

Mayhem 291

Chapter 291 – Convergence (1)

Heum-won (also known as Qinyuan,

It is one of the Demonic Beasts of Mount Kunlun, with the upper body of a giant bird and the lower body of a hornet.

As with most Imae Mangryang, monsters' powers weaken during the day, but Heum-won's flying speed was incomparable to a galloping horse.

The pursuit team tried their best to chase Heum-won as it soared high into the sky, but in the end, they could only watch its gradually disappearing back.

“Damn it...”

“How are we supposed to chase that?”

In the first place, it was nearly impossible to catch something flying into the sky.

Stunned, they eventually had to turn back.

-Flap flap!

“It seems they can't catch up.”

Mok Gyeong-un, who was watching the pursuit team receding into the distance with his excellent eyesight, said with a smile.

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Seop Chun clicked his tongue and asked.

“My lord. When did you tame such a bizarre creature?”

“Ah, this? I had a lucky opportunity at the association.”

“You mean the Heaven and Earth Society?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak’s eyes widened.

As members of the Heaven and Earth Society, they had lived there for a long time but had never seen anything like this before.

Meanwhile, Six Offices Commander So Yerin took off the black mask she was wearing and spoke.

“Sir Mok is truly skilled in sorcery as well. Seeing that you even tamed such a monster.”

“It was just luck.”

“Can anyone tame something like this with just luck? Anyway, you, young master...”

Speaking, she flinched and grabbed the cart.

Heum-won had slightly banked to the side while increasing its altitude, causing her to lose balance.

Her gaze wavered as she looked down.

Although she seemed like someone who wouldn’t fear anything, she unexpectedly appeared afraid of looking down from high up in the sky.

At this, the masked Embroidered Uniform Guard Ma Ra-hyeon asked with a worried expression.

“Six Offices Commander. Are you alri...”

“I’m fine! It’s nothing.”

Before Ma Ra-hyeon could finish his words, So Yerin hurriedly shook her head in denial.

Judging by the slight flush on her face, she seemed embarrassed to have shown fear while looking down.

As if reading his subordinate’s mind, Ma Ra-hyeon turned his head away.

Then, he soon looked at the food waste container where the Holy Fire Priestess was.

Ma Ra-hyeon’s gaze looking at it became strange.

At that moment,

-Click!

Mok Gyeong-un opened the lid of the food waste container.

As the lid opened, the Holy Fire Priestess, who had to infer the outside situation based on sound alone, asked Mok Gyeong-un with a puzzled expression.

“What happened?”

“As you can see, we succeeded in escaping.”

“Succeeded?”

“Yes.”

“Aaah!”

At those words, her face lit up.

The situation seemed to be progressing urgently, and she was curious about what had happened.

But hearing that they had successfully escaped, her emotions were beyond compare.

So, she, who had been crouching with only her head sticking out of the food waste, tried to stand up.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un said.

“I’d like to advise you to just stay still.”

“Didn’t you say we escaped? I’ve been inside since earlier, and my ears are ringing, and my stomach is churning uncomfortably, so here...”

At that moment, the Holy Fire Priestess’s expression stiffened.

Looking up, she couldn’t hide her astonishment at the sight of the huge talons gripping the cart and Heum-won’s back.

“W-what in the world is this?”

“It’s nothing much, should I say we’re in a rather high place right now?”

“High place?”

“Yes. So it would be more comfortable for you to stay inside, right?”

“...Ah, I understand.”

“Shall I close the lid for you?”

At those words, the Holy Fire Priestess, whose stomach was churning, soon nodded her head.

It seemed better to see nothing inside the food waste container rather than continue looking at this.

Mok Gyeong-un, who closed the lid with a smile, turned his gaze.

Ma Ra-hyeon, who made eye contact with Mok Gyeong-un, soon avoided his gaze as if flustered.

-Mortal, did you sense it too?

At Cheong-ryeong's words beside him, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders.

He couldn't help but sense it.

Although he was sensitive to other things, Mok Gyeong-un could always detect killing intent like a ghost, no matter how much it was concealed.

He had long noticed that the faint killing intent emanating from Ma Ra-hyeon was directed towards the Holy Fire Priestess.

He didn't know the reason, but there seemed to be some emotional factor.

-It seems we shouldn't leave them together.

-That's right.

-By the way, to think of utilizing the Demonic Beast Heum-won like this, you're really something else.

-Should I say it was improvisation?

-Thanks to that improvisation, you finally managed to escape the Imperial Palace. To the point of even using the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox, your audacity is truly commendable, Mortal.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled at her words as she clicked her tongue.

Heum-won was a contingency plan prepared for the worst-case scenario, but the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox could be considered a stroke of luck.

It was fortunate that the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox helped them out of her usual whim; otherwise, they might have really been caught by the Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek, known as one of the Six Heavens.

-Grip!

Mok Gyeong-un clenched his trembling left fist.

Although his regenerative ability wasn't as great as Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint, who had consumed the blood of a spiritual creature, his recovery was fast, so strength gradually returned to his hand.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un let out a faint sigh.

Even after absorbing the immense demonic power of the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox and gaining some enlightenment, the wall called the Six Heavens, known as the pinnacle of the martial arts world, was indeed vast.

‘There’s still a long way to go.’

There was a high probability that those who killed his grandfather were part of a huge organization.

To investigate them, he either needed to build a force or possess overwhelming martial power, but judging from this fight, Mok Gyeong-un concluded that he was still lacking.

However, there was no need for disappointment.

Through this fight, he learned the extent of the Six Heavens’ martial prowess and gained various insights and lessons from it.

‘The ways to manipulate Qi are endless.’

He closely observed how someone who had completely crossed the wall of walls utilized Qi.

As a result, he vaguely grasped his method of manipulation.

If he utilized this, it seemed he could manipulate Qi more effectively than now.

-Ssk!

As Mok Gyeong-un slightly moved his finger, the hilt of the Evil Commandment Sword sheathed in the scabbard faintly trembled.

At this, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth rose.

It was at that moment.

-Mortal.

-...

-Mortal.

-Yes?

-You... are you going to abandon that baldhead and leave?

-!?

The baldhead Cheong-ryeong was referring to was none other than the Shaolin's expelled monk, Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior Ja Geum-jeong.

Amidst the complications and the need to mobilize Heum-won, he had momentarily forgotten about him.

Originally, the overall plan was to pull the food waste cart outside the outer palace and then use the carriage prepared by Ja Geum-jeong to escape Kaifeng.

However, as they unintentionally escaped using Heum-won, they ended up leaving Ja Geum-jeong behind.

-Ah... I forgot.

-It seems so.

-Well, it can't be helped.

-Huh?

-It's not like we can go back now...

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at So Yerin.

Because of the sudden appearance of the Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek, she also ended up leaving the Imperial Palace, but she ultimately had to return.

Therefore, it seemed he had to ask her to tell Ja Geum-jeong to come separately.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong suddenly spoke with an exasperated expression.

-You don't need to do that.

-What do you mean by that?

-Look below.

At Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un looked down at the ground in puzzlement.

With Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, which were far superior to ordinary people's vision, he could see a dot-like figure moving on the underbrush that looked as small as a tuft of hair, and he could also hear a faint sound.

The sound of Heum-won flying and the wind made it difficult to hear, but when he focused on his hearing, he could hear that faint sound.

-Yaaaaa! Can't you hear meeeee!

A voice shouting with inner energy reverberated upward.

The owner of that voice, shouting at the top of his lungs, was none other than Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior Ja Geum-jeong.

In a secluded forest nearby.

“Huff... huff...”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, his face drenched in sweat, stuck out his tongue and exhaled roughly.

Although he had drawn the surrounding energy to endure, he had exhausted all his stamina trying to catch up with the flying Heum-won.

This was the first time since mastering martial arts that he felt like he would die from using lightness skills.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile.

“You followed well.”

“Huff... huff... damn... My lord... you told me to prepare a carriage and wait... huff huff... what kind of act is it to abandon this baldhead?”

“Ah. I didn’t abandon you. It turned out that way due to unavoidable circumstances.”

“Unavoidable circumstances? What could possibly...”

-Pak!

At that moment, Seop Chun elbowed his side and whispered in his ear.

“You’ll be surprised if you know what we went through.”

“Surprised?”

“Just listen quietly. Actually...”

Seop Chun briefly explained what had happened during the escape from the outer palace.

Listening to this, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong’s eyes widened as he retorted.

“What? You fought against the Northern Blade King Gu Seong-baek?”

“No. I told you to just listen quietly, so why are you asking again?”

Seop Chun shrugged his shoulders as if in a predicament.

However, despite that, he seemed quite proud.

That was understandable because the person he had chosen as his master, Mok Gyeong-un, had confronted the Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek, known as one of the Six Heavens, the pinnacle of the current martial arts world, and even inflicted injuries on him, albeit in a joint attack.

This couldn't be dismissed as mere luck.

It was a tremendous feat against a supreme master at the level of a great sage who had crossed the wall of walls and reached the realm of the Profound Realm.

If this spread to others, no, to the martial arts world, Mok Gyeong-un's reputation would also rise.

Who knows, he might even become renowned as a rising master.

‘Ah...’

For a moment, Seop Chun licked his lips.

Come to think of it, Mok Gyeong-un was considered dead in the Imperial Palace.

Therefore, regrettably, it seemed unlikely that his reputation would spread due to this incident.

It was an opportunity to gain a reputation comparable to the Eight Stars, surpassing the promising later-generation masters, but it was a pity that it had to be thoroughly concealed since it was a mission related to the Imperial Palace.

Meanwhile, Ja Geum-jeong asked Mok Gyeong-un in an excited voice.

“No, My lord. Did you really confront one of the Six Heavens?”

“Hey, baldhead.”

“What?”

Suddenly hearing someone calling him, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong turned his head with a fierce expression.

The person who called him was Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint.

“Did you just call me baldhead?”

“Are you displeased when others call you that even though you refer to yourself as baldhead?”

“What?”

“Judging by the way you address Sir Mok as your lord, it seems you are his subordinate, so what kind of way of speaking is that, you brat?”

“No, does this nun have a death wish to go to paradise so soon? With that beggar-like appearance, who are you calling a brat...”

-Pak!

Before he could finish his words, Dam Baek-ha revealed her energy.

-Gooooo!

“If I can’t call you a young brat, then what should I call you?”

Sensing this, Ja Geum-jeong flinched for a moment.

That was understandable because just from the revealed energy alone, he could tell that her inner energy was far superior to his own.

‘What the? This nun?’

Just looking at her revealed energy, it reminded him of his master, the Shaolin’s Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, to the extent that her inner energy was very profound.

Who the hell was this woman?

While he was puzzled,

At that moment, someone knelt down in front of Six Offices Commander So Yerin with a thud.

It was none other than the masked Embroidered Uniform Guard Ma Ra-hyeon.

At Ma Ra-hyeon’s attitude, So Yerin’s eyes were filled with bewilderment.

“What... are you saying right now?”

“...It’s exactly as I said. I don’t think I can return to the Imperial Palace with the Six Offices Commander.”

Chapter 292 – Convergence (2)

-Slap!

The boy curled up like a shrimp as the whip struck him.

With the continuous whipping, the boy’s clothes gradually became stained with blood.

The face of the boy, who had been screaming, twisted like an evil spirit as if resenting everything in the world.

‘What... what did I do wrong?’

He was simply born a mixed-blood.

But is this a sin?

Just because he doesn’t have black eyes and his skin is a bit fairer, does he have to suffer discrimination and disregard like this?

He didn’t know how things had come to this.

-Slap! Slap!

[Damn mixed-eye, die! Die! Someone like you is better off dead!]

With the continuous verbal abuse and whipping, the boy’s mixed eyes trembled.

Beyond pain and suffering, anger began to overtake reason, and it soon overflowed with murderous intent.

‘I’ll kill you. I’ll kill you.’

The restraints on his arms didn’t matter.

It would end if he just bit off that bastard’s neck with his teeth.

The boy, driven by rage, watched for an opportunity with the eyes of a hawk.

Then, when the hand that had been whipping him momentarily stopped from exhaustion,

“Aaargh!”

With a scream, he charged at the slave trader who had been whipping him.

There was only one goal.

To bite off that damn bastard’s neck.

Even if he died on the spot, he was determined to kill that one bastard...

-Thud!

However, before he could reach him, someone’s kick tripped him, and he fell.

The one who knocked him down was the slave trader’s bodyguard.

[How dare you, damn blue-eyed bastard, lunge at someone!]

-Thud!

The slave trader stomped on the fallen boy with bloodshot eyes.

He didn’t care whether the boy lived or died.

He was only focused on venting his anger.

-Thud thud!

-Grip!

It was too painful, but the boy bit his lips tightly and endured his groans.

He thought showing his suffering would only help the slave trader vent his anger.

-Thud thud!

‘Would it be better... to die like this?’

As his consciousness gradually faded from the pain, he wished for death.

It was that moment.

-Chak! Thud! Roll roll!

Then, something rolled in front of the boy.

[Y-you bitch...]

-Chak!

Hot liquid splattered and soaked the boy's body.

The boy, who had been curled up, slowly raised his head in puzzlement.

His eyes saw something surprising.

It was the head of the slave trader with bloodshot eyes, as if unaware that his neck had been cut off.

What the hell just happened?

The boy, who had been dazed while looking at the bastard's severed head, soon raised his head and looked at someone standing in front of him.

It was a beautiful girl with red hair fluttering like blood.

The girl flicked the blood off her sword onto the ground, glanced at the boy once, and then tried to leave the tent.

He didn't know why she did it.

The boy, who had been stunned, soon staggered up in a hurry, ran to the girl, and shouted.

[P-please take me with you too.]

[P-please take me with you too!]

The eyes of the masked Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, who suddenly recalled his first encounter with the Embroidered Uniform Guard Six Offices Commander So Yerin, trembled faintly with a complex state of mind.

She was his savior who had rescued his life from falling into the abyss and his master who had taught him martial arts.

She had accepted him without any prejudice, and now he was telling her that he would leave her side, so just parting his lips felt heavy.

He didn't want to disappoint anyone else, but especially not her, his master.

At that moment, So Yerin spoke.

“...Why? Why can't you return to the Imperial Palace?”

“I apologize, Young Miss.”

“Don't just say you're sorry, tell me the reason.”

“Young Miss.”

“I told you to state the reason.”

Although she was speaking gently as usual, Ma Ra-hyeon, who had been with her for a long time, felt a faint agitation in her voice.

With a heavy heart, Ma Ra-hyeon hesitated and opened his mouth.

“The Southern Pacification Commissioner saw me. If I return, I will become a traitor.”

It was a justification he had thought of in advance.

No, it was not just a justification but also the truth from the beginning.

Unlike her, whose face was covered with a mask, he had acted in his original identity to safely pass them through the outer palace, so he was in a position where he could not return to the Imperial Palace.

If he were to return, he would be immediately caught by the Southern Pacification Commissioner.

Although his face had not been exposed, it could cast suspicion on his master So Yerin, who had entered the Embroidered Uniform Guard together with him.

“I apologize. I cannot become a burden to you, Young Miss.”

“Who says you’re a burden? Do you think I can’t protect you?”

“...I will become a shackle on your ankles.”

“It doesn’t matter. I will protect you in any way...”

“I have already made my decision.”

“Decision? Is it your decision to leave me on your own...”

“No. I’m not just leaving.”

“What?”

“I wish to serve Sir Mok Gyeong-un here as my master.”

‘!?’

At Ma Ra-hyeon’s words, So Yerin’s expression stiffened.

Ma Ra-hyeon was an upright and loyal man.

He had been with her for a long time, so he was not only her disciple but also a colleague and like a younger brother.

Now, without any warning, he said he would leave her side and enter under someone else, so she couldn't help but be confused.

“Wh... why...”

At her reaction, Ma Ra-hyeon felt a pang in his heart.

However, he soon gathered his thoughts and spoke.

