

Mayhem 301

Chapter 301 – Diabolic Beast (3)

“Kiririk! You damn Taoist priest! Come back here right now!”

-Crash! Crash crash crash!

As Mok Gyeong-un disappeared beyond the wall he had pierced through, the furious diabolic beast Alyu began causing a commotion by repeatedly stomping the ground with its hooves.

As the ground shattered and it thrashed about wildly, the restraints attached to its four legs, which could be considered part of the dharma tools, automatically tightened, trying to calm Alyu down.

Normally, when it raged to this extent, the Demon-Subduing monks would chant the Demon-Subduing mantra to suppress the diabolic beast Alyu’s evil nature and make it fall asleep.

However, coincidentally, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master had instructed the Demon-Subduing monks to temporarily leave their positions so they wouldn’t hear Mok Gyeong-un chanting the incantations of his magical techniques, which turned out to be the root of the problem.

-Snap!

The restraints, unable to withstand the raging diabolic beast Alyu’s strength, finally broke.

As the restraints on the front legs snapped, the diabolic beast Alyu couldn’t hide its joy.

“Kirik! Kirik! This damned shackles has finally broken.”

Since the front legs were freed, breaking the restraints on the hind legs was a piece of cake.

Eventually, the restraints on the hind legs also snapped after a few kicks.

-Snap!

As the restraints that had been binding all four legs were gone, the diabolic beast Alyu immediately charged towards the iron door to get out of the cave.

-Crash!

Although the iron door was engraved with gold-plated Demon-Subduing mantras, Alyu's strength was so immense that it dented the iron door outward with just a single impact.

Because of this, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master, who had been waiting for Mok Gyeong-un outside, could tell that something had gone wrong.

"Deoksu, go to the neighboring cavity right now and gather all the Demon-Subduing monks."

"Ah, yes, I understand!"

As Demon-Subduing monk Deoksu ran off, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master drew upon his dharmic power and began chanting the Demon-Subduing mantra towards the iron door.

"Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum arihanna banaya hum banaya hum baabam baara hum batah."

At the same time.

Monk Dae-deok, the overseer of the Precepts Hall, headed towards the entrance of Shaolin Temple with the monks from the Precepts Hall in tow.

The grounds of Shaolin, boasting the largest scale among all the temples in the Central Plains, were so vast that it inevitably took quite some time just to reach there.

Moreover, as Shaolin was located halfway up Mount Song, the distance between the grounds was also great.

So if one were to walk, it would take nearly a quarter-hour just to get from the Arhat Pavilion to the entrance, but thanks to using the Light Body Technique at a moderate speed, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok arrived at the entrance within half a quarter-hour.

At the entrance of Shaolin, armored military officials and nearly a hundred soldiers were seen.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok greeted the officer with a long beard, who seemed to be the representative of the military officials, with his palms together.

“Amitabha. I am Dae-deok, the overseer of the Precepts Hall of Shaolin. What brings the imperial officials to this humble place?”

“If you’re the overseer of the Precepts Hall, you must be quite a high-ranking monk in Shaolin.”

The young monks of the Precepts Hall frowned at the arrogant tone of the military official.

Although the current imperial court followed the principles of Confucianism, Shaolin was a very old temple and had served as the national temple for generations thanks to its connection with the first emperor, Taizu, so it deserved to be treated with respect.

However, this military official’s attitude was far from that.

“I am Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards. Although we didn’t forcibly enter out of respect for Shaolin’s ties with Emperor Taizu, we received information that there are traitors here in Shaolin.”

“Amitabha. Traitors? What do you mean by that?”

At Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s words, Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards snorted and said,

“It’s no use playing dumb. Do you know how many people we’ve heard from nearby that a large monstrous bird fell into Shaolin?”

“Oh my. The imperial official is truly putting this humble monk in a difficult position. This is simply a place where monks who have renounced the world cultivate the Buddhist way.”

“Just a place to cultivate the Buddhist way? Ha! How can you say that in a place known as the orthodox school of martial arts in the world?”

“Amitabha.”

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok simply chanted a Buddhist prayer with his palms together.

Then Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards frowned and raised his voice, saying,

“Could it be that Shaolin is trying to protect the traitors who helped the prisoners escape from the underground prison of the imperial palace? If that’s the case, even if it’s a temple with deep ties to Emperor Taizu, we will have no choice but to forcibly enter and search.”

At those words, the young monks of the Precepts Hall uniformly protested.

“No. What kind of outrageous behavior is this?”

“Forcible suppression? No matter if you’re an official, how can you do this to a place that worships the Buddha...”

“Enough!”

However, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, silenced them with a stern shout.

Then, as if he had no dissatisfaction at all, he bowed his head along with his palms together and spoke in a gentle voice to Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards.

“Amitabha. Although Shaolin is a place to cultivate the Buddhist way, how could we possibly protect traitors? I kindly request the official to withdraw his misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? Then bring the traitors here right now. If you do that, there will be no need to forcibly search Shaolin.”

“Amitabha.”

At Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards’ words, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, chanted a Buddhist prayer as if he were in a difficult position.

However, contrary to his expression, his inner thoughts were completely different.

Rather, he was grateful that his wish had been fulfilled.

-Mortal? Mortal?

Cheong-ryeong called out to Mok Gyeong-un, who had become dazed while staring at the wall.

She thought there might be a problem, but realizing that Mok Gyeong-un’s gaze was fixed on the stone wall of the meditation cave, she stopped calling out to him.

‘Could it be that he fell into a state of enlightenment in that brief moment?’

The current phenomenon was the same as when one fell into a meditative state.

But he hadn’t opened his Ghostly Eyes and deeply concentrated on the hand seals, yet he fell into a meditative state for the second time after the tombstone without any signs.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong found it strange.

His concentration was indeed stronger than hers when she was alive, but for such realizations to come in succession was an unusual phenomenon.

Even if this place was the birthplace of orthodox martial arts, Shaolin.

‘Could it be...’

It was right at that moment.

A five-colored light was emitting from the top of Mok Gyeong-un’s head as he had his eyes closed.

‘Ah!’

At this, Cheong-ryeong couldn’t hide her excitement.

‘Grasping with a non-existent arm...’

An action that should have been impossible actually became possible.

Moreover, since the water had flowed down, it should have been approached with the concept of supporting rather than grasping, but he was even grasping it.

All of this was no different from nothingness becoming existence through willpower.

Strong willpower made all of this possible.

‘Willpower...’

Because of this, Mok Gyeong-un gained a huge enlightenment different from before.

The various principles contained in that simple action turned his mind upside down, and they gradually became organized one by one.

The understanding of qi, which he had only vaguely perceived until now, was also the same.

In the end, qi was not something far away.

Everything that existed was qi, and qi was everything that existed.

‘So this is how it was.’

Now he felt like he truly understood what qi was.

It was a truly mysterious thing.

Just by observing this process, everything that had been blocked became unblocked.

‘Is this what a true qi master looks like?’

-Swish!

Then, Mok Gyeong-un saw the practitioner who had been staring at the stone wall with his eyes lowering the kasaya cloth covering his head.

His dark skin and curly beard, quite different from the people of the Central Plains, were revealed.

The moment he saw this, something flashed through Mok Gyeong-un’s mind.

‘Could it be?’

Curiosity arose in Mok Gyeong-un, and he tried to approach to see that face.

Then, the one who had lowered the kasaya spoke.

[If you have gained enough, now return to where you belong.]

‘!?’

For a moment, Mok Gyeong-un faltered.

He was convinced that all these scenes unfolding were happening within an enlightenment.

However, that practitioner staring at the stone wall spoke as if he were aware of Mok Gyeong-un’s presence.

Finding this strange, Mok Gyeong-un approached to see his face, and at that moment,

-Swish!

The cave where snowflakes had been fluttering returned to its original state as if nothing had happened.

Mok Gyeong-un frowned at the cave that had become silent as if nothing had occurred and the floor where water had pooled.

What was going on?

He had experienced countless visualizations, but none had been as vivid and immersive as this one.

Moreover, those last words still lingered in his mind.

‘...I was merely observing.’

Why did those last words sound like they were spoken to him, not to the practicing monk who had cut off his own arm?

It was even confusing.

Then, Cheong-ryeong’s voice reached Mok Gyeong-un’s ears.

-Mortal!

At her excited voice, Mok Gyeong-un answered in puzzlement.

“What is it?”

-...Let me ask you directly. Did you break through the blocked wall?

She had already witnessed the five-colored light emanating from the top of Mok Gyeong-un's head and enveloping his entire body when he fell into the visualization.

So she was already convinced of it.

At her question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and opened his mouth to answer.

“The wall you're talking about...”

-Rumble rumble rumble!

