making him kneel, she had intended to push him away, but he didn't budge.

'He's resisting the power of a 3-star warrior.'

It was surprising.

At first glance, he seemed to be at most a first-rate expert.

However, seeing him use sharp energy, she realized that he was a master who had reached the peak realm.

So she thought the power of a 3-star warrior would be enough, but he was holding his ground.

-Tremble!

“As expected of a cadet who received 3 plaques. With this level of skill, you’d be stronger than most other sects’ masters.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

Although she wasn’t using the energy of the danjeon, this woman’s internal energy was extraordinary.

The face vaguely visible through the veil was very young.

However, judging by the energy emanating from her, she possessed a vast amount of internal energy reminiscent of the Valley Master of the Corpse Blood Valley, Lee Ji-yeom.

“...You’re the one with delicate wrists but extraordinary martial power. Can I ask who you are?”

“Crazy! How dare you address her as ‘you’...”

-Squeeze!

“Aah!”

“Quiet.”

The woman in the bamboo hat, who had warned Yeop Wi-seon while squeezing his wrist even harder, smiled and said,

“Wi So-yeon.”

‘Wi So-yeon?’

Just knowing her name didn’t reveal who she was.

But then she continued,

“I am Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society’s Society Leader.”

‘!?’