“I apologize. Sir Mok Gyeong-un saved me when I was about to die from blood poison. So I wish to dedicate my remaining life to serving him.”

“...”

At his words, So Yerin closed her mouth.

If he simply said he would leave because his identity was exposed and it would be a problem, they could have devised various means such as a human skin mask.

However, if this was the reason, she couldn't hold him back.

No, if she held him back, it would be disregarding Ma Ra-hyeon's decision.

“Commander Ma... no, Ma Ra-hyeon.”

“Young Miss... I apolo...”

“Enough. Why should that be something to apologize for? How can I stop you when you say you want to repay a debt of gratitude?”

‘Ah, Young Miss.’

Ma Ra-hyeon, who had been bowing his head, closed his eyes.

He still did not think he had fully repaid the favor he had received from her.

However, the one who knew the truth about his father’s death, which had long remained a lump in his heart, was right there.

If he missed this opportunity, it might never come again.

‘If... if there is another chance, I will surely repay your kindness.’

She was his master who had allowed him, a mixed-blood, to live like a human being.

Leaving her like this, he had no desire to return to her side again.

He just wanted to repay her kindness in any way possible.

Meanwhile, So Yerin approached Mok Gyeong-un, clasped her hands together in salute, and said.

“Young master. Then, I cannot be away for long, so I will return to the Imperial Palace now.”

“Ah. Of course you should.”

“If I learn any information about the mark, I ask that we meet. Of course, I will also share any information I come across.”

“I will do so.”

“Then I wish you good fortune.”

With those words, she was about to turn and leave, but she paused for a moment, then turned her head and said to Mok Gyeong-un.

“Please take good care of Ma Ra-hyeon.”

At her request, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders.

Accepting this as a sign of affirmation, So Yerin smiled bitterly and soon looked at Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint.

Then, Dam Baek-ha also clasped her hands in salute to Mok Gyeong-un, then tore off a piece of her clothing and handed it over.

The piece of clothing had the prisoner number [126] engraved on it.

“What is this for?”

“Thanks to you, Sir, the successor of the Elder, I was able to come out into the world again like this. I will never forget this great favor you have shown me.”

“I didn’t intend it, so you don’t need to be so grateful.”

“Even so, if it weren’t for you, Sir, I would have never been able to come out. That fact remains unchanged.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un smacked his lips and said.

“Well, if you feel that way, as a sign of gratitude, that suggestion...”

“That is a skill that only the owner of our sect and clan can learn, so I cannot teach it to you.”

Before Mok Gyeong-un could finish his words, Dam Baek-ha flatly refused.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had intended to ask her for the formula for casting the suggestion, licked his lips as if disappointed.

It was quite an interesting technique, so he wanted to know the exact formula.

Dam Baek-ha, who had handed over the piece of clothing, pointed to it with her eyes and said to the disappointed Mok Gyeong-un.

“Even so, how could I not repay the favor? I intend to go to the Four Leagues Alliance, where the successors of our cult are said to gather for the reconstruction of the cult. If there is any work that needs to be done, even if inadequate, send this. I will rush to assist you in a single breath.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled.

Although she expressed herself as inadequate, she was a tremendous master close to the realm of the Profound.

Such a master said she would rush to help whenever requested, so he had gained a useful card.

So Yerin and Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint went their separate ways.

When they had left and their presence had completely disappeared, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and soon turned his gaze to Ma Ra-hyeon and said.

“Now that they’re gone, shall we hear the real reason?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Ma Ra-hyeon’s eyes narrowed through the gaps in his mask.

His eyes were filled with bewilderment.

“What are you talking about...”

“You can’t lie to me.”

-Smolder!

With these words, Mok Gyeong-un raised his demonic energy.

At that moment, Ma Ra-hyeon’s pupils turned black with demonic energy, and he unconsciously revealed his inner thoughts, which he had been trying to hide.

“Because of that damn old hag you abducted from the prison, my mother and that damn father of mine died.”

‘!?’

-Pak!

As soon as he finished speaking, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak hurriedly blocked the space between him and Holy Fire Priestess.

Their goal was to safely bring Holy Fire Priestess to the Heaven and Earth Society.

However, if the purpose of this masked Embroidered Uniform Guard Ma Ra-hyeon, who had pledged loyalty to Mok Gyeong-un, was to take revenge on her, they should never let him get close.

“What? Weren’t we on the same side?”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had read the atmosphere, also raised his energy and prepared to intervene at any moment.

At that moment, the Holy Fire Priestess staggered with a perplexed look.

‘This can’t be...’

She had a suspicion when she saw Ma Ra-hyeon’s mixed eyes.

However, with his recent words, she could be certain of his identity.

She spoke in a trembling voice.

“A-are you the son of Priest Mayera?”

“Shut up!”

Then, Ma Ra-hyeon roughly tore off his mask and shouted at her.

Despite his pupils being dyed black with demonic energy, his emotions had somehow become agitated.

“Mayera Hyeon...”

“I told you to shut that mouth!”

Ma Ra-hyeon yelled and tried to launch his body towards her.

At that moment, someone pressed down on his shoulder.

-Grip!

Ma Ra-hyeon tried to draw out his inner energy to shake it off, but the other person’s inner energy was so strong that he was forced to kneel on one knee.

-Thud!

‘Wh-who? Ah!’

He wondered who it was, but it was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had placed both hands on his shoulders, smiled and said.

“It’s troublesome if you act recklessly. Regardless of your circumstances, I didn’t have you take her out so you could do as you please.”

Although he spoke casually, this was a clear warning.

If he applied a little more force to his hands, it seemed it would not end with just crushing his shoulders.

At this, Ma Ra-hyeon endured the pain and opened his mouth.

“My lord... if you... leave... the disposal... of that... damn... old hag... to me... I will... pledge... my loyalty... to you... with... my life...”

“Are you negotiating?”

“I... will be... more helpful... to you... than that... old hag...”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un scoffed and sneered.

Then, he leaned close to his ear and whispered.

“You value yourself quite highly.”

“My lord... it’s true. I can lay down my life for you as much as...”

“That’s unfortunate.”

“What do you mean?”

“The value of something changes depending on the situation. Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon was quite useful in the Imperial Palace, but right now, that person is more valuable to me.”

“My lord!”

“So let’s make this clear right here.”

-Grip!

Mok Gyeong-un's grip tightened.

A small groan escaped Ma Ra-hyeon's mouth from the pain that felt like his shoulders would shatter.

"Ugh."

"I hope you erase the thought of touching that person from your mind until my business is finished."

"Haa... haa..."

"I quite like Thousand-men Commander Ma. But if you ignore my kind warning, I'm afraid I'll have no choice but to personally carry out the weeping beheading of Ma Su."

Weeping Beheading of Ma Su.

It refers to the anecdote where Zhuge Liang, a military strategist of the Shu Kingdom, beheaded his cherished general Ma Su with a sorrowful heart to enforce military discipline after Ma Su suffered a major defeat by disobeying orders.

It also meant that no matter how outstanding a talent, if they disobey orders and rules, they will not be forgiven.

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Ma Ra-hyeon said nothing.

Seeing this, Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun were inwardly worried.

'If Holy Fire Priestess is no different from the enemy of his parents, will that Embroidered Uniform Guard master simply accept his lord's warning?'

‘If he’s going to be a variable, it would be better to separate them now rather than just warn him.’

He is someone who left his original companions and chose revenge.

Would such a person obediently follow his master’s orders?

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un removed his hands from Ma Ra-hyeon’s shoulders, which he had been pressing down.

‘Ah...’

Is he really going to let it pass with just this level of warning?

It was that instant.

-Thud!

Then, Ma Ra-hyeon suddenly knelt on one knee in front of Mok Gyeong-un, clasped his hands together in salute, and bowed his head respectfully.

Then, he spoke politely with his head bowed.

“Ma Ra-hyeon wishes to serve Sir Mok Gyeong-un as his master. I will stay by your side with my life and pledge my loyalty, so please keep your promise.”

‘Huh?’

‘What is this?’

The two couldn't hide their bewilderment at his sudden pledge of loyalty.

They thought he would harbor resentment for forcibly stopping his revenge, but he suddenly pledged his loyalty.

But what promise was he referring to at the end?

Did his lord make some kind of promise?

They couldn't understand what was going on.

While pledging his loyalty with his head bowed like that, Mok Gyeong-un's words echoed in Ma Ra-hyeon's mind.

[I hope you erase the thought of touching that person from your mind until my business is finished.]

The premise was 'until my business is finished.'

Mok Gyeong-un patted Ma Ra-hyeon's shoulder and spoke with a sardonic smile.

"I like that you're quick-witted."

Chapter 293 – Convergence (3)

-Anyhow, you're really shrewd.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders at Cheong-ryeong's words.

Although she expressed it as shrewd, if he hadn't laid out the premise like this, there was no knowing what Ma Ra-hyeon, burning with a desire for revenge, might have done.

Rather than creating an unnecessary variable, it was better to promise a carrot like this.

At least in order to obtain the carrot, he wouldn't be able to think of anything else.

-Still, I provided an opportunity, so you should say I'm kind.

-Kind? What if there's no more opportunity after this?

Mok Gyeong-un smiled silently at Cheong-ryeong's words.

It was just as she said.

Once he obtained all the desired information from the Holy Fire Priestess, he would hand her over to the Heaven and Earth Society Leader for a meeting.

The leader of the Heaven and Earth Society was one of the Six Heavens.

Even if he was bedridden, if the Holy Fire Priestess fell into the hands of the leader, a supreme master at the level of a great sage, the opportunity like now might become distant for Ma Ra-hyeon.

Of course, for Mok Gyeong-un, that was not something to be particularly concerned about.

-Ssk!

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and looked at the Holy Fire Priestess.

After finding out who Ma Ra-hyeon was, she had an inexplicably anxious look.

‘We need to get out of Kaifeng first.’

There was quite a bit he wanted to ask the Holy Fire Priestess.

However, this place was not far from the imperial capital Kaifeng, so there was a risk of pursuit.

In a situation where So Yerin and Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint were not present, if the Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek, one of the Six Heavens, appeared, it would be difficult to handle at the moment.

So, Mok Gyeong-un said to everyone.

“Let’s get out of Henan first. Everyone, get on the cart.”

“Understood.”

“Yes, Young Master.”

“Ooh. Can we ride that giant bizarre bird?”

“...It’s not something to be so happy about.”

Everyone was about to get on the cart, which had become more spacious with the removal of the food waste containers and the reduction in numbers, when Holy Fire Priestess approached Mok Gyeong-un and spoke in a small voice.

“Disciple of Elder Ya-seon.”

“That’s a long form of address. Just call me Mok Gyeong-un.”

“Mok Gyeong-un?”

“Yes.”

“I understand. Brother Mok. Are we going to ride this bizarre bird to move?”

“Yes.”

“Can’t we just get a horse?”

“Even if it’s okay, how can we get a horse in this deep mountain valley? And we’re not far from Kaifeng, so if we don’t hurry, we might be caught by the pursuit team. Is that alright?”

“Ah...”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Holy Fire Priestess looked at the Demonic Beast Heum-won with a pale face.

Although it was fast, relying on the talons of that giant monster to fly in the sky was not a very pleasant memory.

However, since there was no other choice, she had no option but to accept it.

“Well, shall we go then? If it’s difficult to just ride the cart, you can stay inside the food waste container again.”

“...I understand. But before that, Brother Mok. I have something to say.”

“Something to say?”

“That’s right. Elder Ya-seon must have made arrangements, but before that, we need to find the sacred orb.”

“Sacred orb... Come to think of it, what is that sacred orb?”

He was curious about what it was anyway.

Both the organization of the mark and the Embroidered Uniform Guard had tried to find that so-called sacred orb under orders from above.

If it weren’t an important item, they wouldn’t have gone to such lengths to target it.

Holy Fire Priestess glanced at those sitting on Mok Gyeong-un’s cart, then leaned close to his ear and whispered.

“It’s the Holy Fire.”

“...Holy Fire?”

“Didn’t you hear from Elder Ya-seon?”

“No, I only received instructions to abduct the Holy Fire Priestess from the underground prison of the Imperial Palace.”

“Ah. Elder Ya-seon taught well according to the doctrine.”

‘Doctrine?’

Listening to her words, it seemed that only a portion of the followers of the Fire Faith Order knew about that Holy Fire.

Holy Fire Priestess spoke to Mok Gyeong-un in a secretive voice.

“Originally, it’s too early, but since Brother Mok will succeed Elder Ya-seon, I’ll tell you. Without the Holy Fire, this old one cannot receive revelation.”

“Revelation, could it be?”

“The foresight you know is precisely the revelation.”

‘Ho.’

Interest glinted in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes at her words.

He had guessed that the sacred orb might be related to foresight abilities, but it seemed to be true.

So, Mok Gyeong-un asked in a small voice.

“Can you not receive revelation without the sacred orb?”

“The sacred orb is a sacred object passed down through generations in our cult. Only with it can we receive the revelation of the sacred fire and open the path.”

“If it grants revelation, it must be essential.”

“That’s right. Also, only with the Holy Fire can we gather the believers again, and the incarnation that has appeared in the present world... No. This much, you don’t need to know yet.”

‘Incarnation?’

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

Was the incarnation she mentioned referring to what was written in the language of the Persian Kingdom that the Shadow Clan Master Hwan Ya-seon possessed?

[Beware, for the incarnation of Ahriman shall appear in the present world.]

He didn't know what that incarnation was, but it seemed to be a very important revelation for both the Shadow Clan Master Hwan Ya-seon and the followers of the Fire Faith Order.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un had no interest in this.

His only concern was to find out who killed his grandfather and the mastermind behind it.

However, it seemed he had to find the so-called sacred orb.

There must be more than just wanting to see her for the leader of the Heaven and Earth Society to send someone to the underground prison of the Imperial Palace to abduct Holy Fire Priestess.

It must be related to that foresight ability.

‘It will be necessary.’

A Holy Fire Priestess without foresight ability would be no more than half a person.

The leader wouldn't acknowledge her either.

So, Mok Gyeong-un asked.

“That sacred orb, no, where is the Holy Fire?”

“I entrusted it to my granddaughter.”

She had a granddaughter?

Well, if she wasn't living alone at such an old age, she was old enough to have grandchildren.

“I see, then where is your granddaughter?”

“I asked a favor from the head of that family, who has long been connected with this old one. It's a martial arts family in the martial arts world, so you, a martial artist, should know if you hear it.”

“A martial arts family in the martial arts world? Where is it?”

“The Tang Family of Sichuan.”

‘!?’

The Tang Family of Sichuan.

It is a martial arts family consisting only of the Tang clan bloodline and one of the Seven Great Families of the martial arts world.

The Tang Family of Sichuan, renowned for their hidden weapons, Golden Silkworm Hands, and poison, boasts the greatest power and influence among the Seven Great Families, along with the Mo-Yong Family and the Namgoong Family.

-Flap flap!

Mong Mu-yak, who was holding onto the shaking cart caught by Heum-won's talons, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un in a worried voice.

"My lord... The Tang Family of Sichuan belongs to the Righteous Alliance. Will it be alright?"

For him, who had only heard the destination after ascending into the sky, he couldn't help but be concerned.

The mission in the Imperial Palace was also dangerous, but at least it was no different from a neutral zone, so they could focus solely on the abduction.

However, if it was the Tang Family of Sichuan, the situation changed.

The Tang Family of Sichuan belonged to the Righteous Alliance, so they were completely at odds with the Heaven and Earth Society.

That meant they would be entering enemy territory.

Moreover,

"Not only the Tang Family, but Sichuan Province is completely the territory of the Righteous Alliance. With the Qingsheng Sect, Dianchang Sect, and Emei Sect present, if we make a slight mistake, the Heaven's Net Earth's Web may unfold."

Heaven's Net Earth's Web.

It refers to a large-scale encirclement and pursuit formation deployed by over a thousand martial artists.

This formation, which is difficult to escape from due to its vast encirclement net, exerts pressure to the extent of not allowing any room for energy circulation or recovery of physical strength once caught.