At that moment, the entire cave shook, the ceiling cracked, and fragments crumbled down.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head from the stone wall of the meditation cave to look at the cave opening he had slid down from.

From there, fierce demonic energy and screams were rampant.

“Om somani somani hum arihanna arihanna hum...”

-Crunch!

The diabolic beast Alyu bit off the upper body of one of the Demon-Subduing monks who were chanting the Demon-Subduing mantra and wielding the dharma weapon, the Vajra Pestle.

As it chewed on the torn-off upper body, one of the Demon-Subduing monks, unable to contain his anger and losing his senses, rushed forward.

“Deok-myeo-eo-eo-eong!”

-Squish!

However, that demon-subduing monk was soon trampled by hooves, becoming unrecognizable.

In an instant, five demon-subduing monks lost their lives, and the eyes of the remaining demon-subduing monks were now filled with fear and terror.

As if sensing this, the magical beast Alyu roared with a voice full of exhilaration.

“Kiriririririk!”

For the evil and deluded, human negative emotions such as fear and terror were no different from nourishment.

Consuming humans in that state was the ultimate delicacy.

‘Kirik! This is the best. Fear more! Fear even more!’

The magical beast Alyu was determined to pay back for everything he had suffered during the 99 days he was trapped.

Of course, he had no intention of fighting against the entire Shaolin.

His goal was to kill these damn demon-subduing monks to vent his anger and then leave Shaolin.

‘The only regret is not being able to kill that bastard.’

It would have been very entertaining to see these bald monks and that bitch fight if he had managed to kill that bastard who was under the protection of that monster fox, but it was quite regrettable.

So, to alleviate this regret even a little, he had to kill these bald bastards in the cruelest way possible before leaving this place.

At that moment, something glared at the magical beast Alyu’s red eyes.

Alyu soon lowered his head.

-Clang!

What flew was none other than the vajra pestle imbued with Dharma power.

The one who threw the vajra pestle was none other than the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master.

Just by looking at his appearance with his robe soaked in blood, one could tell that his injuries were quite severe.

“Haa... Haa... Everyone, get a hold of yourselves. We must keep that demon here until reinforcements arrive!”

At his shout, some of the demon-subduing monks gritted their teeth and tightly grasped their vajra pestles again.

Seeing this, the magical beast Alyu let out a chuckle.

Seeing the dying bastard trying to revive the morale with all his might, it seemed the leader was indeed a leader.

‘So, if I kill you, old man, these bald bastards won’t be able to do much anymore!’

-Bang!

The magical beast Alyu then kicked the ground and charged towards the injured Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master.

Surprised by this, some of the demon-subduing monks simultaneously threw their vajra pestles at the beast.

-Clang clang clang clang!

However, it was impossible to stop the magical beast Alyu, who couldn’t be easily subdued even if over a hundred demon-subduing monks attacked, with just five vajra pestles.

At this, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master tried to confront the beast by personally drawing upon his Dharma power.

“Om somani somani hum ari... Cough.”

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master, who was chanting the demon-subduing mantra, soon vomited a handful of blood.

In an instant, despair filled the eyes of the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master.

He had lived most of his life as a demon-subduing monk, but to think that his end would be at the hands of a demon, it was truly strange.

Was all of this ultimately karmic retribution?

As the magical beast Alyu approached closer, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master soon closed his eyes.

Although it was in vain, if this was death, what could he do?

He inwardly chanted the Buddha's name.

‘Amita...’

-Kwaaang!

At that very moment, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master frowned and opened his eyes at the tremendous roaring sound that echoed in his ears.

‘!!!!!!!!!’

An astonishing scene unfolded before his eyes.

The head of the magical beast Alyu was pressed down, half-buried in the ground, and above its head, someone was standing with the corners of his mouth raised.

“Patron?”

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Chapter 302 – Diabolic Beast (4)

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master was so startled that he couldn't close his mouth.

What on earth just happened?

The other Demon-Subduing monks were the same.

They witnessed what had just occurred with their own eyes, but they were so shocked that they were at a loss for words.

“Just now... What was that?”

“Wh-what in the world is this?”

Mok Gyeong-un, who suddenly appeared, leaped down from above onto the head of the diabolic beast Alyu.

From this point on, unbelievable things were already happening.

His weight couldn't have been that heavy, but Alyu toppled forward, and its head was soon buried in the cave floor.

At that moment, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master opened his mouth.

“Patron, where on earth have you been?”

“The cave walls were weaker than I thought. By the way, I wasn't gone for long, but it seems the situation has gotten a bit out of hand.”

“Cough cough.”

“But for something you said you had subdued once before, it looks like you're in quite a predicament, am I right?”

“Are you being sarcastic right now... Patron!”

Just as the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master was about to say something out of anger, he suddenly shouted in surprise.

That was because the tail of the diabolic beast Alyu, whose head was buried in the ground, suddenly flew towards Mok Gyeong-un like a whip.

The force was tremendous, but Mok Gyeong-un raised his arm in the direction the tail was flying.

-Whoosh!

With a sound like flesh being torn, the end of the tail wrapped around Mok Gyeong-un’s wrist.

Seeing this, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

It was clear that the force of the flying tail seemed to be trying to send Mok Gyeong-un flying from above his head.

But the tail was wrapped around his wrist, so did it have another trick up its sleeve?

‘What is this bastard?’

Of course, that wasn’t the case.

The diabolic beast Alyu couldn’t hide its inner confusion.

Although it didn’t know what exactly had happened, Alyu, whose head was suddenly stepped on by Mok Gyeong-un, became furious and tried to quickly raise its head.

However, Alyu couldn't lift its head.

Thinking that he might have used some magical technique, Alyu first tried to shake off Mok Gyeong-un with its tail.

It naturally expected Mok Gyeong-un to be sent flying after being hit by its tail.

But that expectation was off the mark.

‘What strength does this bastard have?’

The reason Alyu's tail was wrapped around Mok Gyeong-un's arm was because, despite receiving the impact, he endured it like a massive old tree that had taken root for hundreds of years.

-Tighten!

It was useless even when it concentrated its demonic power on its tail to try and sever his wrist.

Of course, pulling didn't work either.

What the hell is this bastard?

Suddenly, it felt completely different from before.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un's voice reached the diabolic beast Alyu's ears.

“This is my first time using the Thousand-Pound Weight, but it seems quite heavy for you. Seeing how you're stuck to the ground and can't even budge.”

‘You damn human bastard!’

-Grit!

The diabolic beast Alyu couldn't hold back its anger at Mok Gyeong-un's provocative words.

A mere human climbed on top of its head and made disparaging remarks, making it want to tear him to pieces right away.

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master, worried about Mok Gyeong-un's provocation, warned him.

“Cough cough. Patron. Don't provoke the demon too much. For now, just keep it tied up like that. Reinforcements will arrive soon. At that time, this humble monk and the Demon-Subduing monks will restrain it again with the restraints...”

-Grrrr!

Before he could even finish speaking.

The cave floor shook as if an earthquake had occurred.

It was a phenomenon caused not only by the tug-of-war between Mok Gyeong-un, who was using the Thousand-Pound Weight, and the diabolic beast Alyu, who was trying to get up by putting strength into its hooves.

“Huh?”

“Priest!”

At this, the nearby Demon-Subduing monks hurriedly supported the staggering Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master in front of Alyu's head and moved as far away as possible.

-Grrrr! Crackle crackle!

The floor shook even more violently and even began to crack.

Nevertheless, Mok Gyeong-un still remained motionless on top of the diabolic beast Alyu's head.

-Groan! Groan!

Then, the diabolic beast Alyu's demonic power surged to an extreme, and its red fur stood up like thorns, and a purple smoke of acid spewed out from there.

But that wasn't the end of it.

The diabolic beast Alyu's head swayed, and then it spewed out a purple smoke from its mouth.

As a result, the floor melted, and the terrible acid began to spread in all directions along the floor.

"Dodge it! Get out of the way!"

"H-how can we deal with this?"

The Demon-Subduing monks near the dented iron door might not know, but without mastering the Light Body Technique, there was no way they could avoid the smoke that would melt anything it touched in this brief moment.

But at that instant, Mok Gyeong-un quickly formed hand seals in a simplified manner.

-Pak! Pak! Pak!

Soldier! Fight! Split! Formation!

They were the hand seals of the Nine Hand Seals.

In an instant, four pillars shot up in the direction the smoke was spreading, along with tremendous spirit power.

-Rumble!

Seeing this scene, the Demon-Subduing monks stuck to the end of the cave wall couldn't hide their astonishment.

As Demon-Subduing monks who had mastered dharmic powers, they could see things with their naked eyes that ordinary people couldn't, such as spirit power and demonic power.

But that wasn't the end of it.

Mok Gyeong-un put his sword fingers to his mouth and muttered softly.