If the Heaven's Net Earth's Web alone was like this, it would be even worse if the Tang Family of Sichuan, skilled in poison arts and hidden weapons, were involved.

"It doesn't seem very good."

"...It's dangerous. Even if there's no enlightened grandmaster at the level of a great sage like the Six Heavens in the Imperial Palace, the Tang Family of Sichuan has Tang In-hae, known to be comparable to them in terms of killing techniques, and he is one of the Eight Stars."

Tang In-hae of the Thousand Poison Hands.

He was a master who, along with Guyang Sa-oh of the Eight Poison Snake Staff, had reached the realm of the Poison Man, said to be the highest level of poison arts, among the known poison masters in the Central Plains and beyond.

It was no exaggeration to say that poison arts, which followed a different path from ordinary martial arts, were specialized solely in destruction and death.

Therefore, going to the Tang Family of Sichuan was particularly daunting.

Seop Chun also seemed to agree, as he chimed in.

"This is where Mu-yak is right. In a sense, the Tang Family of Sichuan may be even more dangerous than the Imperial Palace. My lord, how about reconsidering?"

"Reconsider. Even so, what choice do we have? If we don't have that so-called sacred orb, it may not be in the state the society leader desires."

“However, the order given by the society leader did not include that sacred orb. Moreover, unlike the Imperial Palace mission, we are not prepared for the trip to the Tang Family of Sichuan.”

At Seop Chun’s words, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had been listening quietly, took a sip from his gourd and spoke.

“Gulp. What are you so afraid of? We’re not going there to fight, but to fetch that old nun’s granddaughter.”

“It’s a difference in position. The Righteous Alliance and our association are enemies. We don’t need justification to fight.”

“If that’s the case, there’s no other way, but if you’re really worried, shall this baldhead accompany that old nun and go?”

“What?”

“Since the news of this baldhead serving Young Master Mok here hasn’t spread yet, it shouldn’t matter if I go, right?”

“...”

Seop Chun stared intently at Ja Geum-jeong.

Is he being serious?

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong is known as one of the Three Madmen.

The reason is that regardless of the righteous faction or the evil faction, he committed eccentric acts and received the nickname of a madman.

If he tried to enter the Tang Family of Sichuan, would they let him in nicely?

“...Hey. Do you really think the Tang Family of Sichuan will let you in?”

“Gulp. Well, if I’m unlucky, they might kick me out.”

It seemed he was aware of his own notoriety to some extent.

Seop Chun let out a deep sigh and soon spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“My lord, please...”

It was before he could finish his words.

-Gasp!

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly drew the Evil Commandment Sword he had been carrying at his waist.

-Ssrng!

“M-My lord?”

Puzzled by the sudden drawing of the sword, Mok Gyeong-un soon leaped onto the cart’s handle and swung his sword downward.

Then, sharp Sword Intent arose from the sword and slashed through the air.

-Pakang!

As something collided with the Sword Intent, metallic sounds and blue sparks scattered as it shattered.

It was unknown what it was, but it was clear that it had flown from below.

“What is it?”

“A pursuit team?”

Surprised by this, Seop Chun, Mong Mu-yak, and Ma Ra-hyeon stuck their heads out and looked down below the cart.

But it was at that moment.

From below, something flashed here and there and rushed towards them.

It was something blunt and short to be called an arrow.

What it was targeting was none other than,

‘Heum-won?’

At this, Mok Gyeong-un shouted at Heum-won.

“Dodge it!”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s shout, Heum-won glanced down, and rather than dodging, it tried to deflect the incoming objects with a gust of wind like the arrows in the Imperial Palace.

-Paaang!

As Heum-won's giant wingbeat created a tremendous whirlwind, the rushing objects were soon deflected downward.

It was the moment when they thought most of the objects had been deflected.

-Ssk!

Something pierced through the whirlwind created by the wingbeat and flew towards Heum-won's torso.

Just as it was about to make contact, Mok Gyeong-un leaped up and slashed it with the Evil Commandment Sword.

-Chaeng-gang!

The slashed object coincidentally fell onto the cart.

Seeing the halved object that had fallen, everyone couldn't identify what it was due to its peculiar shape.

However, there was someone who recognized it.

It was the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

This was none other than,

“Vajra?”

Vajra.

It is a ritual implement used by monks of the Buddhist sect when cultivating the Buddhist way or subduing demons, symbolizing the mind of enlightenment that shatters human afflictions.

‘Could it be?’

Startled upon seeing this, Ja Geum-jeong tried to look down below the cart.

But before he could do so, two more vajras flew in, and one of them pierced through Heum-won’s right wing.

-Splat!

As the vajra pierced its wing, Heum-won let out a scream.

-Kee-keh-keh-keh-kek!

‘Couldn’t block one.’

He had blocked one of the two flying vajras by throwing the Evil Commandment Sword.

However, the other one flew towards the completely opposite wing, leaving no room for any action.

Mok Gyeong-un made a gesture of reaching out his hand and pulling.

Then, the flying Evil Commandment Sword changed direction and flew back towards Mok Gyeong-un.

-Pak!

It was the moment he grasped the sword.

-Ooooh!

From Heum-won's right wing, which had been screaming, a solemn energy that had never been felt before flowed out, and a strange sound rang in their ears.

-Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baa-bam baa-

It was a bizarre phenomenon.

How could the sound be heard so clearly?

While he was puzzled by this, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong shouted urgently.

“My lord! It's the demon-subduing mantra of the demon-subduing monks!”

Chapter 294 – Shaolin Temple (1)

Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baa-bam baa-ra hum ba-tak.

The solemn sound of chanting the sutra.

It was the demon-subduing mantra used by the Buddhist sect to subjugate demons.

At the mention of the demon-subduing mantra, Ma Ra-hyeon spoke with widened eyes.

“Demon-subduing mantra? Isn't that a Buddhist scripture? Could it be...”

“Damn bizarre bird. Of all places it could fly, how dare it fly above Shaolin as a monster?”

‘!!!!!!’

At the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong’s words, everyone couldn’t hide their bewilderment.

‘Sh-Shaolin?’

It was a very coincidental occurrence.

In order to find Holy Fire Priestess’s granddaughter, who was said to be holding the sacred orb, they had to head towards the Tang Family of Sichuan, so the Demonic Beast Heum-won flew southwest from the imperial capital Kaifeng.

However, no one had predicted this.

On the southwest route from the imperial capital Kaifeng, there was Mount Songshan, one of the Five Great Mountains and the Central Mountain.

If this were just an ordinary mountain, there wouldn’t be any particular problem, but on Mount Songshan, there was the Shaolin Temple, known as the holy land of Buddhism and the birthplace of the Righteous and Martial Way.

“Damn it.”

A rough sound escaped Seop Chun’s mouth.

Even if luck was bad, how could this happen?

Among so many places, who would have thought they would get entangled with the Shaolin Temple, known as the center of the righteous path, in this manner?

Meanwhile,

-Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baa-bam baa-ra hum ba-tak.

The sound of chanting the demon-subduing mantra grew louder.

Then, Heum-won, whose right wing had already been struck by the ritual implement, the vajra, screamed in pain and twisted its body.

-Kee-keh-keh-keh-keh-kek!

“Whoa!”

“E-everyone, hold onto the cart!”

As Heum-won twisted its body and the cart also tilted, everyone panicked and grabbed onto various parts of the cart.

“Aaargh!”

At that moment, as the food waste container tipped over, Holy Fire Priestess, who was inside, was about to fall.

But in that instant, someone grasped her wrist.

-Pak!

It was none other than the masked Ma Ra-hyeon.

Ma Ra-hyeon's eyes, who had saved her at a precise moment, became strange.

‘Damn it.’

If it were up to him, he just wanted to let her die.

However, the only one who knew how his damn father had died was this damn old hag.

Therefore, he couldn't let her fall and die like this.

Meanwhile, the Demonic Beast Heum-won, unable to endure the wound inflicted by the vajra and the demon-subduing mantra, tried to fall downward.

“Oh no!”

“Ah ah ah! We're falling!”

No matter how skilled they were in martial arts, falling from such a height could result in death from the impact.

“Y-Young Master!”

Seop Chun called out to Mok Gyeong-un, who was holding onto the feathers on Heum-won's back.

Since only his lord could tame and handle the Demonic Beast Heum-won, he called out in desperation, clinging to even a straw.

-Mortal. You need to pull out the vajra.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong urgently spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head while being severely shaken by the descent and looked at Heum-won's right wing.

In Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, which had opened the Ghost Eyes, the solemn energy of the vajra was visible.

It was spreading throughout Heum-won's body like poison, evaporating its demonic power.

-I cannot touch that.

-That makes sense.

The solemn energy was in complete opposition to the energies that belonged to the yin, so Cheong-ryeong, a vengeful spirit, couldn't touch it.

So, Mok Gyeong-un firmly grasped the fur on Heum-won's back with both hands.

Fixing his posture and locking onto the target, Mok Gyeong-un soon stamped his feet.

-Pak!

Mok Gyeong-un's body sprang out like a spring and rushed towards Heum-won's right wing, which was flapping loosely, having lost its strength.

Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand to grab one of the wing feathers.

But at that moment, as Heum-won's body spun sideways, he missed it.

‘Ah?’

In the process, Mok Gyeong-un's body missed the wing and moved away from Heum-won.

-Swoosh!

-Oh no!

Thinking it wouldn't work, Cheong-ryeong tried to come out of the wooden puppet.

It was that exact instant.

Mok Gyeong-un twisted his body, rotated his figure, and soon kicked the air.

-Pang!

As if there were a wall in the air, he kicked it, and Mok Gyeong-un's body was repelled in the opposite direction, flying back towards Heum-won's right wing.

‘This fellow, Mortal?’

Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her inner astonishment.

The technique Mok Gyeong-un had just displayed was none other than the profound principle of the Air-Stepping Technique.

She didn't expect him to be able to perform such an amazing principle in a moment of crisis.

But what was important now was not that he had performed the profound principle of the Air-Stepping Technique.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had flown in the opposite direction by kicking the air like that, soon grabbed Heum-won's wing feather and plunged his other hand into the place where the solemn energy was spreading.

-Puk!

-Kee-keh-keh-keh-kek!

In pain, Heum-won screamed.

Mok Gyeong-un ignored it and thrust his hand even deeper into the flesh, finally finding the vajra.

Having found the vajra, Mok Gyeong-un grasped it to pull it out.

At that moment,

-Chiiiiik!

A burning pain was felt on the palm holding the vajra.

The solemn energy flowing from the vajra seemed to penetrate his palm and affect the death energy and demonic energy.

‘How annoying.’

At this, Mok Gyeong-un raised even stronger death energy to suppress the energy of the vajra.

And then, he pulled it out from Heum-won's wing flesh.

-Pak!

He hurriedly threw away the vajra he had pulled out.

Then, Heum-won, who had been writhing in pain and falling until just a moment ago, flapped its left wing vigorously, trying to maintain balance somehow.

-Flap flap!

Although the vajra had been pulled out, the right wing, which had already been a mess, couldn't be used, so it was impossible to take off with just one wing.

However,

-Flap flap!

Thanks to the frantic flapping, it was at least able to reduce the acceleration of the descent.

Having managed to lower its speed before hitting the ground, Heum-won barely landed.

“Bleh.”

As soon as it landed, Holy Fire Priestess and the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong vomited on the ground, and the others who had been holding onto the cart also collapsed on the ground with pale faces.

-Thud!

“Haa... haa...”

“We almost died for real.”

They had tried to ride Heum-won comfortably but ended up experiencing a proper hell.

But even though they had safely landed on the ground, it wasn't over yet.

The place they had landed was none other than,

-Rumble rumble!

‘Ah. We’re doomed.’

The middle of the Shaolin Temple.

Before they knew it, dozens of demon-subduing monks in monastic robes and warrior monks in orange robes holding staffs had surrounded them.

-Murmur murmur!

The monks who had encircled Heum-won soon discovered Mok Gyeong-un and his group and whispered with somewhat surprised eyes.

“What is this?”

“Who are they?”

Meanwhile, an old monk with white beard and an air of experience walked out from among the demon-subduing monks.

In his hand were three vajras, and the solemn energy flowing from his entire body was so tremendous that it encompassed the surroundings.

-Ooooh!

‘It was him.’

Mok Gyeong-un instantly realized that he was the one who had thrown the vajras at Heum-won’s wing.

The flowing energy itself was on a different level.

If compared to the Fangshi, this solemn energy, vast and wide like the ocean, possessed a capacity that far surpassed the realm of Sun-level diviner.

-It’s no ordinary Dharma power.

-Dharma power?

-Yes. I heard that while the diviners and Taoist priests cultivate spiritual power, among the Buddhist monks, there are those who cultivate Dharma power. It’s the first time even I have seen this energy, and it seems very troublesome.

-...You’re right.

The Dharma power exuded by the old monk and the demon-subduing monks made the Demonic Beast Heum-won shrink back and become extremely vigilant.

‘No.’

Mok Gyeong-un scanned the surroundings.

Not only their Dharma power but also the energy flowing from the temple itself was solemn, pure, and extremely clean.

Because of that, even the energy of the evil spirits and weak Imae Mangryang commonly seen in the surroundings could not be felt.

‘No wonder it’s called the sacred land of Buddhism.’

Mok Gyeong-un inwardly clicked his tongue with an annoyed look in his eyes.

Who would have thought that after barely escaping from the Imperial Palace, they would get caught up in a place like this?

Meanwhile, the old monk who had stepped forward clasped his hands together and spoke.

“Amitabha. Who are the patrons to be together with the bizarre creature causing harm...”

“Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion!”

Before the old monk could finish his words, someone stepped forward.

It was the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

The old monk, who had been examining his appearance, which was similar to the monks’ attire, including the broken prayer beads, soon frowned and said.

“Deok-mun? So it’s you, Deok-mun.”

Ja Geum-jeong’s Buddhist name during his time in Buddhism was Deok-mun.

The old monk, who hadn’t recognized him at first glance due to his somewhat rough appearance over time, couldn’t understand what was going on after recognizing him.

“Deok-mun, how are you with this bizarre creature?”

“It’s a misunderstanding, Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion. This bizarre creature is not harming people but has been tamed.”

“Tamed? What nonsense is that?”

At that moment, a middle-aged monk among the warrior monks walked out and spoke.

Recognizing him, Ja Geum-jeong clasped his hands together, bowed his head, and greeted him.

“Amitabha. Greetings to the Master of the Arhat Pavilion...”

“How dare an expelled disciple clasp his hands and greet us? Unclasp your hands.”

“...”

At the resolute words of the Master of the Arhat Pavilion, Ja Geum-jeong unclasped his hands with a bitter expression.

As he said, he was an expelled monk, so he had no right to clasp his hands and greet.

Meanwhile, the Master of the Arhat Pavilion pointed to Heum-won and asked.

“How did you tame that thing? It’s not a beast but a monster that captures and kills humans. But how...”

“It’s my spirit beast, Venerable.”

‘!?’

The Master of the Arhat Pavilion turned his head.

The one who had intervened was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

“Spirit beast?”

Not knowing what the term spirit beast meant, the Master of the Arhat Pavilion looked puzzled, and the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion said.

“Amitabha. Did you just say spirit beast, patron?”

-Ssk!

Mok Gyeong-un clasped his hands together in a salute and replied.

“Yes. Although it is a bizarre creature, it is a being I employ as my spirit beast. So it is under control and not dangerous, unlike what you see...”

“Gal (喝)!”

Before he could finish his words, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion let out a shout.

Then, pointing to Heum-won, he said.

“Isn’t a spirit beast a method used by the Fangshi to forcibly establish a connection and enslave bizarre creatures?”

At his words, interest glinted in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

He thought a monk practicing Buddhism wouldn't know much about sorcery, but it seemed that was not the case.

"That's right. But why did you shout like that?"

Looking puzzled, the old monk, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion, trembled his white eyebrows and spoke.

"Sorcery derived from Taoist techniques is a dangerous art that deviates from the laws and principles of nature, young patron. How could you have learned such an evil thing?"

"...Is sorcery evil?"

"As I said, patron. Sorcery is a method that deviates from principles. A spirit beast is also ultimately an act of forcibly establishing a connection and enslaving a being. This is an act that goes against the will of others. How can you say this is not evil?"

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un snorted and said.

"So what is it that you want to say?"

To this, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion pointed the vajra at Heum-won and replied.

"Amitabha. I say this for your sake, patron, so don't be displeased and take it to heart. Sorcery that goes against principles will surely bring harm to you, patron. So stop practicing sorcery any further and sever the forcibly established connection with the bizarre creature."

Chapter 295 – Shaolin Temple (2)

“Amitabha. I say this for your sake, patron, so don’t be displeased and take it to heart. Sorcery that goes against principles will surely bring harm to you, patron. So stop practicing sorcery any further and sever the forcibly established connection with the bizarre creature.”

The atmosphere turned strange at the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion’s coercive attitude.

Having already fallen into the middle of Shaolin, known as the holy land of the righteous path, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak were inwardly baffled as they were already being cautious.

Fortunately, they didn’t know yet that they were from the Heaven and Earth Society, but they seemed to have gained disapproval due to something bizarre.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“Sever the connection? If I do that, it’s the same as unleashing the reins on that bizarre creature, so what are you going to do? Will you kill it?”

“No matter how harmful the bizarre creature is, we monks and priests are practitioners of Buddhism. Unless it’s an unavoidable situation, we do not recklessly take lives.”

“Then will you release it?”

“How can we carelessly release a monster that captures and eats humans? We will confine it in the demon-subduing hall of the temple and subdue its demonic nature with scriptures.”

“What if the demonic nature cannot be subdued?”

“Even if the demonic nature cannot be subdued, we will have no choice but to open the killing precepts to prevent harm.”

“In conclusion, you’re saying you’ll confine it and then kill it?”

“Amitabha.”

The Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion quietly clasped his hands together.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un smacked his lips and said.

“What if I politely refuse the Venerable’s proposal?”

“Amitabha. patron... As a demon-subduing monk who must subjugate demons, I cannot let the bizarre creature go once it has entered the temple.”

The atmosphere suddenly turned heavy.

The surrounding demon-subduing monks and warrior monks seemed to have read the situation as they firmly grasped their vajras and staffs.

‘Damn it.’

‘This doesn’t look good.’

At this, Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates also began to take fighting stances.

As they took fighting stances, vigilance appeared in the eyes of the Master of the Arhat Pavilion.

‘Except for that old patron, each one of them is no ordinary person.’

As the master who oversaw the Arhat monks, one of the three major warrior monk groups of Shaolin, he discerned the martial prowess of the group with his excellent insight.

Meanwhile, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion spoke with his hands clasped together.

“Amitabha. I do not wish to fight with the patrons. I advise against sorcery and enslaving bizarre creatures as spirit beasts because they go against principles. If you agree to my proposal, I will let you leave unharmed.”

‘!?’

At the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion’s words, Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun, whose vigilance had heightened, glanced at each other.

They had been worrying about what would happen if their identities were exposed while fighting the warrior monks of the Shaolin Temple.

However, if they agreed not to practice sorcery and hand over only the Demonic Beast Heum-won, it wasn’t a bad proposal in the current situation.

At least it was better than being tied up in the middle of enemy territory.

So they cautiously looked at their master, Mok Gyeong-un.

“Hmm.”

Mok Gyeong-un let out a small groan as if contemplating and stroked his chin.

Seeing his appearance, they inwardly hoped that this time, Mok Gyeong-un would accept the proposal rather than displaying his characteristic unpredictable behavior.

It was a completely different situation from before.

This place was Shaolin, the holy land of the righteous path.

They were monks who practiced Buddhism, so although they were one of the Nine Great Sects, they did not interfere with martial arts or worldly affairs and rarely intervened unless it was a special case.

Nevertheless, no one disregarded the power of Shaolin.

The perception that they were the orthodox of martial arts in the Central Plains was firmly ingrained.

‘Young Master... clashing with Shaolin is an act of madness.’

‘This time, it would be better to just let it pass.’

It was at that moment.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un lowered his hand that had been stroking his chin and soon smiled and said.

“Saying that we can leave unharmed if we just accept the proposal is an enticing offer that’s hard to refuse.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the two let out sighs of relief.

Although he didn’t show it, Ma Ra-hyeon was also worried that a fight might break out, so he felt fortunate.

“Amitabha. Young patron, you have opened your eyes rightly and readily accepted my proposal, so truly...”

“I didn’t say I would accept it.”

“!?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's unexpected words, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion frowned.

As someone with a somewhat strong temperament, unlike a Buddhist disciple, he couldn't understand why his roundabout proposal was rejected.

-Mortal. You're not planning to reject the proposal, are you?

Cheong-ryeong also asked Mok Gyeong-un in a tone of incomprehension.

Since she was close by, Mok Gyeong-un might seem unpredictable, but apart from that, she knew that he greatly valued rational judgment.

The promise not to use sorcery could be brushed off as just a formality in this situation, and since he didn't intentionally make Heum-won his spirit beast, there was no problem in handing it over to them.

Of course, it had the advantage of being able to fly and had played an important role recently, but if it meant clashing with the Shaolin Temple right now, it was cold but rational to sacrifice Heum-won and move on.

-It's unlike you. The Demonic Beast is one thing, but why are you doing this when you can safely leave Shaolin by handing it over?

-Unlike me?

-Yes. Although you may seem a bit stubborn, it's foolish to refuse such a proposal when the Shaolin are monks who practice Buddhism, unlike other righteous factions, and won't make such a proposal out of hypocrisy. Accept it.

-I'm afraid that will be difficult.

-What?

-As you said, if I were alone, I would think it's rational, but to build a force, it doesn't seem like a particularly good choice.

‘!?’

What did this fellow just say?

For a moment, she doubted her ears.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un looked at the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion and spoke.

“Although it's a tempting offer to leave here unharmed according to the Venerable's proposal, I can't easily hand over my... no, such an expression seems a bit excessive. Let's just call them comrades. Anyway, I can't easily hand over my comrades.”

“Comrades?”

-Murmur murmur!

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the surrounding Arhat monks and demon-subduing monks stirred.

Although he said he had tamed it as a spirit beast, it was a bizarre creature and monster, not a human.

Did he just refer to that being as a comrade?

‘This fellow?’

On the other hand, interest glinted in Cheong-ryeong's eyes at Mok Gyeong-un's words.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un never believed in or trusted anyone.

Recently, he had begun to follow some of her advice, but in important moments, he still acted according to his own judgment.

But despite the significantly dangerous situation, Mok Gyeong-un referred to the Demonic Beast Heum-won as a comrade and refused to hand it over.

To him, the Demonic Beast Heum-won should have been just a tool, so it was truly unexpected.

This was,

‘Is it intentional? Or is he starting to change?’

If it was intentional, the effect seemed to be somewhat achieved.

At the moment he rejected the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion’s proposal, the expressions and gazes of the subordinates, who had been bewildered, turned strange at his words about not being able to hand over a comrade.

It was probably to confirm his inclusiveness as a leader.

By showing that he wouldn’t abandon even a tamed bizarre creature in a crisis situation, he gave them the trust that he wouldn’t let go of their hands no matter the circumstances.

At this, Cheong-ryeong inwardly clicked her tongue.

‘...Even if it’s calculated, you’re gradually acquiring the qualities of a leader.’

Despite showing outstanding talent in various aspects such as martial arts, sorcery, and pharmacology, she thought it would be difficult for him to dominate others or develop social skills due to his tendency to not trust anyone.

However, Mok Gyeong-un was starting to acquire the qualities of a leader faster than she had expected.

This could be considered a surprising change compared to her expectations.

At that moment, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion spoke with a fierce expression.

“Although you say you have subjugated it with a method that goes against principles, its essence is a bizarre creature that captured and harmed people. How can you call such a being a comrade and display such an aberration?”

“Isn’t that a matter of mindset?”

“A matter of mindset?”

“If harming people is the problem, isn’t it actually people who are more problematic?”

“What?”

To the questioning Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with the corners of his mouth raised.

“Are there more instances of people being killed by beasts or bizarre creatures? Or are there more instances of people being killed by other people?”

“...”

At that question, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion’s mouth closed.

To deny this, it was a fact that people were killed more by the hands of other people.

It was an undeniable truth.

Theft, robbery, conflicts in the martial arts world, and on a larger scale, war.

All these things made people commit murder against other people.

When Mok Gyeong-un pointed this out, even the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion, who was extremely strong-willed, found it difficult to refute.

At that moment, the Master of the Arhat Pavilion, who had been listening quietly, stepped forward.

“Amitabha. patron, your words certainly have a point. It is true that what harms people the most is indeed people. However, even so, it is not in accordance with principles to equate this with bizarre creatures.”

“What’s not in accordance with principles?”

“Beasts or bizarre creatures only possess simple desires, but humans are beings that experience the Five Desires and Seven Emotions.”

“You’re taking a difficult approach, Venerable.”

“I’m not trying to preach Buddhism to you, patron. The Five Desires and Seven Emotions refer to five types of desires and seven types of emotions. The Buddha said these are the beginning of all suffering, and those who practice Buddhism strive to overcome them and maintain the Middle Way. Even if they are not monks who practice Buddhism, humans have the basic will to control and overcome these Five Desires and Seven Emotions.”

“So?”

“However, unlike humans, bizarre creatures and beasts are not complex and live solely based on simple desires. The simpler the desires, the more difficult it is to control them. Moreover, how can you compare beings that prey on living humans to humans?”

“So, in conclusion, are you saying they are incomparable?”

“That’s right, patron. Humans are imperfect and complex beings that simultaneously possess yin and yang energy, so they have the quality to control themselves. However, bizarre creatures are inherently yin beings, so they are not like that. Comparing them with the same logic as you, patron, is no different from forcing it.”

“Ah, I see.”

“I understand your reluctance to hand over the bizarre creature, but if you lose control over it, countless people will lose their lives, patron. We cannot simply stand by and watch, so we are asking you to hand over the bizarre creature.”

“I see. But come to think of it, I haven’t heard an apology even once yet.”

“Apology?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s abrupt words, the Master of the Arhat Pavilion tilted his head.

“Patron, what are you saying?”

“I understand your concern about the bizarre creature being dangerous, but we didn’t cause any harm to the Venerables of the Shaolin Temple, and we were just flying in the sky on the bizarre creature, but you suddenly attacked and almost killed us, didn’t you?”

“That, patron...”

“Are you trying to play dumb? Didn’t you say just a moment ago? That monks who practice Buddhism do not recklessly take lives, even if it’s a tiny creature?”

“Amitabha. That’s true, but...”

“Fortunately, we were lucky to survive, but we all almost fell from that high place and died. If that had happened, from the Elder to the demon-subduing monks here, you all would have gone against the Buddha’s teachings and committed the sin of killing, yet there’s not a single word of apology.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the demon-subduing monks who were surrounding them with vajras in hand flinched involuntarily, as if momentarily flustered.

At this, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion spoke as if in a predicament.

“Patron... Although we monks and demon-subduing monks have mastered Dharma techniques, we haven’t mastered martial arts, so we didn’t realize that you were riding on the bizarre creature...”

“Hmm. Are you going to say you didn’t know? Even after confirming that we fell like this? Or is it because we were lucky to survive, so that’s the end of it?”

“No, patron. I didn’t mean it that way...”

“You see that old lady over there, right?”

When Mok Gyeong-un called her, Holy Fire Priestess, who had been lying down as the aftereffects of falling from a high place hadn’t subsided yet, raised her head with a pale face, not understanding the situation.

“She’s an ordinary person who hasn’t even mastered martial arts, so she’s still suffering like that. You’re quite irresponsible.”

“Oh my.”

At this, the Master of the Arhat Pavilion couldn't hide his predicament.

He had already noticed from the beginning that the Holy Fire Priestess was an ordinary old woman who hadn't mastered martial arts.

However, as Mok Gyeong-un said, even if it was an act done with good intentions to suppress evil, it was certainly true that they had almost killed ordinary civilians and them.

‘Anyway, you're quite good at twisting words, Mortal.’

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue at the sight of the perplexed monks.

In a way, it was the only weakness of the Shaolin monks.

They were monks who practiced Buddhism before being martial artists, so they were bound by their own rules and Buddhist teachings.

Mok Gyeong-un had taken advantage of the gap where they were bound by their rules.

“Amitabha. patron, you are right. First, I apologize for the mistake we made. None of this was intentional.”

“Not intentional? Does that mean it's okay to kill even by mistake if it's not intentional?”

“Oh my. patron, how can you distort my words like that...”

“I can't help but interpret it that way.”

“There seems to be a misunderstanding. If we had known that you were riding on that bizarre creature, we would not have rashly attacked from the beginning.”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with glinting eyes.

“What did you just say?”

“...I said if we had known that you were riding on that bizarre creature, we would not have attacked.”

“You definitely said that, right?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“You said if you had known we were there, you wouldn’t have attacked because it was dangerous in the first place, right?”

“...That’s right.”

“Then, we wouldn’t have fallen into the middle of the Shaolin Temple like this and engaged in a debate with the Elder about handing over the bizarre creature or killing it, and the Venerables wouldn’t have almost committed the sin of killing, right?”

“...”

“In the end, it’s no different from creating a situation that wouldn’t have occurred in the first place. Then, whose fault is it?”

“...”

Eventually, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion was at a loss for words, like a mute who had eaten honey, unable to say anything.

This was not only him but also the Master of the Arhat Pavilion.

No matter how much they wanted to refute, there was no room to find fault in Mok Gyeong-un's argument.

‘Ha?’

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had been watching this, let out a hollow laugh.

He had been born with the Spiritual Eye open, so he had drowned his suffering in alcohol.

However, the Precepts Hall did not understand his suffering and instead expelled him on the grounds of violating the rules.

When he left, he still thought he was lacking in Shaolin, but after seeing this debate, the monks who were trapped in the framework of rules looked so foolish to him.

It was at that moment.

“Hohohoho. What a prodigy. What a prodigy.”

At the voice that came with laughter, everyone's gaze turned towards that direction.

-Creak!

At that moment, the door of the hall on the south side of the Arhat Pavilion square where they were opened, and three old monks in red kasayas appeared.

The moment he saw them, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong clasped his hands together and bowed his head.

His eyes were red as he bowed his head.

‘Ah, Master.’

That was because among the old monks was his master, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon.

However, that wasn’t all.

The Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok and the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Master Mu-seong, who had driven him out of Shaolin, were also present.

‘It’s become even more troublesome.’

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the three old monks with an annoyed expression.

The energy they exuded was equally profound, and all three of them were tremendous masters who had crossed the wall.

Chapter 296 – Shaolin Temple (3)

‘...Definitely them.’

Mong Mu-yak swallowed his dry saliva with trembling eyes.

Belonging to the leader’s direct information department, Mong Mu-yak was well aware of a lot of information within and outside the Heaven and Earth Society.

As such, he could immediately recognize who the three old monks who appeared in the square were.

‘The Three Monks of Shaolin!’

They were undoubtedly the famous Three Monks of Shaolin.

Unlike other sects, the masters of Shaolin Temple didn’t cling to the secular world or engage in martial arts activities, so there were few renowned masters.

However, with a single confrontation, Shaolin once again demonstrated its prestige after a long time.

It was because of a great villain named Gu Myeol-geop, otherwise known as ‘Nine Calamities of Destruction’ who appeared fifteen years ago.

Gu Myeol-geop’s martial prowess was so outstanding that he was referred to as a potential Six Heavens of the next generation.

But then, one day, he suddenly went mad and indiscriminately killed people.

The reason was unknown, but the crazed Gu Myeol-geop slaughtered every living thing he saw, and numerous masters of the righteous factions tried to suppress him to stop this but failed.