“Four Peaks Linking Technique.”

-Whoosh!

Surfaces were formed by the four pillars.

As the surfaces were formed, the purple smoke that had been spreading towards the Demon-Subduing monks was soon blocked by the wall of spirit power.

The smoke made of acid was blocked at a critical moment.

Seeing this scene, some of the young Demon-Subduing monks couldn't help but cheer involuntarily.

“Wow!”

“Gasp!”

But they soon closed their mouths as they noticed the looks from the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master and their senior monks.

However, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master himself couldn't hide his inner astonishment at Mok Gyeong-un's magical technique skills.

Although he didn't acknowledge magical techniques, he understood that they were also performed through the harmony of spirit power and technique formulas.

‘Fast.’

But the speed at which the technique formula was completed was tremendous.

This was because the spirit power quickly took shape.

If it had been just a little slower, everyone in the cave would have melted in that smoke made of acid.

However, the astonishment was short-lived.

‘Huh?’

-Grip!

At that moment, when Mok Gyeong-un made a gesture of clenching his hand, the pillars began to move and gradually narrow the distance.

Then, the smoke that had been blocked by the surface of spirit power was also pushed and gathered.

At this, the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master shouted in surprise.

“Patron! What are you doing? Stop it right now!”

It was a crazy act.

If the pillars narrowed, the smoke would inevitably gather in one direction.

The wall made of spirit power might be able to block that smoke infused with demonic power, but that patron with a mere human body couldn't.

He could melt and die from the acid.

“Patron!”

But inside the Four Peaks Linking Technique, as if his voice couldn't reach, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't hear his shout at all.

Rather, as if trying to finish it off inside,

-Swish!

He raised his fist on the opposite side that wasn't tied by the tail, and then,

-Bam!

He strongly struck down on the crown between the horns of the diabolic beast Alyu, who had barely lifted its body halfway up while spewing smoke.

“Kekekekek!”

As soon as he did that, the diabolic beast Alyu stopped spewing out the acidic smoke in pain and let out a roar of agony.

However, this scene couldn’t be seen from the outside.

Because at some point, the four sides of the Four Peaks Linking Technique were obscured by the purple smoke.

It was impossible to know what was happening inside that smoke.

The only thing that could be guessed was,

-Bam! Bam! Bam!

The intense booming sounds that shook the cave floor.

The Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master and the Demon-Subduing monks could only watch this absentmindedly.

“Kiriririri!”

The diabolic beast Alyu, suffering from the continuous punches, released its tail that had been holding Mok Gyeong-un’s wrist and moved its head in an attempt to somehow get him off its head.

-Whoosh! Bam!

“Get down! Get down right now!”

Mok Gyeong-un, who was standing while holding the horns of the diabolic beast Alyu, chuckled.

Then, he raised his fist once more and strongly struck down on the crown of the diabolic beast Alyu.

-Bam!

“Kekekek!”

-Crash!

The jaw of the diabolic beast Alyu, hit by the fist, finally fell to the ground.

It tried to endure it somehow with anger, but the diabolic beast Alyu was now on the verge of losing consciousness due to the repeated pain inflicted on its head.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un struck down on the diabolic beast Alyu’s head once again.

-Bam!

The jaw of Alyu, whose head was hit, dug into the ground.

Not stopping there, Mok Gyeong-un continued to strike down on Alyu’s head with a constant force.

-Bam! Bam! Bam!

With the repeated pain, Alyu finally cried out.

“Kiririk! St-stop! Stooooop!”

It was too painful, and there was no pride or anything.

However, Mok Gyeong-un paid no heed to this and kept striking down on the diabolic beast Alyu’s head.

-Bam! Bam! Bam! Crunch!

No matter how much he struck with uniform force, if this continued, it would naturally break and collapse.

“Kekekekeke!”

The image of that past flashed through the diabolic beast Alyu’s mind.

The miserable sight of its kin’s heads being shattered and torn off by the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

Recalling this, the diabolic beast Alyu, who hadn’t felt fear even when it was dragged by the Demon-Subduing monks of Shaolin, suddenly became terrified and pleaded like crazy.

“Kirik kirik! Sp-spare me! Please spare me!”

-Rumble rumble!

‘!?’

Suddenly, an even greater number of warrior monks from the Arhat Pavilion rushed in and soon surrounded Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates who were waiting in the center of the courtyard – the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, Mong Mu-yak, Seop Chun, Ma Ra-hyeon, and Holy Fire Priestess, who was the most important for this mission.

‘Why are they increasing the numbers even more?’

‘Something's strange.’

Originally, they were surrounding them because of the Demonic Beast Heum-won, but the atmosphere was quite different.

The newly appeared warrior monks from the Arhat Pavilion had eyes full of wariness and were assuming the basic fighting stance, as if they were ready to fight at any moment.

Moreover, the formation in which they were surrounding them was clearly a battle formation.

Being in the middle of this, the air became heavy due to the energy of the formation, making it difficult to breathe.

At this, Seop Chun stepped forward and shouted.

“Our lord hasn't even returned yet, so what are you doing?”

“Are you trying to break the agreement made by the elder of Shaolin?”

Mong Mu-yak also supported this.

In response to their protest, Grand Monk Museong of the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall, also stepped forward and said,

“Amitabha. There seems to be some misunderstanding. Please calm down and wait a moment.”

After soothing them in this way, Grand Monk Museong turned his gaze to the warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion and spoke.

“The patron who went to the Demon-Subduing Cave hasn’t returned yet, so why are the warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion surrounding them? Dismantle the formation immediately.”

At the command of Grand Monk Museong, who was the eldest among them except for the Meditation Master of Shaolin, the warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion hesitated for a moment, then turned their heads in unison and looked at someone behind them.

It was none other than,

“Amitabha.”

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, the overseer of the Precepts Hall.

Beside Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, there was a military official wearing armor.

He was Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards.

Seeing him standing arrogantly with his hands behind his back, Grand Monk Museong of the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall, couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

“Why is a military official here?”

In response to that question, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok stepped forward.

“Amitabha. Venerable Monk. This military official is the Commander of the Imperial Guards from the imperial palace in Kaifeng. He has come to our temple leading soldiers to pursue traitors, under the orders of His Majesty the Emperor.”

“His Majesty the Emperor? Traitors?”

At Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s words, even the warrior monks who knew nothing about it were at a loss.

What does he mean by traitors?

On the other hand, Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates couldn’t hide their dilemma.

‘Damn it.’

The situation they had been most worried about had finally occurred.

They had been quite nervous because the demon beast Heum-won had been attacked by the Demon-Subduing monks and fell into the middle of Shaolin Temple, and as a result, they were stuck here.

But now, the pursuit from the imperial palace had finally reached this place.

‘What should we do about this?’

It seemed that the warrior monks would pressure them as traitors, regardless of the agreement.

They were perplexed because their lord hadn’t even arrived yet.

The warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion had already surrounded them, so they couldn’t escape either.

The cheekbones of Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok twitched.

Although he tried his best not to show it, he couldn't help but feel excited because things were going better than he had hoped.

‘Regardless of whether an agreement was made or not, now that we have the justification of them being traitors, we can act according to the rules. On top of that, if we can use this opportunity to retrieve the Nine Seals of Unobstructed Great Ability from the Virtue Gate, it will be killing two birds with one stone. Amitabha. All of this is the guidance of the Buddha. Hohoho.’

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok was inwardly satisfied, then raised one hand in a half-fold posture, pointed at them, and spoke.

“Amitabha. Disciples of Shaolin, listen. They are traitors of the imperial palace...”

-Thud!

Before he could even finish speaking.

Suddenly, from somewhere, the ground of the courtyard shook with a booming sound.

What on earth was going on?

At that moment, someone among the warrior monks shouted.

“Lo-look over there!”

At this, everyone in the courtyard, including Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok who had been interrupted while speaking, turned their gazes in that direction.

It was the path leading to the back garden of Shaolin.

From there, a huge monster with red fur all over its body and horns on its head, resembling a dragon, was seen walking with its massive body.

But someone was riding on top of its head, and...

“My lord!”

Seop Chun, who recognized him first, shouted with a look of joy.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Seeing him appearing majestically while riding the diabolic beast (Alyu, which should have been trapped in the Demon-Subduing Cave, the expression of Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, immediately distorted.

Chapter 303 – Domineering Steps (1)

-Thud! Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un, majestically appearing like a triumphant general while riding the diabolic beast Alyu, which should have been trapped in the Demon-Subduing Cave.

Seeing him like that, everyone in the courtyard couldn't hide their astonishment.

This was something that even Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates, who had pledged their loyalty to him, were doubtful of and couldn't be certain about.

‘He really did it?’

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong stared at Mok Gyeong-un in a daze.