As a result, even Shaolin, which rarely intervened in the affairs of the secular world, eventually had to step in.

‘A joint attack technique that made even a master comparable to the Six Heavens kneel.’

Shaolin, famous for its many unique techniques, was also skilled in joint attacks like the Arhat Formation, and these three, who were called the supreme masters of Shaolin at the time, defeated Gu Myeol-geop in just over a hundred breaths with an exquisite joint attack technique.

It is said that the masters who witnessed this at the time were so stunned that it was a tremendous confrontation.

On this occasion, martial artists referred to these three old monks as the Three Monks of Shaolin.

‘Misfortune never comes singly.’

Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue.

The Master of the Arhat Pavilion and the surrounding warrior monks were already overwhelming enough.

But now, even the Three Grand Monks of Shaolin, known as the supreme masters of Shaolin, had appeared, so it could be said to be the worst situation.

At this, Mong Mu-yak approached closely and spoke in a low voice.

“My lord. They are the ones called the Three Grand Monks of Shaolin, the supreme masters and elders of Shaolin Temple.”

“The supreme masters and elders of Shaolin Temple. I see.”

“...My lord. You must avoid a conflict with the Three Grand Monks of Shaolin.”

Mong Mu-yak warned with a concerned voice.

At that moment, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who had a benevolent appearance and was walking through the hall among the three old monks, opened his mouth in a warm voice.

“Amitabha. It’s been a long time, Deok-mun.”

“M-Master!”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong couldn’t hide his emotions when his master recognized him right away.

Outside, he was called one of the Three Madmen and was known as a madman, but he followed his master like his own parents.

However, this long-awaited reunion was shattered by the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok.

“Amitabha. Sutra Pavilion Master. That patron is no longer a person of Buddhism, so why are you calling him by his Buddhist name when he was already excommunicated?”

At his words, Ja Geum-jeong glared at the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok with disappointed eyes.

Although he had been expelled, he was once a disciple of Shaolin.

But drawing the line so coldly like this, he couldn’t help but feel resentful.

The Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon also seemed displeased with this, and he tried to say something to the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok but soon changed the topic.

“Amitabha. Who is the patron who sharply rebuked us just now?”

At his question, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion and the Master of the Arhat Pavilion naturally pointed to Mok Gyeong-un with their eyes.

Then, the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, who was next to Gong-jeon, clasped his hands together and spoke with a frown.

“Amitabha. How can you describe this as a rebuke, Sutra Pavilion Master?”

At this, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon smiled and replied.

“He spoke the truth, so of course it can be called a rebuke. Where there is a cause, there is an effect, and where there is no cause, there is no effect. That young patron pointed this out, so how can we deny it? Isn’t that right, Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion?”

“Amitabha.”

At those words, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion clasped his hands together, unable to hide his predicament.

If Gong-jeon, one of the three old monks with the highest seniority in Shaolin, spoke like that, it would be acknowledging that all of this was his own fault.

Even if it was a mistake that had occurred.

However, it seemed that not all three of them shared the same opinion.

“Oh my. How can you attribute this to the fault of the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion? He did what he had to do as the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion. Who would have known that people were riding on that bizarre creature, and that too in the high sky?”

At the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s defense, the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion nodded his head.

That was what he wanted to say.

If they told him to take responsibility or apologize for what had happened, he could do so as much as needed.

However, when a bizarre creature was passing right above Shaolin, it would be absurd to just let it go, and how was he supposed to know that people were riding on it?

“Precepts Hall Master. That’s a dangerous remark. It could be interpreted as saying that anything is acceptable if done unknowingly.”

“Amitabha. Don’t distort my words too much. I was merely trying to say that the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion did not do it intentionally. I hope the patrons will forgive him with a generous heart.”

With that, the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok clasped his hands together and bowed his head to Mok Gyeong-un and his group.

Although he seemed to be bowing his head and apologizing, the group couldn’t help but click their tongues inwardly at his attitude that lacked any sincerity.

Meanwhile, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon spoke.

“Even if one practices Buddhism, the way and enlightenment that each person accepts are different, so patrons, please don’t be too upset. Anyway, as this patron said, this incident is not without responsibility on the part of our temple...”

“Sutra Pavilion Master. You’re not planning to let that bizarre creature out, are you?”

The Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok interrupted his words.

“Since the patrons have suffered a great mishap due to our temple’s mistake, shouldn’t we let it out accordingly?”

“I have already apologized for that part and am willing to make other compensations if desired. However, letting the bizarre creature out is a separate issue.”

“Oh my. How can you say such a thing?”

“Are you going to violate the rules of our temple, Sutra Pavilion Master? A monster that brings harm to humans has entered our temple, yet you’re saying you’ll just let it go.”

“Then what do you intend to do?”

“We should capture it, of course. What are the demon-subduing monks doing? Can’t you subdue that bizarre creature right now?”

At the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s exclamation, the demon-subduing monks once again grasped their vajras and prepared to chant the demon-subduing mantra.

Then, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon shouted.

“Demon-subduing monks, stop this at once. This is the responsibility of our temple, so it is not a matter to be resolved through rules.”

-Murmur murmur!

The demon-subduing monks were at a loss, confused by the different orders.

The Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion was the same.

He also had a strong temperament, so he shared the same opinion as the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, but since they had clearly made a mistake, he found it difficult to subdue the bizarre creature.

“Oh my. A monster that harms and devours people is right in front of our eyes, yet you hesitate. Do you truly have the qualifications to be demon-subduing monks? This won’t do.”

-Ssk!

As soon as those words ended, the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok reached out his hand.

-Woong!

“Huh?”

Then, due to his profound true energy, the vajras in the hands of three demon-subduing monks were pulled out,

-Swish swish swish!

And they flew towards the cowering Demonic Beast Heum-won.

But at that moment, a surprising thing happened.

As Mok Gyeong-un grasped a finger strike and raised his hand, the Evil Commandment Sword at his waist came out of its scabbard on its own and flew as if it were alive,

-Cha cha chaeng!

It deflected the three flying vajras at an exquisite moment.

The Evil Commandment Sword that had deflected them soon returned to Mok Gyeong-un’s scabbard when he made a gesture of pulling the finger strike.

-Chak!

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

The audience stirred.

Anyone who had mastered martial arts couldn’t mistake it.

‘Sword Control Technique?’

It was none other than the profound principle of the Sword Control Technique.

‘How can this be?’

‘My lord unleashed the Sword Control Technique?’

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates also couldn’t hide their astonishment.

This profound principle of manipulating a sword with Qi was in a different realm from the Void Hand Interception that the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok had used by simply launching the vajras with true energy.

It was not only crossing the wall but also reaching mastery with the sword, and it required an understanding of Qi at least at the pinnacle-stage of the Transformation Realm to be possible.

-What?

Cheong-ryeong also couldn’t hide her astonishment.

-Mortal, when the hell did you master the Sword Control Technique?

-After confronting the Heaven and Earth Society Leader and the person called the Southern Pacification Commissioner, I roughly understood how to handle the flow of Qi.

-!?

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Cheong-ryeong was inwardly dumbfounded.

She was well aware of his martial talent and his insight into the flow of Qi, but she didn't expect him to even master the profound principle of the Sword Control Technique.

And that too after only experiencing it twice.

It was an absurd talent that was hard to get used to no matter how many times she experienced it.

It was at that moment.

"The Sword Control Technique... Young patron, you surprise this old monk. I haven't directly seen many masters, but among the contemporary masters, I've never heard of anyone unleashing the Sword Control Technique at that age."

Currently, Mok Gyeong-un was still wearing the human skin mask.

However, the face of the human skin mask also appeared to be only in the mid-twenties, so even the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok was astonished.

"I wish the young patron would use such power for the right cause, but it's truly regrettable to use it for a mere man-eating monster. Amitabha."

-Gooooo!

With those words, the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok revealed his pure yet profound energy.

As befitting martial arts of Buddhism, it wasn't overbearing, but the energy was so vast that it naturally inspired awe.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said.

"I understand that sorcery is not viewed favorably in Shaolin, but that bizarre creature hasn't eaten any humans since becoming my spirit beast. Yet you still insist on taking action?"

"Even if it hasn't done so yet, if that monster escapes from your control, there will surely be trouble."

"You're worrying about something that hasn't even happened yet."

"How can we stand by and watch when harm is right in front of our eyes? For the sake of the young patron and for the future, it seems that monster must be eliminated."

"If the Elder insists on doing so, I have no choice either."

At this, Mok Gyeong-un also tried to take a fighting stance.

Although Mong Mu-yak had hoped that he wouldn't clash with the Three Monks of Shaolin, now that things had turned out this way, there was no other choice, so he took a fighting stance while exchanging glances with Seop Chun and Ma Ra-hyeon.

"Master!"

As the atmosphere was about to lead to a fight, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong called out to his master, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, in an earnest voice.

Then, Gong-jeon also seemed to think it wouldn't work and tried to step in.

But it was at that very moment.

-Clap!

“Amitabha.”

The sound of solemnly chanting a sutra along with the clapping of hands.

As this sound spread in all directions, everyone in the square who had been raising their energy stopped and looked at someone.

It was the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong, the only one among the Three Grand Monks of Shaolin who had not intervened.

‘Tremendous inner energy.’

‘That old monk has the most profound inner energy among the three.’

Thanks to the energy infused in Museong’s voice, Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates realized that Museong had the most profound internal energy among the Three Monks of Shaolin.

With him intervening, they couldn’t help but feel tense, but Museong spoke in a gentle voice, unlike before.

“patrons and the two Pavilion Masters, could you listen to this old monk’s words for a moment?”

As he stepped in, the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, who had been somewhat stubborn, lowered his momentum and replied in a cautious manner.

“Please speak, Pavilion Master.”

That was understandable because among the three people called the Three Monks of Shaolin, the one with the highest seniority was none other than Museong, who had the character ‘Mu’ (pacify/comfort) in his Buddhist name.

Gong-jeon also respected Museong, so he clasped his hands together and said.

“Amitabha. Do you have any insights, Pavilion Master?”

To this question, Museong looked intently at Mok Gyeong-un.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un also clasped his hands together in a salute and politely said.

“Please speak, Pavilion Master.”

Then, Museong bowed his head once to show respect and opened his mouth.

“Thank you for lending your ears to this incompetent monk’s words. While quietly observing, I came to a conclusion about what the problem is.”

“And what is that?”

“From Shaolin’s perspective, we cannot simply let demons pass by due to our rules.”

As soon as his words ended, the corners of the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s mouth slightly rose.

It seemed that the one with high seniority was taking his side.

However, his words were not finished yet.

“But it is also true that the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion’s mistake caused trouble for the patrons. Therefore, even though our temple has rules, it doesn’t seem right to arbitrarily enforce them.”

“Pavilion Master! You’re not suggesting we just let that monster go, are you?”

Dae-deok interjected with a frown, unable to accept it.

Then, Museong clasped his hands together and said.

“Amitabha. Pavilion Master... Even a butcher can become a Buddha if he puts down the knife in his hand.”

“Pavilion Master, that’s...”

“How can beasts and monsters not have the qualifications to become Buddhas? All living beings have the qualifications to become Buddhas.”

“...”

At his words, Dae-deok closed his mouth.

It wasn’t very good to argue about something in front of someone who had higher seniority and deeper faith than himself.

So if he couldn’t properly refute, he couldn’t recklessly open his mouth.

Meanwhile, Museong looked at Mok Gyeong-un and said.

“This is what this poor monk thinks, but what does the patron think?”

Although he felt puzzled by the appearance of readily taking their side, accepting his mediation was the way to avoid fighting with Shaolin at the moment, so Mok Gyeong-un responded positively.

“I agree with the Elder’s words.”

“Hohoho. That’s good. Then, I would like the patron to demonstrate proof.”

“Proof? What do you mean by that?”

“The Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion here and the Precepts Hall Master are people who strictly follow the rules, so in order to convince them, it would be good if the patron could show that it is possible to control the demonic nature, even if it is called a monster. What do you think?”

‘!?’

[What do you want me to show and how?]

[It’s not that difficult. Among the thirty-six caves of our temple, there is a demon-subduing hall where a vicious monster is confined.]

[A vicious monster?]

[That’s right. That monster is so vicious that the demon-subduing monks tried to subdue its demonic nature by chanting the demon-subduing mantra for ninety-nine days, but there has been no progress yet. So, I would like the patron to show these two Pavilion Masters that you can control the demonic nature. Is it possible?]

This was the proposal of the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong.

In order to convince the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion and the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, he wanted Mok Gyeong-un to show that he could control the demonic nature of a vicious monster, in other words, a bizarre creature.

If he could demonstrate this, he said it would be fine to take the Demonic Beast Heum-won and leave Shaolin Temple.

‘Hmm.’

Since he couldn’t recklessly fight against Shaolin Temple, known as the center of righteous martial arts, Mok Gyeong-un had no choice but to accept this.

However, there was one problem.

Currently, Mok Gyeong-un’s spirit beast quota was full, so he couldn’t increase it.

Therefore, he might not be able to show the suppression of demonic nature by making a bizarre creature his spirit beast as Museong had proposed.

‘What should I do?’

While Mok Gyeong-un was pondering like that, he was being guided by Gong-jeon.

After passing a few halls, a half-building made of numerous rock walls appeared towards the rear garden of Shaolin Temple.

There were roughly thirty-six caves.

The names of the caves were written on the hall that served as the entrance to the half-building.

As he was walking along the square to go towards the caves, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly stopped halfway.

There, a red stele was erected, and in front of it, a single footprint was deeply engraved.

‘What is this?’

The footprint looked like a foot stamping mark.

But why did they erect a red-painted stele like this in front of the footprint?

Moreover, the following phrase was engraved on the stele:

[Remember.]

As Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head while looking at this, Gong-jeon, who had been guiding him, soon spoke.

“Amitabha. That is a stele erected to awaken Shaolin’s vigilance.”

“Vigilance?”

“That’s right. There was an incident where the Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation, once called perfect, collapsed with just a single foot stamping of a supreme master.”

“A foot stamping, you say? Could it be?”

“Yes, that footprint is the trace from that time.”

‘!!!!!!!’

Chapter 297 – Shaolin Temple (4)

“Yes, that footprint is the trace from that time.”

At the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon’s words, interest glinted in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

Although he didn’t know exactly what the Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation was, he could understand from the name itself that it was a formation composed of a hundred and eight people.

But to say that a joint attack formation deployed by a hundred and eight people was shattered with just a single foot stamping?

It was quite an interesting story.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong’s voice echoed in his mind.

-...It’s absurd.

-What?

-The Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation is not a simple formation. It is the Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation, known as the most perfect among all joint formations.

-So?

-Not so, but it’s already remarkable that a single supreme master broke it, but to say that he did it with just a single foot stamping...

She couldn’t finish her words.

The masters who deploy the Arhat Formation are top-notch masters from first-rate to the peak.

A formation is a technique that doubles in strength just by assembling the array.

But if one could break that tremendous multiplication achieved by a hundred and eight people with a single foot stamping, it meant that their level was unimaginable.

-Truly the Steps of Domination.

Steps of Domination.

There is a saying that with a single footstep, or with a single stride, one can dominate everything.

As she said, if that was possible with a single footstep, it was enough to call it by such a title.

So, Mok Gyeong-un approached the footprint and asked.

“If a stele was erected to the extent of awakening Shaolin’s vigilance, the owner of this footprint must be an outsider, not from Shaolin, right?”

“Amitabha. That’s correct.”

The monks of Shaolin Temple called this footprint a humiliation.

However, the reason they left it was to put down their pride as the orthodox of martial arts in the Central Plains, reflect on themselves, and maintain vigilance.

‘Just a single foot stamping...’

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un placed his own sole against the footprint with eyes full of curiosity and asked.

“Does the Elder know who this person is?”

“...I do know, but it is a taboo to speak of it, so I cannot reveal it. Please understand.”

“I understand.”

At Gong-jeon’s words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled.