As a former member of Shaolin, he knew better than anyone the skills of the Demon-Subduing monks.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un had accomplished what even they couldn't do.

“Ha! He may be the lord I serve, but at times like this, it's truly incredible. Don't you think, Mu-yak?”

“.....”

At Seop Chun's words, Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue and nodded his head.

He had wondered what the fuss was about when they mentioned a demon or something.

But after seeing the diabolic beast Alyu, which was slightly larger than a two-story building, he wondered how on earth it was tamed.

The overwhelming presence emanating from the diabolic beast Alyu was on a different level from ordinary beasts.

It was a dangerous existence that couldn't be placed in the category of ferocious beasts or anything like that.

The masked Ma Ra-hyeon quietly said to them, who were excited.

“Now is not the time to rejoice over this. Since the pursuit has come from the imperial palace, that agreement is already as good as broken.”

Along with those words, Ma Ra-hyeon glanced at Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards.

He also seemed shocked to see the monster for the first time and was momentarily at a loss for words.

‘Things have gotten complicated.’

Although he had never conversed with him directly, he had heard rumors about that person.

Due to his extremely arrogant temperament, he wasn’t selected for the Embroidered Uniform Guard, but his skills alone were considered among the top three in the Imperial Guards.

‘Why did it have to be him?’

That Kang-hak was notorious for being very persistent.

With a strong desire for power, he would stop at nothing to arrest them, regardless of the means and methods, in order to achieve results.

“Amitabha. It is truly remarkable. Remarkable indeed.”

Grand Monk Museong of the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall, exclaimed in admiration.

Although he also valued discipline, considering the mistakes of the Demon-Subduing monks and the inability to impose discipline on laypeople, he had given them a chance.

But seeing such perfect control over the demon, he couldn’t help but acknowledge it.

-Thud! Thud!

As the diabolic beast Alyu approached the Arhat Pavilion, Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards, who was standing next to Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, spoke while still unable to close his mouth in shock.

“...What on earth is that? Venerable Monk.”

“Please calm down, Commander. That demon was captured by Shaolin because it was causing harm.”

“You said it was captured? But who is that person riding on top of it?”

“As you can see, that person is not from Shaolin.”

“I can tell that just by looking at his hair. Wait, could it be...”

“He is one of the traitors you mentioned, Commander.”

“Then we must capture that person immediately!”

“Please give this humble monk a moment...”

“Monk, you clearly said that Shaolin had nothing to do with the traitors. But what difference is there between leaving the traitors alone like this and Shaolin protecting them? If this is how it’s going to be, we have no choice but to search Shaolin.”

At Commander Kang-hak’s words, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok frowned.

He had brought this person in as a pretext to handle everything according to the rules, but he turned out to be a more troublesome patron than expected.

At that moment, Grand Monk Museong of the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall, approached and said,

“Amitabha. You keep mentioning traitors, but what exactly do you mean by that?”

“Venerable Monk, they are traitors who helped prisoners escape from the imperial palace.”

“Helped prisoners escape from the imperial palace?”

“It is as I said. Furious at this, His Majesty the Emperor has ordered the capture of the traitors. Venerable Monk, we must arrest them immediately.”

“Oh my. Fellow Venerable Monk.”

Grand Monk Museong couldn't hide his predicament.

He roughly grasped the main point.

However, it was an extremely ironic situation.

He had already given them a chance through his own words, and they had firmly seized that opportunity.

“Venerable Monk, do you not see that?”

-Thud! Thud!

Grand Monk Museong pointed with his hand at the diabolic beast Alyu, which had approached close to the courtyard, and Mok Gyeong-un, who was riding on its head.

“That patron has succeeded in controlling the demon. But how can we break an agreement made in the name of Shaolin?”

“Amitabha. Venerable Monk. We are not breaking the agreement.”

“Not breaking it? What do you mean?”

“What you agreed to, Venerable Monk, was that if they showed that they could control the demon, you would also release that flying demon over there.”

At Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s words, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong shouted angrily.

“Isn’t that too far-fetched?”

“Far-fetched?”

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok snorted and looked at Ja Geum-jeong, saying,

“An expelled monk who broke the precepts as often as eating meals after drinking alcohol is now saying it’s far-fetched? Did you think that even though Shaolin cultivates the Buddhist way and values compassion, it would protect traitors who harm the country?”

“Fellow Venerable Monk!”

At his words, Grand Monk Museong strongly reprimanded him.

In a situation where he had to speak cautiously, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok was now talking as if he represented Shaolin.

This was an extremely dangerous remark.

However, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, who couldn’t miss this opportunity, didn’t abandon his stubborn attitude despite the reprimand from Grand Monk Museong, who had a higher rank.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok spoke even louder so that everyone could hear.

“Right now, outside Shaolin, government troops from the imperial capital of Kaifeng have gathered. If the temple does not hand over the traitors, not only them but more imperial troops will come and conduct a search. Will you allow this?”

“!!!!!”

-Murmur murmur!

“Search the temple?”

“What on earth is that about?”

At Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s words, the monks of Shaolin in the courtyard became agitated.

It may be called a search, but if they didn’t hand over those people, it was no different from saying that they were also in cahoots with them.

Shaolin had never knelt or bent to any external pressure or enemy.

But even for Shaolin, if a country deliberately sent troops, the situation would change.

No, it could be said to become complicated.

“Amitabha.”

Grand Monk Museong’s mind became complicated.

Until now, it was a problem that could be handled on his own.

However, with the involvement of the military official and the imperial palace, the matter had become too big.

This was close to the level where all the priests, including the Meditation Master of Shaolin, had to gather and hold a meeting.

At that moment, Mong Mu-yak, one of Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates, stepped forward and shouted.

“Venerable Monk! The Demon-Subduing monks of Shaolin attacked this monstrous bird we were riding, causing it to fall here, and we almost died. Even though the monks of Buddhism nearly committed murder, our lord showed understanding despite the lack of a proper apology. But how can the great Shaolin, the most senior, so easily break the agreement made?”

“That's right. Shaolin is a place for Buddhist disciples who have cut ties with the secular world, so are you trying not to let us go just to appease the government troops?”

Seop Chun supported Mong Mu-yak in this way.

At their words, which were somewhat logical, Grand Monk Museong couldn't hide his predicament.

There was nothing wrong with what they said.

However, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok and Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards were different.

Commander Kang-hak shouted in a voice filled with anger.

“You bastards! You sneaked into the imperial palace and helped a vicious prisoner escape, committing the crime of treason, and now you dare to mention government troops?”

-Shing!

Kang-hak half-drew his sword from his waist.

At this, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok hurriedly stopped him.

“Amitabha. Commander, please calm down.”

“Calm down? Whose side is Shaolin on? You clearly said that Shaolin had nothing to do with the traitors, but now it seems that’s not the case at all.”

‘Troublesome patron indeed.’

He had intended to use him as a mere pawn, but he kept pouring fuel on the fire.

He understood his intention to push them and easily catch those people, but it was problematic for him to intervene in this way.

Feeling that this wouldn’t do, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok spoke in a loud voice.

“Warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion, listen. As the overseer of the Precepts Hall of Shaolin, I command you. Subdue and restrain them immediately!”

At his command, the warrior monks of the Arhat Pavilion hesitated.

If they were indeed traitors, it would be right to subdue them, but since the opinion of Grand Monk Museong, who had a higher rank than Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, differed, it was difficult for them to act recklessly.

As a result, the overseer of the Arhat Pavilion, the leader of the warrior monks, finally opened his mouth.

“Venerable Monk. The agreement regarding controlling the demon or not is a separate matter from this. If they are truly traitors, Shaolin could be in danger.”

“Oh my.”

Unfortunately, the opinion of the overseer of the Arhat Pavilion was the same as that of Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, the overseer of the Precepts Hall.

From the perspective of the overseer of the Arhat Pavilion, the intention was to handle the matter within their own capacity and not create a situation where imperial troops would gather.

At that moment, someone who had crossed the pavilion intervened.

“Amitabha. That shouldn’t be said. How can Shaolin break an agreement it made out of fear of a search by imperial troops?”

It was Grand Monk Gong-jeon, the overseer of the Sutra Pavilion.

At this, the overseer of the Arhat Pavilion replied with a perplexed expression.

“Amitabha. Venerable Monk. That’s not what I meant. If Shaolin is falsely accused of protecting traitors...”

“When heaven and earth have witnessed it and we are upright, why should we fear such a thing? You said a military official came from the imperial palace? Shaolin is a temple that cultivates the Buddhist way. If you must arrest them as traitors, do it outside, not in Shaolin.”

At Grand Monk Gong-jeon’s words, Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards said as if it were absurd.

“Now that I see it, it seems Shaolin has properly colluded with the traitors. Protecting prisoners who helped a vicious criminal escape, you must be out of your minds.”

“Amitabha. Why is the military official pushing us in such a way?”

“Shaolin is supposed to be a place that values cooperation and justice, but even after seeing the evildoers who committed treason, you say you’ll just let them go without knowing. How is this pushing you? Anyway, I understand Shaolin’s intention well. In Shaolin, no longer...”

-Flinch!

Suddenly, Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards couldn’t finish his words.

That was because of the eerie presence felt from behind.

“Since you called us evildoers, I should do as you wish.”

‘!?’

The expression of Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, who was next to Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards, froze.

The owner of this voice was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

When did he come behind them?

They didn’t even sense him approaching.

-Grab!

“Ugh!”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the back of Commander Kang-hak's neck.

As someone who had risen to the position of Commander of the Imperial Guards, Kang-hak, who had reached the pinnacle-stage of the Peak Realm, tried to resist and break free.

However,

-Tighten!

“Urk!”

He instinctively sensed it.

The strength gripping the back of his neck was so strong that if he resisted even slightly, it felt like his neck would be torn off.

Mok Gyeong-un grinned at him and said,

“Like an evildoer, I should take you hostage and leave this place.”

“How dare you!”

At that moment, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok hurriedly turned his body and unleashed the Dragon Claw Hand towards Mok Gyeong-un, who was gripping the back of Kang-hak's neck, in an attempt to save him.

Each of the Seventy-two Unique Arts of Shaolin was close to being a supreme technique, but...

-Bam bam bam bam bam!

Mok Gyeong-un lightly blocked his Dragon Claw Hand with one hand.

He wasn't using any special technique but was matching the moves of the Dragon Claw Hand, and at some point, Mok Gyeong-un's hand movements resembled the Dragon Claw Hand.

At this, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok couldn't hide his astonishment.

In the midst of exchanging techniques, Mok Gyeong-un was copying his own technique.

How could there be such a cunning person?

‘In that case!’

Feeling that this wouldn't do, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok unleashed a fierce palm strike towards Mok Gyeong-un.

It was the most domineering and powerful technique of the Shaolin Bronze Sand Palm, a palm strike that pushed the opponent with profound internal energy.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un also unleashed the same palm technique.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok smiled contentedly at Mok Gyeong-un's response.

‘I'll subdue him with internal energy.’

Having cultivated the divine technique of Shaolin, the True Sutra of Marrow Washing, he possessed vast and profound internal energy.

Therefore, he was confident that he would not lose to anyone in terms of internal energy.

Moreover, no matter how much this young patron in his mid-twenties had reached a high level, there was no way he could defeat him in internal energy...

-Bang!

‘Impossible!?’

-Slide!

The moment their palms collided, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok’s body was pushed back more than ten steps.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok couldn’t hide his perplexity as he looked at his trembling hand.

Unlike himself, who was pushed back, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t budge a single step despite holding Commander Kang-hak of the Imperial Guards.

‘!!!!!!’

Seeing this scene, the eyes of the warrior monks of Shaolin widened.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, one of the top three masters of Shaolin known as the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin, was pushed back in an internal energy clash against a young master whose name wasn’t even known.

‘How could this be?’

Chapter 304 – Domineering Steps (2)

The Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, one of the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin.

He held the third-highest monastic rank at Shaolin, but in reality, he was only a year or two apart from those above him in terms of internal energy cultivation.

Having mastered the Bone Marrow Cleansing Scripture and the Mahayana Heavenly God Technique, it was no exaggeration to say that among the orthodox warriors, none could match his internal energy except for the Six Heavens and Eight Stars masters.

Yet, such a man was overwhelmed in internal energy by a newcomer whose name was not even known, someone who appeared to be in his mid-twenties at most.

‘Oh my. How astonishing.’

‘He overwhelmed Dae-deok in inner strength?’

From the perspective of the other two Supreme Monks of Shaolin, the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon and the Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong, they couldn’t help but inwardly marvel at this.

They had predicted to some extent that Mok Gyeong-un was no ordinary master, but who would have guessed that in terms of internal energy, the purest and most robust inner force of Shaolin would prevail against a formidable expert?

-Sssssss!

At that moment, a haze rose from the hands and shoulders of Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok.

This phenomenon occurred when dispelling the opponent’s energy.

‘Not only is his inner strength formidable, but his energy is also bizarre.’

The moment it made contact, a portion of his internal energy scattered.

If it weren't for the pure internal energy of Shaolin, this phenomenon would have been even more severe.

-Clench!

Dae-deok unconsciously bit his lip tightly.

Although he had cultivated the Buddhist path for a long time, his temperament was more sensitive compared to other high-ranking monks, making it difficult for him to tolerate this.

‘How can such humiliation be possible?’

It was utterly shameful in front of Shaolin's disciples.

However, as an elder, he had too much pride to openly express this, so Dae-deok tried his best to manage his expression and spoke.

“Amitabha. The internal energy of the young patron is truly extraordinary.”

“For a venerable monk who has cultivated internal energy for such a long time, your inner strength is quite weak.”

“.....”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Dae-deok's earlobes trembled.

The young man was deliberately provoking him.

It seemed he was doing so because he had already judged himself to have the upper hand in internal energy.

This infuriated Dae-deok inwardly, but he maintained his composure.

‘Phew.’

Being inferior in internal energy did not necessarily mean complete defeat, but if they were to face each other one-on-one again, it was undeniable that the probability of losing was significantly higher.

Therefore, Dae-deok believed that driving the situation, rather than a direct confrontation, was the only answer.

“Patron. I am well aware that your martial arts are extraordinary. However, no matter how exceptional they may be, this is not something that can be tolerated at the moment. Release the military officer at once.”

“Ah. You mean this person?”

Mok Gyeong-un pointed with his eyes at Commander Kang-hak, whose neck was grasped by his hand.

“That’s right.”

“Well. Why should I do that?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s response, Dae-deok inwardly exclaimed with delight.

Yes. He was grateful that he came out like that.

If he faithfully played the role of the villain, their side could take the opposite approach.

Dae-deok assumed the stance of the Small Golden Strong Acid Hand and raised his voice towards Mok Gyeong-un.

“Amitabha. I had my doubts since you were called a traitor, but are you really going to take a hostage and do as you please like this?”

-Murmur murmur!

At Dae-deok’s outcry, the reaction of the warrior monks of Arhat Pavilion, who were watching, changed drastically.

Until now, they were at a loss as to what to do when opinions differed among the Supreme Monks of Shaolin with higher ranks.

However, it was different in the case of taking a hostage right in the heart of Shaolin.

-Rumble rumble!

The surrounding warrior monks moved in unison.

Then, eighteen warrior monks surrounded Mok Gyeong-un, forming the Eighteen Arhats Formation, and aimed their staffs at him.

“Patron. Release the hostage at once!”

As one of the warrior monks shouted, Dae-deok barely managed to suppress the twitching of his lips.

It was going as intended.

The monks of Shaolin were disciples of Buddha, so they always contemplated right and wrong.

This was a lifelong study and a common issue for all, whether they were young or old monks.

However, if they were given a clear justification for righteousness, they changed.

‘Patron.....You absolutely cannot escape from here.’

Confronting him alone was one thing, but confronting Shaolin was different.

Even if he was a transcendent master who had surpassed the wall, if Shaolin decided to take action, it would be difficult to guarantee victory, let alone be careless.

At that moment.

-Clench!

“Ugh.”

Mok Gyeong-un tightly grasped Commander Kang-hak’s neck and spoke.

“It seems you don’t understand the meaning of a hostage. If you act like this, more force will inevitably be applied to the hand grasping the neck.”

“How dare you!”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s threat, anger surged in the eyes of the surrounding Arhat warrior monks.

To them, taking a hostage was an act of cowardice itself.

At that moment, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok spoke in a loud voice.

“If the patron is going to act in such a cowardly manner, this humble monk has no choice. Arhat warrior monks, surround them immediately.”

“Yes!!!!”

At Dae-deok’s command, the waiting Arhat warrior monks shouted in unison and surrounded Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates: Mong Mu-yak, Seop Chun, Ma Ra-hyeon, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, and the Holy Fire Priestess.

By their side was the Demonic Beast Heum-won, so 64 Arhat warrior monks lined up and formed an encirclement.

“Dae-deok! What are you doing now?”

Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong pressured him with a similar response, threatening his fellow monks.

Dae-deok snorted and said.

“When that wicked patron has even taken a hostage, how long are you going to let yourself be dragged around with agreements and whatnot? Master, please come to your senses!”

“Master!”

“Demon-Subduing Monks, subdue those monsters without harming the Arhat warrior monks!”

Dae-deok ignored Museong’s reprimand and issued orders to the Demon-Subduing Monks.