Somehow, it seemed understandable.

Even Cheong-ryeong couldn’t help but be amazed, so a great formation that was shattered with just a single foot stamping, even if it was left for the sake of vigilance, would be difficult to easily reveal.

“Then shall we go again?”

“Yes, ah! Can I just ask if the person who left this is one of the Six Heavens or someone like that?”

“...It’s a very old incident. It happened hundreds of years ago. So you don’t need to have doubts, patron.”

“I apologize. I tend to be curious.”

-Tap!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un placed his sole against the footprint.

It was an action done without much thought.

In fact, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon was familiar with people like this, so he lightly smiled as if he was used to it.

But it was at that very moment.

-Gasp!

The moment he placed his sole, Mok Gyeong-un's vision turned black.

As his entire vision turned black and he couldn't see anything with his physical eyes, Mok Gyeong-un could instinctively tell that a mental image had unfolded.

‘What is this?’

Mok Gyeong-un frowned at the sudden bizarre phenomenon.

Then, without intending to, the demonic power of the Third Eye arose on its own, and along with it, a strange scene unfolded before his eyes.

It was this very place.

It felt slightly different, but a hundred and eight warrior monks holding staffs were deploying a formation and surrounding someone.

That someone was a person with a demon mask and striking blood-red hair.

‘Blood-red hair?’

It seemed familiar.

The moment he saw that hair, the Six Offices Commander So Yerin came to mind.

At that moment, an old monk shouted at the warrior monks surrounding the person.

[Go and bring an incense that lasts for a moment.]

[Yes, Head Monk.]

At this, a few warrior monks clasped their hands together and tried to run.

[There's no need for that.]

With those words, the unidentified person wearing the demon mask lightly stamped his foot while holding his hands behind his back.

-Thud!

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

At that moment, the hundred and eight Arhat monks who were aiming their staffs simultaneously rolled their eyes back and collapsed to the ground.

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

It was an extremely surprising incident.

Everyone must have been shocked because the hall instantly turned silent.

However, unlike them, in Mok Gyeong-un's right pupil, numerous repetitive flows of energy spreading in all directions were visible as he watched this.

‘This is?’

This was not ordinary energy but Innate True Energy, and it created a tremendous suggestion by generating repetitive flows.

This flow of energy was similar to the suggestion shown by Dam Baek-ha the Sixth Blood Saint, but it had reached an even higher level.

It was something that was difficult to even imitate without the formula to control this flow of energy.

-Gasp!

At that moment, the thirty scattered words of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques in Mok Gyeong-un's mind began to combine.

The formula of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, which had been stagnant for a long time, was taking shape.

‘Extreme supremacy, endless, extreme, nothingness, nothingness, nothingness... the Suppressing technique.’

As the formula took shape, it remained as a single form in his mind.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, who had unexpectedly obtained another technique of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, turned strange.

‘Ah...’

If he hadn't seen this scene in the mental image, he would never have thought of this formula of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques.

This was because it was a formula that was difficult to even grasp a sense of.

At that moment, voices rang in Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-Mortal?

“Patron?”

Those were the voices of Cheong-ryeong and the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon.

The moment he recognized their voices, the scene before his eyes disappeared, and he soon emerged from the mental image.

Returning to reality, Mok Gyeong-un let out a small exclamation.

“Ah...”

-Mortal, what's wrong with you?

“Patron, are you alright?”

At their questions, Mok Gyeong-un lightly waved his hand as if he was fine.

However, contrary to what he said, the demonic power of the Third Eye was still open in his right eye, so in Mok Gyeong-un's vision, the texture of the Innate True Energy faintly remained at the center of the footprint.

‘Was it because of this?’

This texture had led Mok Gyeong-un into the mental image by becoming a formula.

Mok Gyeong-un, whose mental image was much deeper than others, could read the will remaining in the formula.

But coincidentally, the energy still faintly remained centered around the sole, so he could fall into the mental image.

‘Who is it?’

The man with blood-red hair wearing a demon mask.

Surely, that man must be the one who left this footprint that the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon mentioned.

But he clearly said it happened hundreds of years ago, so if the remnants of that energy still remained to this extent, it was immeasurable how incredible it was.

‘...It seems the level of the Old Martial Arts World was indeed higher than the current martial arts world.’

Clicking his tongue, Mok Gyeong-un soon removed his sole from the footprint.

Then, he pointed towards the caves with his hand and said.

“I’m fine, so let’s go.”

“Amitabha. I understand.”

The Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who had been worried about Mok Gyeong-un's dazed and staggering appearance, soon clasped his hands together and started guiding again.

At the same time, in the square of the Arhat Pavilion.

There, Seop Chun, Mong Mu-yak, Ja Geum-jeong, Ma Ra-hyeon, and Holy Fire Priestess were waiting with a somewhat anxious look.

Originally, they had also intended to follow Mok Gyeong-un to the demon-subduing hall.

However, due to the dissuasion of the Master of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion, they had to stay here.

[There isn't just one monster inside the demon-subduing hall. If many people who haven't mastered Dharma techniques enter besides the demon-subduing monks, it will stimulate them. So, patrons, please wait for a moment.]

So, having sent only Mok Gyeong-un, they couldn't help but be concerned.

If Mok Gyeong-un successfully controlled that so-called monster, they would be able to leave Shaolin, but if not, things would get even more complicated.

In fact, if they had just given up on this bizarre bird, they could have left safely, so they felt a bit of regret for making things complicated.

However, they found it difficult to express dissatisfaction with him.

That was because their trust in him had deepened after seeing Mok Gyeong-un not abandoning even a mere bizarre creature.

‘We have no choice but to trust our lord now.’

They just hoped that their lord would succeed.

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong was looking at someone with dissatisfaction.

It was the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok.

He always emphasized rules and was particularly stubborn even among the elders of Shaolin.

He had never bent his will even once.

‘Damn baldhead.’

He was always irritated because it seemed like he was blocking his path.

Then, his eyes met with Dae-deok’s, and perhaps because he was in an expelled position unlike before, Ja Geum-jeong glared at him intently.

‘Tsk tsk.’

At Ja Geum-jeong’s attitude, Dae-deok clicked his tongue inwardly.

Although he had expelled him, he was once a respected elder of the temple, but seeing him glare as if he would kill him, it seemed that expelling him early was the right choice.

If it weren’t for Gong-jeon constantly intervening, saying something about his Boundless Talent or whatever, he would have immediately caught him and even destroyed his danjeon to take away his martial arts.

‘Hmm.’

By the way, such an opportunity was rare.

He had continued to leave him alone because he had mastered the Boundless Talent that no one in Shaolin could restore.

But now that he had come to Shaolin on his own feet, it seemed that he had to make him reveal the formula of the Boundless Talent under some pretext.

If that arrogant patron who mastered sorcery failed to control the monster, there would be plenty of opportunities.

Since he was a patron who would go through such trouble to protect a mere monster, he would create a justification to subdue him if slightly provoked.

While he was sorting out his own schemes like that,

At that moment, a monk belonging to the Precepts Hall entered the Arhat Pavilion.

“Amitabha. Pavilion Master.”

“What is it?”

At this, the monk quietly whispered something in the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s ear.

After hearing this, Dae-deok quietly glanced at Mok Gyeong-un’s group waiting in the middle of the square and the Demonic Beast Heum-won.

“Ho. I see.”

Soon, the corners of Dae-deok’s mouth rose faintly.

While passing the entrance of the cave halls in the form of several half-buildings, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon spoke in front of the Repentance Restriction Cave.

“But honestly, I was surprised, patron.”

“...”

“Although I am a monk who practices Buddhism, this is the first time I’ve seen someone as young as you with such profound cultivation as a martial artist.”

At his sincere praise, Mok Gyeong-un soon expressed his gratitude.

“You flatter me.”

“If it’s not rude, may I ask your age, patron?”

“Seventeen... No, as of yesterday, I’m eighteen.”

He had completely forgotten, but come to think of it, yesterday was his birthday.

He wasn’t sure if it was really the day he was born, but it was the day his grandfather always celebrated.

“What?”

At that moment, Gong-jeon asked back in puzzlement.

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un instantly realized his mistake.

While heading to the demon-subduing hall, he had been devising contingency plans in his mind in case he couldn’t make the bizarre creature his spirit beast or failed to control it.

So he had absentmindedly answered his age, but he was currently wearing a human skin mask.

The face of the human skin mask appeared to be in the mid-twenties, so answering like this would be considered strange.

However, fortunately,

“Hohoho. Amitabha. I apologize. It seems my Buddhist cultivation is still lacking. This is also a kind of prejudice. I thought you were older than that because your cultivation is so profound.”

“Ah... Yes.”

Rather than the facial features and age not matching, he was more interested in something else.

Perhaps because he considered it remarkable that Mok Gyeong-un had reached this level at such a young age, Gong-jeon was constantly exclaiming in admiration.

“Oh my. A prodigy indeed. A prodigy.”

He genuinely considered Mok Gyeong-un’s martial talent to be extraordinary.

So, just before reaching the demon-subduing hall, he asked.

“As a monk who has left the secular world, it is not right to show interest in worldly affairs, but I would like to know the name of the patron who will surely gain even greater prestige in the future. Could you please let this poor monk know?”

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un pondered for a moment.

He had been hiding his real name from the beginning, and since it hadn't been long since he left the imperial capital Kaifeng, even if Gong-jeon was favorable to him, it was ambiguous to reveal the name he used in the Heaven and Earth Society.

So, he was about to casually say any name as an alias, but soon he thought of something.

[I was thinking of calling you Jeong, but that doesn't suit you either.]

At this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said.

“It's Cheonma... Cheonma (Heavenly Demon).”

Chapter 298 – Diabolic Beast (1)

“It's Cheonma... Cheonma (Heavenly Demon).”

‘!?’

As soon as Mok Gyeong-un finished speaking, the kind smile on the Grand Monk Gong-jeon's face froze.

“Cheon... ma? Oh my.”

Grand Monk Gong-jeon reacted to the word ‘ma’, meaning demon, that came after the name.

Out of all the possible names, why choose to attach the word ‘ma’, which is undoubtedly ominous?

If you interpret the name literally, it means ‘the demon of heaven’.

This made him strangely nervous, but there was no rule stating that the word ‘ma’ couldn’t be included in a name, and there was no reason to view it negatively based on this alone.

‘There must be a reason for the patron choosing such a name.’

With that thought, Grand Monk Gong-jeon relaxed his expression and spoke.

“Hohoho. Amitabha. Cheon-ma... What a truly extraordinary name. In Buddhism, prestige and fame are said to be mere dust, but I sincerely hope that the patron’s prestige will last for a hundred, even a thousand years.”

“Thank you for your kind words. I hope it will be as you say, Venerable Monk. My grandfather said something similar.”

“Something similar?”

“Yes. He said there are two ways for a person to live forever.”

“Live forever? Oh? And what were those ways?”

“He said the first is to leave descendants and continue the bloodline for generations, and the second is to leave a name that lives on in people’s memories.”

“Hohoho. Those are wise words indeed. That is truly the only way to live forever. What else could be eternal? The patron’s grandfather is truly a man of great wisdom.”

Upon hearing those words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled wordlessly.

As they conversed, they finally reached the entrance of the Demon-subduing Cave.

The Demon-subduing Cave was located right next to the Wall Contemplation Cave.

In front of it, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master, who had gone ahead saying he had preparations to make, was waiting.

“Amitabha. Have you arrived?”

“Amitabha. Are the preparations complete, Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master?”

“Yes. I have already instructed the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monks guarding the cave that the patron will enter, in case of any eventuality. This humble monk will also accompany you, so there is no need to worry.”

“Then, if there are any precautions the patron should be aware of, could you please inform him?”

“Yes, I understand.”

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master looked at Mok Gyeong-un, then pointed to the Demon-subduing Cave with his hand and spoke.

“Patron, once you enter the cave, you will see several blocked cave entrances. Although those entrances are blocked, there are Demon-Subduing Pavilion monks chanting the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra in front of them, so please do not disturb them.”

“In other words, I should just pass by them.”

“That is correct.”

“The cave the patron will enter is located at the very back. Inside, there is an extremely ferocious demon. That demon was captured from Mount Shaoxian, north of Mount Daeham. Its strength is immense, and its demonic power is also formidable. Even the Arhat monks had to be mobilized, and it was only barely subdued using the Green Jade Buddha Seal and thirty-six powerful demon-suppressing treasures.”

“It seems like it was quite a struggle to capture it.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, one of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master’s eyebrows rose.

It seemed like his pride had been hurt somehow.

However, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master soon sighed and spoke.

“Phew. That demon’s evil nature is so strong and ferocious that even this humble monk, who has faced countless demons, cannot handle it alone under any circumstances.”

“It’s that dangerous, yet you managed to capture and bring it here. Wouldn’t it have been better to just kill it?”

“Amitabha. Taking life is a last resort. As a disciple of the Buddha, how could one commit such an act without even attempting to enlighten it?”

“So you keep it locked up and continuously chant sutras?”

“That is correct.”

“Has any demon been successfully enlightened through this method?”

“.....”

At this question, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master gave no answer.

This was a clear negation.

Although the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monks took turns chanting the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra day and night to weaken the demons’ evil nature in an attempt to enlighten them, there was not a single being whose fundamental nature had changed.

Rather, as their evil nature and demonic powers weakened, many demons died before the 108 mantras were completed.

In the end, enlightening demons was practically impossible.

As such, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monks still attempted to enlighten them but inwardly believed it to be impossible.

‘That complacency will soon disappear as well.’

As he was also well-versed in dharmic powers, he could gauge the strength of the monstrous bird’s demonic energy that had fallen in the Arhat Hall’s courtyard.

While he acknowledged that it was incomparably stronger than ordinary demons, it was on a completely different level from what they were about to witness.

It was not only powerful and ferocious.

It even possessed the intelligence to deceive humans, which is why it was locked up in a deeper cave than the other demons.

“Well, it’s not like keeping it locked up had any meaning anyway.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s sarcastic remark, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master put his palms together and replied.

“Amitabha. Then, let the patron demonstrate his ability to control demons using techniques that defy principles.”

“I understand.”

In this manner, Mok Gyeong-un followed the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master’s guidance and entered the cave.

-Wooooong!

As soon as he entered the cave, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

-Why are you doing that, mortal?

Cheong-ryeong asked.

-...It’s quite similar to when we came into contact with the primordial energy.

-Primordial energy? Could it be that inside the cave...

-The dharmic power is much stronger than outside.

Mok Gyeong-un found the reason on the cave walls.

The entire wall was engraved with gold-plated Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra characters, causing the surrounding area to overflow with dharmic power.

However, this dharmic power seemed to have a nature opposite to the energy of the dead within Mok Gyeong-un's body, such as the death energy and demonic energy, causing the internal energies to surge.

He even developed a headache that wasn't there before.

-Do you think you can endure it?

-More or less.

Although the energy was turbulent, it wasn't agonizingly painful to the point of death.

It was just unpleasant to be in this space.

Moreover,

-Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baabam baara hum bataak.

Just as the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master had said beforehand, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monks were chanting the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra in front of each cave within the Demon-subduing Cave, making even the ears sting.

Enduring this discomfort, they finally reached the deepest part of the Demon-subduing Cave.

On the way, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master said,

“The thirty-six caves located in the back garden of Shaolin are all interconnected. Therefore, if you accidentally stray from the guided path, you may lose your way. So, I humbly request that the patron be cautious.”

“Thank you for the advice.”

“And we will arrive soon, but if any problems arise after entering, please shout loudly. Although the demon’s legs have been restrained with dharmic tools, its demonic power is so strong that it may be dangerous if you’re not careful.”

“I understand.”

Eventually, they arrived at the cave located at the very back of the Demon-subduing Cave.

The entrance was incomparably larger than the other caves.

The blocked iron door was also engraved with gold-plated Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantras.

-Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baabam baara hum batak.

In front of the entrance, a single Demon-Subduing Pavilion monk was standing and chanting the mantra.