However, unlike the Arhat warrior monks who acted as intended, none of the Demon-Subduing Monks moved.

Dae-deok raised his voice at this.

“Why are you just standing there?”

Then, someone staggered out from among the Demon-Subduing Monks.

His monk’s robe was stained with blood from his injuries. He was none other than the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master.

“Amitabha. Cough cough. We humble monks cannot do that.”

“What?”

“Cough....I apologize, but that patron has successfully fulfilled the agreement with the Muscle Tendon Scripture Hall Master.”

“Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master! At this point, what does that have to do with....”

“It matters. Cough cough. That patron saved the lives of us Demon-Subduing Monks, including myself, from the rampaging monsters. How can we, who have already received his grace, break the agreement, let alone repay him?”

“Ha!”

At the Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master’s refusal, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok was dumbfounded.

If those Demon-Subduing Monks did not help, it would become difficult to subdue the monsters, and sacrifices could occur.

‘Demon-Subduing Pavilion Master, why be so stubborn at a time like this?’

Faced with his refusal, Dae-deok, who was in a predicament, clenched his teeth.

It was too late to turn the situation around anyway.

If it was a path to uphold the rules and preserve Shaolin’s honor, it had to be done even if some sacrifices were involved.

‘No matter how stubborn he is, he will have no choice but to step in when the warrior monks are in danger.’

With that, Dae-deok ordered the Arhat warrior monks.

“Arhat warrior monks, quickly those traitors.....”

Before he could even finish his words.

“Amitabha! Everyone, stop!”

At that moment, Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong shouted in a lion’s roar-like voice.

At his resounding voice filled with internal energy that reverberated like an echo, the warrior monks, without exception, frowned.

Ma Ra-hyeon inwardly clicked his tongue at Museong’s startling shout.

‘They say he is the best among the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin, and his internal energy is indeed remarkable.’

What was even more surprising was that although it was a sound infused with internal energy, no one was injured.

This meant that Museong had reached the realm of mastery in controlling his true energy.

Startled by Museong's sudden shout, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok opened his mouth.

“Venerable Monk, why.....”

“Dae-deok, be quiet.”

“.....”

At his stern voice, Dae-deok closed his mouth with a stiffened face.

Museong, who had acknowledged his position when he took on the role of hall master and rose to the rank of Precepts Hall Master, always called him ‘Venerable Monk’ despite his higher rank.

However, calling him by his Dharma name like this implied how displeased he was at the moment.

It wasn't just him who sensed this.

All the monks of Shaolin in the hall also seemed to have felt Museong's emotions, as their gazes focused on him.

Then, Museong clasped his hands together and opened his mouth, looking at Mok Gyeong-un.

“Amitabha. First, I apologize to the patrons.”

‘!!!!!’

Surprised by this, Dae-deok tried to stop him.

“Venerable Monk.....”

“I told you to be quiet, Dae-deok.”

“.....”

With the second warning, Dae-deok finally closed his mouth and clasped his hands together.

Even though he was the next-in-line abbot and held the highest rank, he couldn’t stubbornly insist when Museong came out so strongly.

As he closed his mouth, Museong continued.

“Even though we had an agreement with the patrons, this situation arose entirely due to this humble monk’s lack of virtue.”

“Venerable Monk!”

At those words, sighs erupted from here and there.

Even if they had an agreement, if they were traitors who broke out a prisoner from the imperial palace, there was no need for him to lower himself to that extent.

However, with the highest-ranking Museong coming out like this, no matter how respected they were, it was difficult for them to accept it.

At that moment.

“Hmph. Is Shaolin really trying to protect the traitors....”

-Clench!

“Argh!”

As Commander Kang-hak tried to spit out his anger, Mok Gyeong-un grasped his neck, preventing him from speaking.

In that state, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“Thank you for saying that. Then, according to the agreement, will you let us go with the monsters?”

“Amitabha. Patron.”

“Yes.”

“I apologize, but that is no longer possible.”

“Why is that?”

“This humble monk is the elder of Shaolin and a disciple of Shaolin. Now that the situation has come to this, I can no longer let the patrons go. This is due to the difference in our positions, so please do not resent this humble monk even if you blame me.”

‘Well, of course.’

I wondered if he would really let them go now that the situation had come to this, but Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok inwardly exclaimed with delight at Museong's changed stance.

No matter how upright Museong was, he couldn't stubbornly insist on being righteous and noble by himself in this situation.

If he independently let them go, not only would it put them at odds with the imperial palace, but it would also give them a pretext for a search.

Furthermore, if the rumor spread in the orthodox martial arts world that they had released traitors, Shaolin's reputation would hit rock bottom.

"Well, in the end, you share the same opinion as that venerable monk over there."

As soon as those words ended, a voice transmission reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-Amitabha. That is not the case.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes gleamed at the voice transmission.

Come to think of it, Hang Yeo-ryang, the Summoning Sound Valley Master who taught him this technique, seemed to have mentioned that Shaolin was the only place in the orthodox martial arts world where this was possible.

Then, Museong spoke.

-Do not be surprised, Patron. This is this humble monk conveying his voice so that only the patron can hear it.

-I am aware of that.

Mok Gyeong-un replied to this through voice transmission.

At that, Museong responded with surprise, although he did not show it outwardly.

-The patron continues to astound this humble monk in many ways.

Chapter 305 – Domineering Steps (3)

-The patron continues to astound this humble monk in many ways.

-How can such a small talent be astonishing? But why are you sending me a voice transmission?

-It is to convey this humble monk's intentions.

-Your intentions, Venerable Monk?

-If it were this humble monk's personal opinion, I would like to keep the agreement regardless of what the patrons did outside. However, now that the imperial military officer has come here and the patron has taken him hostage, if we let you go, Shaolin may be put in a precarious position.

-Is it because of your standing?

-How could a monk who has renounced the world think of standing? The imperial officials will surely use this as a pretext to pressure the main temple. If the monks who have left the secular world continue to face secular pressure, how can they focus on cultivating the Buddhist path?

At Museong's voice transmission, Mok Gyeong-un looked at him with surprise.

Unlike the Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, he seemed to have a deep Buddhist faith without any selfish motives.

-Then what do you want to do? Do you want us to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the monks?

-How could this humble monk force such a thing?

-Then what?

-I simply wish to give you an opportunity, believing in the patron's martial prowess.

-Opportunity?

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Museong opened his mouth instead of using voice transmission.

"When a conflict with the secular world occurs, Shaolin has overcome it with a simple yet long-standing tradition."

"A long-standing tradition?"

"That's right. No matter how different our positions may be, it is difficult to completely ignore the agreement we made. Since Shaolin is also a disciple of Buddha and a martial artist who hones martial arts, we intend to compete based on the martial arts code."

"....."

"Listen, Arhat warrior monks. Deploy the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation at once!"

"Yes!!!!"

As soon as that command was given.

-Rumble rumble!

The 108 warrior monks, including those who had already deployed the Eighteen Arhats Formation, deployed a formation around Mok Gyeong-un with tremendous spirit.

When the 108 Arhat warrior monks lined up and assumed their stances, their majesty was like witnessing an army of thousands.

What was even more remarkable was that they had only formed a formation, yet their energy doubled and filled the entire hall.

‘.....Impressive.’

This was all too clear in the eyes of Mok Gyeong-un, who had opened his Ghost Eyes.

One by one, ordinary energies converged into a single entity called a formation, becoming so formidable.

Therefore, he couldn’t help but admire it.

At that moment, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong shouted in an angry voice.

“Master! No matter what, isn’t this going too far? What do you mean by competing based on the martial arts code? Isn’t the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation Shaolin’s strongest force?”

The reason Ja Geum-jeong was so agitated was simple.

The Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation was Shaolin’s most powerful formation designed to subdue multiple enemies or transcendent masters of the True Grandmaster level.

It symbolized Shaolin, and among those who had officially faced it, no one had ever broken the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation.

“Amitabha. That’s right. The Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation can indeed be considered Shaolin’s strongest force.”

“Master, this is.....”

“Shh!”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un raised his finger to his lips, gesturing Ja Geum-jeong to be quiet.

Ja Geum-jeong frowned and closed his mouth mid-sentence.

Has his master gone crazy?

Isn’t he afraid of being surrounded by the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation?

While he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un spoke, looking at Museong, who was standing at a distance.

“If you say it’s according to the martial arts code, do you mean we should compete?”

“That’s right. However, I’m not asking you to break it.”

“If you’re not asking me to break it?”

“Presenting the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation, which can be considered Shaolin’s strongest force, to the patron is to express our reverence for the patron’s outstanding martial prowess.”

Is it reverence? Or is it for a definitive outcome?

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said.

“Well, let’s say that’s the case. So, what do you want to do? If not to break it?”

“In the past, after an unpleasant incident, Shaolin further enhanced the formation of the Hundred and Eight Arhats, making it much more perfect than before.”

“.....”

“If you can endure this Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation for just a moment, Shaolin will consider it fate and comply, safely sending the patrons on their way. Of course, if it is not feasible with just the patron alone, you are welcome to join forces with your companions.”

“One moment.....”

“However, if you cannot endure it for a moment, this humble monk will have to hand you over to the imperial palace as traitors, even if the patrons resent me. If we do this, will the military officer from the imperial palace believe that Shaolin is not harboring them?”

“Phew...phew.....”

At Museong’s proposal, Commander Kang-hak, who was being held hostage by Mok Gyeong-un, reluctantly nodded his head as if agreeing.

However, his inner thoughts were completely different.

‘Isn’t the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation of Shaolin known for its undefeated record and Shaolin’s strongest force?’

This was a well-known fact among all martial artists.

As far as he knew, even the Six Heavens and Eight Stars masters, who were considered the pinnacle of the current martial arts world, could not recklessly challenge Shaolin's Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation.

It was literally one of Shaolin's legends.

‘No matter how strong this damn bastard is, it's impossible to last a moment against Shaolin's Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation.’

He was confident about this.

Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok's thoughts were no different from those of the Guard Commander.

Although that outrageously arrogant patron's inner strength surpassed his own, the power of the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation was on a different level.

In the distant past, they had unofficially suffered a humiliating incident, but the perfection of the formation now was incomparable to that time.

‘He talked as if he were being compassionate, but the master has given him an even more inescapable task. Hohoho.’

Dae-deok looked at Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong with a satisfied expression.

On the other hand, Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates had grim expressions.

Even if they were allowed to join forces and given a time limit of a moment, could they really withstand the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation?

No matter how strong Mok Gyeong-un's martial prowess had become, they lacked confidence in this particular task.

At that moment.

"If we are to proceed with your proposal, I should return the hostage to you. Please take him."

-Smack!

Mok Gyeong-un lifted Commander Kang-hak, whose neck he was grasping, and threw him towards Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok as if throwing an object.

'What?'

At his sudden action, Dae-deok inwardly clicked his tongue.

Judging by the way he was flying, it seemed that he had deliberately infused inner strength into the throw.

However, he couldn't show himself being pushed back like before, so he hurriedly spread out his soft palm technique to catch the flying Commander Kang-hak.

The moment he caught him,

-Crash!

'Ugh.'

Dae-deok's expression momentarily twisted in pain.

It was a technique of the Physical Transmission Scripture.

He tried to disperse Commander Kang-hak's force, but instead, that force penetrated and entered, nearly pushing him back again.

-Gulp!

However, thanks to forcefully enduring it, blood rose to his throat as if he had suffered internal injuries.

At this, Dae-deok glared at Mok Gyeong-un with anger-filled eyes.

‘This bastard!’

Regardless of his reaction, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders as if he didn't care at all and turned his head to speak to Museong.

“But Venerable Monk, may I also make a proposal to you, no, to Shaolin?”

“A proposal?”

“No matter how I think about it, this seems to only consider Shaolin's convenience. Even if we are in a disadvantageous position.”

“.....So you're saying you'll reject this humble monk's proposal?”

“No. That's not it.”

“Then what kind of proposal do you intend to make?”

“It’s nothing much. I want us to receive compensation for nearly falling to our deaths due to Shaolin’s mistake. Honestly, an apology alone seems insufficient for a matter involving people’s lives.”

“Compensation? How do you mean compensation?”

“I heard that Shaolin has a very precious spiritual medicine. I think it was called the Great Restoration Pill?”

‘!!!!!!!’

At those words, the monks of Shaolin stirred.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un paid no heed to this and continued speaking.

“If we pass the master’s proposal, how about giving each of us one as compensation for the harm done to me and my companions?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok intervened with a fierce expression instead of Museong.

“The young patron must not be in his right mind to make such a request when you should be grateful for even being given a chance.”

The spiritual medicine Mok Gyeong-un had just mentioned was made from Shaolin’s secret method.

It took a long time to make just one because the manufacturing method was so difficult, and the reason it was famous was that if an ordinary person took the Great Restoration Pill, they would live a long life without illness, and if a martial artist took it, they would gain a full cycle of inner strength.

Therefore, even in the martial arts world, Shaolin’s spiritual medicine, the Great Restoration Pill, was regarded as the supreme spiritual medicine.

“What’s there to be in the right mind about? If Shaolin hadn’t dropped us, this situation wouldn’t have happened at all, so shouldn’t you agree to even greater demands?”

“Ha! The patron truly prefers punishment over.....”

“Enough!”

Museong reprimanded Dae-deok.

As Dae-deok closed his mouth, Museong clasped his hands together and spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“Amitabha. Patron. I apologize to the patron, but the number of Great Restoration Pills is not that many, and moreover, they can only be given out after being approved in a meeting presided over by the abbot.”

“Are you refusing on the pretext of procedure?”

“How could that be? However, I believe there is certainly some truth to the compensation the patron speaks of. So, even if not the Great Restoration Pill, I think I can give you the Small Restoration Pill within my authority.”

“M-Master!”

At those words, not only Dae-deok but even the Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who was favorable to them, looked at Museong in surprise.

That was because the Small Restoration Pill was also a spiritual medicine that Shaolin prided itself on.

In the case of the Great Restoration Pill, the manufacturing method was so complicated and time-consuming that Shaolin created a substitute spiritual medicine.

That was none other than the Small Restoration Pill.

This Small Restoration Pill was also a precious spiritual medicine that could grant ten years' worth of inner strength with a single pill.

“Master, this is.....”

-Swish!

As Gong-jeon tried to say that they should be cautious, Museong shook his head with a resolute face.

His thoughts remained unchanged.

He had already broken his agreement to prevent external pressure by making an enemy of the imperial palace.

At this point, he had a strong desire to compensate them with something, and just then, Mok Gyeong-un made this bold request, so he considered it a good opportunity.

“Of course, please keep in mind that this proposal stems from the patrons being able to endure the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation for a moment.”

“Alright. With this, it seems the balance has been somewhat restored.”

“I will not accept the Small Restoration Pill.”

At that moment, someone intervened and shouted loudly.

It was the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

At this, Gong-jeon spoke in a gentle voice, indicating that it was alright.

“Amitabha. It’s you, Deokmun. If you’re worried about burdening Shaolin, you don’t need to.....”

“No. Master. Instead of that, I want to receive something else.”

“Something else?”

“If we endure the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation for a moment, instead of the Small Restoration Pill, please allow me to strike the Precepts Hall Master over there with full force, just once, no more, no less.”

‘!?’

At his words, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok was dumbfounded.

He wondered what that expelled fellow would dare to demand, but he impudently asked to be allowed to hit him?

It was so absurd that he was about to say something,

“How dare you.....”

“Hohohoho. Even if he was expelled, there is something called old ties, so can’t we grant Deokmun’s request to this extent?”

Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon took the initiative.

At this, Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong nodded with a faint smile.

What was so difficult about allowing him to strike just once, not even the Small Restoration Pill?

Moreover, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok had a significant influence on that child becoming a expelled monk, so he could fully understand that level of venting.

“Now, before we begin, bring an incense stick that lasts for a moment.”

“Yes!”

At Museong’s command, some of the warrior monks who were not part of the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation clasped their hands together and were about to go and fetch it.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un waved his hand and spoke in a meaningful voice.

“Shaolin will have to erect a tombstone due to another misjudgment.”

“What do you mean by.....”

It was at that very moment.

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly stomped his foot on the ground.

-Kwaaang! Crackle crackle!

At that instant, with a tremendous roar, the ground of Arhat Pavilion’s plaza cracked, centered around Mok Gyeong-un, and the vibration spread in all directions.

Along with the vibration that shook the ground, the moment it reached the soles of the Arhat warrior monks who were surrounding him in the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation,

-Tremble tremble!

They all convulsed as if they had been struck by a shock, and then,

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

Without exception, they simultaneously collapsed to the ground.

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

Chapter 306 – Domineering Steps (4)

Boom!

A single stomp.

With that stomp, the ground cracked in all directions, and the hundred and eight Arhat warrior monks collapsed.

Without exception, they all convulsed and lost consciousness.

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

Faced with this sudden and unbelievable situation, everyone was dumbfounded, and the plaza was instantly filled with silence.

One of the legends symbolizing Shaolin was none other than the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation.

Who would have imagined that this perfect formation, known to have never been broken by anyone officially, would crumble so effortlessly?

“.....Hey. Are my eyes deceiving me?”

Seop Chun muttered in disbelief, his mouth agape.

However, even this didn't register in Mong Mu-yak's ears.