As they arrived, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monk stopped and put his palms together.

“Amitabha. Have you arrived, fellow monk?”

“I told you to stop chanting the mantra and wait in the neighboring cavity, so why are you here, Deoksu?”

“I dropped my prayer beads at the entrance and went to retrieve them, but the demon, which I thought was exhausted and asleep, woke up and caused a commotion, so I was trying to calm it down.”

“Oh my.”

At his words, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master looked at the cave entrance with a worried expression.

Despite the prior warning, the demon inside was truly dangerous.

That’s why they had planned to send Mok Gyeong-un in when the dharmic power was at its peak and the demon was most exhausted from the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra.

But if the demon had woken up and caused a commotion, the situation was indeed concerning.

If they weren’t careful, they might end up being harmed instead.

Therefore, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master cautiously said,

“Patron, could you please wait a moment? I think we need to chant the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra a bit more to calm the demon down.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

“Will it make a significant difference even if you do that? Just let me in.”

“Oh my. Patron... This is for your sake as well. No matter how much you want to prove yourself, I cannot allow the patron to be in danger.”

“I understand your concern, Venerable Monk, but we don’t have much time either.”

Shaolin Temple was quite close to the imperial capital of Kaifeng.

If the imperial palace sent troops or trackers, they could reach here in no time.

Therefore, from Mok Gyeong-un’s perspective, he had no choice but to hurry.

“Could you not compromise for just a quarter of an hour?”

“If it seems greatly dangerous, I will let you know, so just let me in.”

“Oh my.”

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master clicked his tongue at Mok Gyeong-un’s stubbornness and approached the firmly closed iron door’s locks.

As the iron door was extremely large, there were a total of five locks.

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master took out keys from his waist and spoke.

-Clank!

“Patron, this iron door is made of hyeon-cheol, so no matter how skilled one is in martial arts, it cannot be cut or broken. Therefore, if it seems dangerous, shout immediately.”

“I will do so.”

-Clank!

After unlocking all the locks except for the last one with an unusual elongated shape, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master handed Mok Gyeong-un a torch hanging on the wall.

“It will be dark inside, so take this with you. There is a torch holder inside.”

“I understand. But why are you leaving one lock unopened?”

“As a precaution.”

“Precaution?”

“This lock is specially designed so that the iron door only opens wide enough for a person to barely pass through.”

“Ah.”

“If it opens wider than that, the demon might escape. The demon inside is not only ferocious but also cunning, so be careful.”

“I will keep that in mind.”

“Then, go and return safely. Amitabha.”

-Screech!

As the large iron door opened, a gap barely wide enough for a person to pass through sideways, as the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master had said, was created.

Through this, Mok Gyeong-un entered with the torch.

As soon as he went inside, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion monk outside immediately closed the iron door.

-Screech! Thud!

Although he tried to close it as carefully as possible, the door was so large that the sound of it closing was quite loud.

Paying no heed to this, Mok Gyeong-un raised the torch to illuminate the inside of the cave, the cavity.

‘It’s huge.’

The cavity was much larger than he had expected.

How large was it? The torch couldn’t illuminate the entire space.

Part of the cavity was shrouded in shadows, and...

-Tak!

Without bringing the torch all the way there, Mok Gyeong-un placed it in the holder next to the iron door.

Then he looked at the area covered in shadows.

Without even needing to search, a strong demonic energy was emanating from there.

-Can you see it?

-Yes, I can see it.

The demon's eyes, faintly blinking and staring at him, were visible.

A red light was flickering in its eyes, and just from the size of its pupils, one could imagine how enormous it must be.

“Kekekekek.”

At that moment, an eerie laughter echoed from the shadows.

The laughter was naturally quite different from a human voice, closer to the sound of scratching one's throat.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un grasped the sword finger in his right hand and prepared his techniques.

They said it had undergone a process of suppressing its evil nature with the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra for ninety-nine days, but the demonic energy it exuded made one question if it had really weakened.

-How strong does it seem?

-It appears to be above the level of a demon beast.

-Above a demon beast?

-Yes.

-Then could it possibly be a Diabolic Beast?

Monsters, or unidentified creatures, are referred to differently based on their level of danger.

The lowest grade is Fierce Beast, and as it goes higher, it becomes a Monstrous Beast and Demonic Beast.

The Heum-won that Mok Gyeong-un had made his servant could also be considered a Demonic beast, but the level of demonic energy he sensed now was far stronger than that.

At that moment, along with the laughter, a voice was heard from the shadows.

“Kekekekek. I should thank those damn bald monks. After being stuck here for ninety-nine days, chanting nothing but those annoying sutras, they’ve finally brought me such a delicious meal.”

Surprisingly, this monster could speak.

The sound of its voice, like scratching its throat, was extremely eerie, but it knew how to accurately convey its thoughts.

-Thud!

The sound of footsteps reverberated throughout the entire cave.

-Thud!

The cave floor shook.

Eventually, the monster revealed itself within the radius illuminated by the torch.

‘Huh?’

It had horns on its head, resembling a dragon.

Its entire body was covered in red fur, and its shape was like a mixture of a dog and a cow, but it had hooves like a horse.

Its size was so immense that one had to look up to see it.

As soon as he saw this, Cheong-ryeong spoke in a surprised voice.

-Mortal... It's Alyu.

-Alyu?

-I had a feeling when they mentioned Mount Shaoxian, but these crazy bald monks have actually captured a diabolic beast.

Cheong-ryeong was dumbfounded.

The existence known as a Diabolic beast was so dangerous that even dozens of skilled Taoist priests had to gather to barely confront it.

Seeing that they had captured and imprisoned such a being, it was clear that Shaolin's power was no ordinary feat, but the situation had become quite serious.

-...This is bad. Aside from being strong, diabolic beasts possess intelligence as well.

-We have to subdue it first.

Controlling it or making it a servant was only possible after subduing the monster.

Fortunately, the demonic energy emanating from this diabolic beast wasn't the worst among the unidentified creatures he had recently encountered.

Should he say it was thanks to having experienced even worse than this?

Right at that moment...

“Kekekekek!”

-Thud thud thud thud thud!

The slowly approaching diabolic beast, Alyu, suddenly leaped towards Mok Gyeong-un with agile movements.

‘Fast, despite its size.’

In response, Mok Gyeong-un moved his body to widen the distance and tried to deploy the Six Directions Formation.

However, the charging Alyu suddenly stopped.

-Bam!

Then, after maintaining some distance, it opened its mouth with trembling eyes.

“Kiririk. You... What are you? Why do you... reek of that monstrous fox?”

‘!?’

Chapter 299 – Diabolic Beast (2)

Long ago, a much smaller form of the Diabolic Beast Alyu (, Yayu) was staring at something with a terrified expression. It was because of the shadow of a gigantic nine-tailed fox that loomed heavily in the center of the burning Mount Shaoxian.

In the flickering shadow of the flames, the enormous nine-tailed fox was tearing apart the head of something. It was the head of an adult Alyu with a dragon's head. The small Alyu's red eyes trembled madly as it watched this scene.

“Kiririk, you... What are you? Why do you... reek of that monstrous fox?” The Diabolic Beast Alyu asked Mok Gyeong-un with trembling eyes.

Alyu, who had endured the torment of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion mantra for 99 days and a hunger that felt like its stomach was being turned inside out, tried to devour Mok Gyeong-un as soon as it saw him.

However, no matter how starved it was to the point of losing its senses, it was still a high-ranking existence among the unidentified creatures. The intelligent Diabolic Beast Alyu couldn't help but be instantly filled with wariness after sensing the familiar scent emanating from Mok Gyeong-un.

“The scent of the monstrous fox?”

“Kiririk. Without a doubt. The scent coming from you is definitely that of the monstrous fox.”

At the confident words of the Diabolic Beast Alyu, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed. Being quick-witted, the moment Mok Gyeong-un heard the phrase “scent of the monstrous fox,” he immediately thought of the Fox Demon Queen, no, the Hundred-Faced King, the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

[Carry it with you. It will serve as proof that I've marked you.]

[If it's proof that you've marked me, it's even more embarrassing to carry around.]

[You're quite honest. But it won't do you any harm to carry it. From what I've seen, you seem to get entangled with unidentified creatures quite often.]

[.....]

[So keep it with you. If you have even a part of my tail, you won't get involved with annoying creatures.]

Mok Gyeong-un recalled the round medallion in his bosom. It was made by the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox using a part of its severed tail.

Originally, he was going to throw it away, but Cheong-ryeong also said it would be better to keep it for the time being.

-Even if it's just a part, the body of a Spiritual Beast close to a Divine Beast like the Hundred-Faced King will come in handy for something, no matter what it is.

However, he didn't expect such a thing to happen so soon. Judging from the wary gaze of the Diabolic Beast Alyu, there was also fear in its eyes.

Seeing a being intelligent enough to speak human language act like this, if handled well, it might be possible to take advantage of the situation.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un took out the medallion made from the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox's tail from his bosom. As he took it out,

-Swoooosh!

The Diabolic Beast Alyu even took a step back due to the intensified scent of the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

“Kiririk. Yo-you, what are you? Why does a mere human like you have something like that?”

The Diabolic Beast Alyu trembled as it recalled an old memory. Even after such a long time had passed, the terror engraved in its entire body had not been forgotten.

It was truly the embodiment of a tyrant. It was so brutal that it would tear apart and devour the five extremities of even its fellow unidentified creatures if they displeased it.

-Tremble tremble!

Seeing Alyu standing upright and trembling, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth twitched. It seemed like it could be easily resolved if handled well.

‘How should I approach this?’

Looking at that attitude, it was clear that the Diabolic Beast Alyu greatly feared the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

In that case, it would be better to imply that his relationship with the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox was very close.

With that thought, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“As expected of a diabolic beast, you have a keen sense of smell.”

“Kiririk. What are you?”

-Clank!

The chain shackles on the ankles of the retreating Diabolic Beast Alyu became taut. Thanks to the restraints connected to the center of the cave, the range of movement for the Diabolic Beast Alyu couldn't reach the cavity walls.

Mok Gyeong-un approached Alyu and said,

-Don't get too close, mortal.

Just in case, Cheong-ryeong warned him. No matter how much it feared, the opponent was still a diabolic beast, a high-ranking existence among the unidentified creatures.

It would be best not to provoke it unnecessarily.

However, Mok Gyeong-un deliberately narrowed the distance to show confidence. And in that state, he held up the round medallion made from the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox's tail hair and said,

"As you can see, should I say we're acquaintances with a close relationship?"

"Acquaintances? With that monster?"

"Yes, you seem to know it well."

"How could I not know? The number of beings that have died at the hands of that monstrous fox is countless. If their bodies were piled up, it would have been taller than a thousand mountains."

-That's probably true. If it's a monster of that caliber, it would have lived for more than a thousand years, so it could pile up not just one, but several thousand mountains.

Cheong-ryeong also muttered in agreement.

Then Mok Gyeong-un shook the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox's round medallion at Alyu and said,

“It’s fortunate that you know well how dangerous the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox is. I was worried that you might not listen to my proposal that could be mutually beneficial.”

“Proposal?”

“Yes. Shall we say it’s a proposal that might pique your interest?”

“What is it?”

The Diabolic Beast Alyu asked with a puzzled expression at the mention of a proposal.

Then Mok Gyeong-un put the round medallion back into his bosom and said,

“If done well, you too can be freed from this place.”

“Freed? From this damn cave?”

“Yes, if you’re interested, would you be willing to hear my proposal?”

“Kiririk. Hmm.”

The Diabolic Beast Alyu rolled its eyes with a strange look, then opened its mouth while looking down at Mok Gyeong-un.

“What’s the proposal?”

“It’s not that difficult. You just need to suppress your demonic nature for a while and show that you can be controlled by me, so to speak.”

“Show that I can be controlled?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t tell me you want me to show those damn bald monks that I’ve been subdued by a human like you?”

“Oh, you catch on quickly.”

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes sparkled with interest. Indeed, a diabolic beast-level creature possessed intelligence beyond the level of being able to converse and even had some degree of insight.

“You probably know why the monks of Shaolin Temple capture and imprison beings like you and other unidentified creatures, and since you’re intelligent, you should also know why they chant sutras while keeping you locked up, right?”

“So you’re saying I just need to pretend to be controlled by a human like you?”

“Yes. If you do that, the Shaolin monks will release you.”

“Just for that?”

“The reason the monks keep you captive is because of your dangerousness. But if you can be controlled, there’s no need for them to hold you anymore.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Diabolic Beast Alyu’s eyes narrowed. It seemed to be seriously considering this proposal.

If it feared the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox and wanted to get out of here, wouldn’t it smoothly accept the proposal?

While thinking that, the Diabolic Beast Alyu opened its mouth.

“Kiririk. I have a question, human.”

“What is it?”

“I understand the conditions for me to be freed, but you don’t seem to be related to those damn bald monks, so why are you trying to prove yourself?”

‘Ah...’

Mok Gyeong-un inwardly felt annoyed at the Diabolic Beast Alyu’s question.

He had hoped for a slightly simpler approach, but perhaps because it possessed intelligence and insight, it was doubting the very intention behind this proposal.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un also quickly racked his brain. How should he explain it so that the Diabolic Beast Alyu would smoothly accept the proposal without suspicion?

Then Mok Gyeong-un drew upon the incantation power, which was the foundation of his sorcery techniques. As he drew it out, the Diabolic Beast Alyu raised its voice at the revealed energy and said,

“Kirik. Human. You’re a Taoist priest, aren’t you?”

“Yes, as you can see.”

“No wonder those damn bald monks wouldn’t send an ordinary human in here.”

-Grit!

Seeing the Diabolic Beast Alyu gritting its teeth, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“Yes. But this is an opportunity for you. I also need to prove to the monks here that the unidentified creature I’ve made my servant is not dangerous due to friction with them.”

“Servant?”

“I have a servant whose demonic power is weaker than yours.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Diabolic Beast Alyu twitched its elongated mouth and said,

“Kiririk. So those damn bald monks are targeting the unidentified creature that you, a Taoist priest, have made your servant.”

“That’s right. You’re indeed smart. So if you accept my proposal and help me, won’t we both be able to obtain a mutually beneficial result?”

“Kirik. Kirik. Yeah. That could be.”

“Then will you accept my proposal? It may be difficult right now, but if you just follow my control for a little while, you’ll gain your freed-“

-Bam!

Before he could even finish speaking, the front hoof of the Diabolic Beast Alyu flew towards Mok Gyeong-un at a tremendous speed, forcing him to hastily retreat his body backwards.

-Bam! Kwang!

As the hoof struck the ground, the floor cracked and shattered fragments flew up.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un created a sharp aura with his sword fingers to cut through the flying fragments and moved his body to dodge the ones he could avoid.

But as soon as he did that,

-Croooo!

A condensed purple smoke spewed out from the Diabolic Beast Alyu's mouth, trying to engulf Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Poison? No.’

It was different from poison. It seemed to be a smoke infused with demonic energy, and...

-Swish!

As Mok Gyeong-un hurriedly dodged it, the spewed condensed purple smoke collided with the ground.

However, unlike a moment ago, where the smoke collided,

-Woong!

A strange phenomenon occurred where the golden sutra characters written on the ground flickered and the smoke bounced off.

The bounced-off smoke then collided with another cave wall. And on that wall as well, due to the golden sutra characters, the smoke was reflected to another place and spread out here and there.

As a result, Mok Gyeong-un tried to maintain the maximum distance to avoid this smoke, but despite not much time passing, the reflecting smoke had already filled more than half of the entire cave.

Consequently, some of the smoke touched his skin, and...

-Sizzle!

‘Acid?’

It was a very strong acid. This was a separate issue from immunity to poison.

If directly exposed to acid, the skin would inevitably melt.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un drew upon the demonic energy to form a thin film on his skin to protect his body like a protective energy shield.

Fortunately, it was effective. The acid couldn’t penetrate the film made of demonic energy.

-Swish!

Not stopping there, Mok Gyeong-un used his true energy to push away the smoke and blocked it from entering a certain range.

Then, from within the smoke...

-Thud! Thud!

The Diabolic Beast Alyu, who had suddenly attacked, revealed itself.

“Kiririk. You’re no ordinary human. There’s no way a mere Taoist priest who only knows a few techniques can move this fast.”

“Whether I’m a Taoist priest or not, what does it matter? I even made a proposal that might pique your interest, but I don’t know what this sudden act is about.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Diabolic Beast Alyu suddenly grinned, revealing its ferocious and sharp teeth.

“Kiririri. Do you think I would believe your words?”

“…This is unexpected. I thought you would seize even a slim chance to escape if you were destined to be trapped and die while listening to sutras anyway.”

“Kirik. Yeah. At first glance, it sounds right. But in the end, those damn bald monks and you, a Taoist priest, are no different from natural enemies to beings like us. It’s truly foolish to believe that I would trust a measly agreement between you lot.”

At the monster’s words, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue and said,

“Are you really going to lose this opportunity to be freed like this?”

“It could also be an opportunity to die after being used.”

At the Diabolic Beast Alyu’s words, Mok Gyeong-un licked his lips.

He himself was also quite suspicious, but this Diabolic Beast Alyu also refused to trust him at all, befitting an intelligent being.

Thanks to the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox’s medallion, he thought it would be easily resolved, but it seemed that wasn’t the case.

So Mok Gyeong-un took out the medallion again and said,

“If it’s because I’m a Taoist priest, I think there’s a misunderstanding. Just seeing that I’m acquainted with the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox...”

-Thud!

Before he could even finish speaking, the Diabolic Beast Alyu stomped the ground with its hoof.

Then, looking down at Mok Gyeong-un, it spoke in a voice filled with overwhelming pressure.

“Thanks to you, human, a filthy memory has resurfaced.”

“Filthy memory?”

“That monstrous fox massacred all of my kin on Mount Shaoxian, leaving me as the only surviving individual.”

“...”

Mok Gyeong-un let out a small sigh.

He thought it simply feared the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox because of its lower status as an unidentified creature.

But if all its kin had been massacred,

-Roar!

Just looking at the surging strong murderous intent, a blatant hostility could be felt.

“...There’s nothing good that will come out of this. Even if you hate the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox, the proposal I made is truly not a lie.”

“Whether it’s a lie or not, I don’t trust the bald monks or you, human. Rather, a brilliant plan has come to mind.”

“A brilliant plan?”

“Yes. Since the monstrous fox cherishes you, human, if you die here, that b*tch and the damn bald monks who locked me up here will have a blast fighting each other!”

-Grrrrr!

As soon as those words were spoken, the Diabolic Beast Alyu spewed out a purple smoke.

The purple smoke, released with even greater force than before, quickly flew somewhere, and that place was none other than the entrance, the iron door.

In an instant, the area around the iron door was filled with purple smoke.

‘Is it trying to prevent me from getting out?’

As a result, Mok Gyeong-un had no choice but to move to the opposite side.

As Mok Gyeong-un launched his body towards the opposite side, at that moment, Alyu’s long tail lashed out like a whip, targeting Mok Gyeong-un.

-Swish!

The size of that tail was so large that it couldn't simply be called a whip.

In the end, Mok Gyeong-un swiftly drew his Wicked Sword.

-Shing!

And with the Wicked Sword, he blocked the monster's oncoming tail.

-Clang!

Contrary to the expectation that the red, feather-like fur on the tail would be soft, the moment it clashed, it emitted a metallic sound, indicating it was extremely hard.

Moreover, the force and weight behind the tail itself were tremendous, so...

-Bang!

Mok Gyeong-un's body was sent flying backwards.

His thrown body was about to crash into the opposite cave wall.

Thinking he should use this force, Mok Gyeong-un somersaulted in the air, twisting his body to try and kick off the cave wall.

However, the moment he was about to kick off in sync with colliding with the wall,

-Kwang!

At that instant, both his feet pierced through the cave wall, and Mok Gyeong-un's body went straight through to the other side.

‘!?’

Chapter 300 – Diabolic Beast (3)

Outside the iron door.

Although not much time had passed since entering, the unusual silence made the Demon-subduing monk Deoksu open his mouth.

“Amitabha. monk. It's strangely quiet, isn't it? Is that patron really a Taoist priest?”

“He is indeed.”

“Don't those Taoist priests use spells or something similar to chanting sutras or mantras like us Demon-subduing monks?”

“Why? Are you curious?”

At his question, the Demon-subduing monk Deoksu waved his hands and shook his head.

“No, that's not it.”

Of course, he was inwardly curious about how Taoist priests would deal with demons.

So he was dying to take a peek, but he had no choice but to wait, fearing that something troublesome might happen if he did.

“Although magical techniques are said to originate from Taoism, it is a power that goes against principles. Don’t bother being curious about it.”

“Amitabha. I will keep that in mind.”

After instructing Demon-subduing monk Deoksu in this manner, the Demon-subduing Priest stared intently at the iron door.

Despite his instructions, the Demon-subduing Priest was also curious inwardly.

Except for the Grand Meditation Master, he possessed the highest dharmic power, but even someone like him couldn’t do anything alone against the demon beyond this iron door.

Yet how could a mere Taoist priest control the demon?

It was practically impossible.

At that moment.

-Bang! Bang!

Finally, noisy sounds could be heard from inside.

Judging from the brief silence followed by noise, it seemed like things weren’t going well.

Soon, the demon’s shout was heard.

-You damn human! Don’t you dare come out of there!

‘!?’

Don't come out of there?

What the hell does that mean?

In the cavity beyond the iron door, there was no particular space to escape or hide.

At the same time, beyond the iron door.

‘Huh?’

This was completely unexpected.

Contrary to the expectation that the cave walls, engraved with sutras all over, would withstand this level of force by bouncing off the smoke spewed by the demonic beast Alyu, the hardness of the walls themselves wasn't that sturdy.

-Crash!

Mok Gyeong-un's body, which had pierced through the wall and entered the other side, slid down a narrow cave passage and fell somewhere.

Eventually, at the end of the slide, there was a pool of water, splashing and wetting his body.

As he fell like that, Mok Gyeong-un raised his head in disbelief, and...

‘!?’

In front of him, a massive dead-end stone wall was spread out.

“Ah...”

It was a scene that made one involuntarily exclaim in awe.

If it were just a simple wall, it would be one thing, but part of the cave ceiling was open, allowing bright sunlight to shine down and beautifully illuminate a portion of the wall.

As he was gazing at this absentmindedly for a moment, a furious shout was heard from behind.

-You damn human! Don't you dare come out of there!

It was the voice of the demonic beast Alyu.

It was riding high, thinking it had blocked the entrance and driven him into a dead end, but an unexpected event had occurred, making it furious.

As Mok Gyeong-un was about to turn his head,

-The cave is connected to here...

At Cheong-ryeong's voice, Mok Gyeong-un asked in puzzlement.

“What do you mean by that?”

-Do you remember what that Demon-subduing Priest or whatever said earlier, that the thirty-six caves in the back garden of Shaolin Temple are all interconnected?

“Ah. I think he did say that. But why bring that up?”

-Look at the top of the wall.

“The top of the wall?”

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, Mok Gyeong-un looked at the top of the wall where the sunlight was shining down.

Large characters were engraved there.

(Wall Contemplation Cave)

‘Wall Contemplation Cave?’

Come to think of it, there was a cave entrance next to the Demon-subduing Cave with the words “Wall Contemplation Cave” written on it.

If that’s the case, this place he had entered by breaking through the Demon-subduing Cave’s wall was the Wall Contemplation Cave, and it seemed that what the Demon-subduing Priest said about all the caves being interconnected was indeed true.

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes were drawn to something other than that fact.

It was none other than the characters “Wall Contemplation Cave” engraved on the wall.

‘Majestic.’

That was the feeling he got the moment he first saw the writing.

The calligraphy contained not a hint of arrogance or selfishness, and the force put into each stroke was even and incomparably majestic.

‘Ah!’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes widened.

The characters were not engraved using fingers or any tool.

They were engraved with qi.

Yet how could it be so flawless?

If one had never learned martial arts or knew nothing about qi, they would have looked at it with a simple gaze, but this was truly amazing.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s reaction, Cheong-ryeong said,

-The mastery of qi has truly reached the level of divinity. As expected of the originator who created Shaolin Fist, known as the orthodox martial art of the Central Plains.

“Originator?”

-Bodhidharma.

“Bodhidharma? Ah... I’ve heard of him before. Isn’t he the one called the founder of Zen Buddhism?”

-Yes. He is the founder of Zen Buddhism and is also known as the origin of Shaolin Fist.

“Then did this Bodhidharma establish Shaolin Temple?”

-No, that's not it.

“Then what is it?”

-Have you ever seen a Daruma doll?

“No.”

-When you look at a Daruma doll, Bodhidharma's appearance gives off a quite exotic feeling.

“If he's exotic, does that mean he's not from the Central Plains?”

-That's right. Bodhidharma was the third prince of the King of Xiangji in the Tianzhu Kingdom, but he renounced the world and cultivated the Buddhist way.

“Oh?”

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes sparkled with interest.

It was surprising to hear that the one known as the origin of Shaolin martial arts was not from the Central Plains but a foreigner.

“But how did a foreign prince who renounced the world become the origin of Shaolin martial arts?”

-That, I don't know. There are several theories, and one of them is right here, the Wall Contemplation Cave of Shaolin Temple.

“Did he train martial arts in the Wall Contemplation Cave?”

-When he entered deep meditation, he would face the wall and sit in meditation all day long, and when he came out of meditation, he would move his limbs without rest and train his body. That physical training is said to have become the foundation of Shaolin Fist.

“I see.”

-What’s even more amazing is that he repeated that wall-facing cultivation for nine years without rest.

The wall-facing cultivation that lasted for a whole nine years.

This became widely known among many Buddhist practitioners and even laypeople, and this Wall Contemplation Cave, where Bodhidharma was said to have trained, was called the Daruma Wall Contemplation Cave by outsiders.

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at the characters “Wall Contemplation Cave” on the wall.

Shaolin Fist was born through Bodhidharma, whom she mentioned, and Shaolin Fist became the foundation for many orthodox martial arts in the Central Plains.

It was literally the very origin.

‘Impressive.’

Mok Gyeong-un inwardly expressed his respect for the fact that someone’s nine years became an origin, and through that origin, countless martial arts were born.

However, that respect was short-lived.

There was no time to leisurely gaze at the stone wall of the Wall Contemplation Cave here.

As Mok Gyeong-un was about to turn his head,

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to turn his head, stopped moving at some point.

Then he stared fixedly at a certain spot on the stone wall.

It was a momentary unconsciousness.

The moment he blinked his eyes, closed them, and opened them again,

-Whoosh!

At that moment, a cold wind blew from the entire stone wall, and snowflakes were fluttering all around.

Faced with such a bizarre phenomenon, Mok Gyeong-un was momentarily at a loss for words.

Mok Gyeong-un raised his head and looked up at the sky.

Snow was falling through the open cave ceiling, and the falling snow was piling up on the cave floor.

‘What on earth...’

As he was puzzled, he noticed a spot where snow had piled up particularly high.

It was the point where the light from the stone wall was reflecting.

There, snow had piled up to the height of a sitting person...

‘Huh?’

He thought it was just snow, but someone was actually sitting in meditation, and snow had piled up on their head and shoulders.

Not understanding what was going on, Mok Gyeong-un tried to approach that person.

But then, footstep sounds were heard.

-Footsteps!

Puzzled by the sound, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head.

As he turned his head, a tall, bald man wearing a yellow kasaya was approaching from a cave at the back of the Wall Contemplation Cave.

Mok Gyeong-un tried to speak to him, but...

“Who...”

-Swish!

That bald someone, who seemed to be a practicing monk, passed by Mok Gyeong-un without even acknowledging his presence.

The practicing monk who had passed by like that soon approached the person sitting in meditation.

Despite the snow piling up on their head and shoulders and someone approaching, the person sitting in meditation didn’t make the slightest movement.

-Thud!

The approaching practicing monk knelt on the ground.

Then, bowing his head to the person sitting in meditation, he spoke in an earnest voice.

[Please give me your teachings.]

[...]

Despite his earnestness, the person sitting in meditation remained still, not uttering a single word or showing any disturbance.

Nevertheless, the practicing monk bowed his head to the ground once again and said,

[Open the path for me.]

[...]

The practicing monk maintained that prostrated posture.

He showed the determination to never move until he received an answer from the person sitting in meditation.

Like that, both the person sitting in meditation and the one prostrating behind remained motionless, and snow piled up more on their bodies.

As Mok Gyeong-un let out a soft sigh, wondering what this was all about,

-Swish!

At that moment, the surroundings darkened and brightened repeatedly, and then...

‘!?’

Suddenly, snow had piled up heavily on the body of the prostrating practicing monk, and the person sitting in meditation had risen to their feet.

The person who had risen from meditation spoke while still keeping their gaze on the stone wall.

[Receive it.]

As soon as those words were heard, the prostrating practicing monk staggered to his feet.

No, he couldn’t even stand up straight.

Having prostrated for a long time while being hit by snow, he stumbled forward.

Even though he fell forward and his nose was bleeding, the practicing monk struggled to get up.

But the person who had been sitting in meditation threw something behind them without even looking.

The practicing monk stretched out both hands to catch it.

-Splash!

The moment the practicing monk caught it, it wet his hands and flowed down to the ground.

It was none other than water.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes sparkled with interest.

‘He threw water?’

It was truly a strange occurrence.

Did he lightly pack some snow and throw it, and it melted in the hands?

Or did he really throw water?

Is it possible to throw water with bare hands like that?

As he was puzzled, the practicing monk tried to scoop up the water that had fallen to the ground with his hands.

But how could he possibly scoop up the water that had already soaked the ground?

[Ah... Aah...]

A sigh escaped from the practicing monk's mouth.

Then, the man in the kasaya who was staring at the stone wall said,

[I gave it to you. So go back.]

At those words, the practicing monk, who had been scraping the wet ground to the point of breaking his nails, pleaded with tears in his eyes.

[This humble monk is still lacking and couldn't receive what you gave. So please, give me your teachings.]

[...]

[Even if I have to die here, I cannot leave.]

[...]

Despite the practicing monk's determined resolve, the one staring at the wall did not turn his head even slightly.

However, eventually, the one in the kasaya staring at the stone wall opened his mouth.

[Unless red eyes fall and pile up here, I will never accept you.]

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un snorted.

How could red eyes possibly fall?

In the end, it was just a roundabout way of saying he wouldn't accept him.

It was at that moment.

-Bam!

At that moment, the practicing monk got to his feet.

Then he ran somewhere in the cave and came back with a knife.

Mok Gyeong-un thought he might do something reckless upon hearing that he would never be accepted as a disciple, but...

-Slice!

At that instant, the practicing monk cut off his own left arm.

‘!?’

Then he sprinkled the blood flowing from his severed arm onto the piled-up snow.

As the practicing monk’s blood scattered, the snow gradually turned red.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth twitched.

This practicing monk had created an answer that couldn’t be made through the sacrifice of cutting off his arm.

It could indeed be called a truly remarkable will.

‘Will he still keep staring at the wall even after this?’

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the person in the kasaya who was staring at the stone wall.

At that moment, the one who had been staring at the stone wall opened his mouth.

[Receive it.]

With those words, the person threw something behind him.

It happened so quickly that the practicing monk unconsciously stretched out his arm to catch it at all costs.

But the arm he stretched out was none other than the severed one.

However,

-Whoosh!

At that moment, a handful of water formed a shape in the air as if grasped by a hand, and it floated there.

‘!!!!!!’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes trembled as he watched this.

The act of trying to grasp something with a non-existent arm actually made it possible.

This amazing sight rang loudly in Mok Gyeong-un’s mind like a bell, and that sound brought about a crack.