Even without Seop Chun's words, this was a sight that was hard to believe even when witnessing it with one's own eyes.

‘Is this a dream or reality?’

It was to the point where one might think they were seeing an illusion.

The masked Ma Ra-hyeon felt the same way.

Having even directly sparred with Mok Gyeong-un, he found it even harder to believe.

No matter how outstanding his natural talent was, how could a human become this strong at such a rapid pace?

This was way too fast.

Moreover,

‘Even if the Eight Stars or the Six Heavens came, would it be possible to crumble the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation with just a single stomp?’

It couldn't be asserted with absolute certainty, but it seemed unlikely.

This was something that would not only shock those present here but also astound all martial artists if it were made known to them.

The cracked ground of the plaza centered around Mok Gyeong-un and the hundred and eight collapsed Arhat warrior monks.

It was truly a spectacular sight.

“.....This is unbelievable.”

“How can such a thing.....”

The warrior monks were in an uproar as well.

Some overconfident masters had challenged the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation in the past to prove their martial prowess, but the result was always the same.

It was to admit defeat and return.

Yet, a sight that even the warrior monks of Shaolin found hard to acknowledge had unfolded.

The gazes of the stunned and bewildered warrior monks naturally turned towards the elders of Shaolin.

‘How.....how!’

The one with the most intense reaction was Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, one of the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin.

He was staring at Mok Gyeong-un as if he were in shock, unable to take his eyes off him.

He had been confident that although Mok Gyeong-un's inner strength was stronger than his own, he would be able to hold out to some extent, but he would definitely fail to withstand the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation and be defeated, just like before.

However, when the result turned out to be the complete opposite of his expectations, he was utterly confused.

At that moment, Commander Kang-hak, who was beside him, opened his mouth with wide eyes.

“Th-this is unbelievable. How can such a thing happen?”

“.....”

“Is this really the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation? Could it be that the warrior monks are acting to let them go on Shaolin's behalf?”

“.....Does it look like an act to you, military officer?”

“If it's not an act, how can such a situation occur with a single stomp? I absolutely cannot believe it.”

Although his martial prowess was not that high, he was also a master who had reached the pinnacle of the peak realm.

Even in the eyes of someone who had learned martial arts, this was utterly unbelievable.

It was so absurd that it seemed more like a falsehood.

Then, suddenly, Kang-hak's eyes met Mok Gyeong-un's.

-Gasp!

In an instant, a chill ran down his spine, and his legs went weak.

Just by making eye contact, he could perceive that the gap between him and that monstrous fellow was beyond comparison, making it difficult to even approach him.

Once gripped by such fear, it was not easy to shake off, so he had no choice but to avoid Mok Gyeong-un's gaze.

Seeing his reaction, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

Then, Cheong-ryeong's voice rang in his ears.

-Mortal..... When did you even comprehend such a thing?

Cheong-ryeong, who had been with Mok Gyeong-un all day, couldn't help but be even more astonished.

Being inside the wooden puppet, it was difficult to accurately discern the flow of energy, but the Arhat warrior monks convulsed and fainted from the vibration that traveled through the ground.

Where did he learn such a bizarre technique.....?

-It's the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques.

-What?

At Mok Gyeong-un's answer, Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her surprise.

She had been trying to decipher the eight forms of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques for a long time but had failed to fully solve them.

Yet, did this fellow Mortal comprehend a form that even she was unaware of?

‘It’s quite useful.’

Mok Gyeong-un thought, looking at the instep of his foot with which he had stomped.

Even Mok Gyeong-un himself did not expect the newly comprehended form of suppression to have such power.

He had realized this by observing the footprint in front of the Wall Contemplation Cave and the flow of residual energy in its vicinity.

It was a technique that subdued the opponent through shock and vibration.

This technique also involved a kind of suggestion, but unlike the previous techniques of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, it consumed a large amount of true energy.

To be precise, it consumed deathly energy, using nearly one-third of it in a single use.

As a result, only about two-thirds of the deathly energy remained in his body.

‘I can only use it once or twice.’

Despite the increase in deathly energy and demonic energy due to his enlightenment, it seemed difficult to use it multiple times with this level of consumption.

Of course, its power was so outstanding that even this single use was enough to break the opponent’s fighting spirit.

At that moment, someone finally spoke.

It was none other than Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong.

“Patron.....”

While most of those in the plaza had surprised and shocked expressions, Museong had a rather serious look on his face.

“Yes.”

“May I ask you one thing?”

“Go ahead and ask.”

“Does the patron have any connection with the Old Blood Cult?”

-Murmur murmur!

At his question, the monks of Shaolin stirred.

Because of Museong’s words, the monks of Shaolin, without exception, recalled one thing.

What flashed through their minds was none other than the tombstone in front of the Wall Contemplation Cave.

The anecdote about that footprint, called Shaolin’s humiliation, was remembered by all the monks of Shaolin to reflect on that time.

At that moment, one of the monks spoke.

“The Domineering Steps.....! It must be the Domineering Steps!”

“Domineering Steps!!!!”

At the mention of the Domineering Steps, the commotion spread even further.

The Domineering Steps.

It is said that with a single step or a single stride, one can dominate over everything.

However, for the monks of Shaolin, these Domineering Steps were the unofficial but first-ever humiliating step that broke the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation hundreds of years ago.

‘Oh.....’

Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon was dumbfounded.

Hundreds of years ago, when the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation was broken by a single Military Step, Shaolin had gritted their teeth and worked hard to enhance it.

Everyone had been confident that the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation would never be broken again.

Yet, the same humiliation from back then was being reenacted.

It was too much of a coincidence.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“I have no connection with the Old Blood Cult whatsoever.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's answer, Museong's right eyebrow rose.

Staring intently at Mok Gyeong-un, Museong said.

“That can't be true.”

“I really have no connection.”

“No. You clearly said it yourself.”

“What did I say?”

“Didn't you say, 'Shaolin will have to erect a tombstone due to another misjudgment'?”

Museong had heard this clearly.

That was why, the moment Mok Gyeong-un stomped his foot, he had watched with disbelief, and he could clearly witness that disbelief becoming a reality with his own two eyes.

Because of this, he could be certain.

While there were people who knew that the erection of the tombstone was called Shaolin's humiliation, no one except the monks of Shaolin knew who had left the footprint and why it was left.

Yet, that patron clearly knew the reason.

Therefore, he must have reenacted that moment.

-Shrug!

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and spoke.

“I only know that because that venerable monk over there told me about it on the way to the Demon-Subduing Cave.”

Mok Gyeong-un pointed with his eyes at none other than Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon.

At this, Museong frowned and looked at Gong-jeon.

Then, Gong-jeon clasped his hands together and bowed his head.

“Amitabha. I apologize, Master. I told the Heavenly Demon Patron about the anecdote of the tombstone.”

Meanwhile, murmurs could be heard from here and there.

“Did he say Heavenly Demon?”

“He definitely did.”

“Heavenly Demon? How can such an ominous.....”

“No, then does that mean he has a connection with that Bloody Demon?”

“The master just said there was no connection at all.”

At their murmurs, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

‘Bloody Demon?’

Are they referring to the man with the demon mask who left that footprint?

While he was puzzled, Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong asked Gong-jeon.

“Is that true?”

“It is. However, as it was decided to keep it a secret, I did not reveal who left the footprint.”

At his answer, Museong fiddled with the prayer beads he held in his left hand.

He had thought that the patron might be related to ‘that person’ when the humiliation from hundreds of years ago was reenacted.

But if it wasn't true, how could the same situation occur?

It was truly a bizarre occurrence.

Thereupon, Museong, after being puzzled for a moment, asked.

“Patron. Then, are you saying that you reenacted it solely based on hearing the anecdote from Gong-jeon?”

“I wouldn't say I intended to, but should I say I saw it in my mind's eye?”

“.....Did you just say ‘mind’s eye’?”

“Yes. In my mind’s eye, I saw how the one who left that footprint broke the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation. That demon mask was quite impressive.”

‘!!!!!!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Museong’s eyes widened.

When he first mentioned seeing it in his mind’s eye, he thought it was because his martial prowess had become high and his senses had become keen.

However, when Mok Gyeong-un mentioned the demon mask, he couldn’t help but be surprised.

“Oh my.....”

An exclamation involuntarily escaped his mouth.

Museong looked at Mok Gyeong-un with a genuinely astonished gaze.

‘What a fearsome talent. How can he engage in such a profound mind’s eye technique at such a young age?’

The mind’s eye technique was something that could only be achieved when one’s mental cultivation was deep.

Even he, who had cultivated the Buddhist path for many years, could only enter the mind’s eye state by looking at formulas or traces after turning sixty.

Yet, for that patron, who appeared to be in his mid-twenties at most, to have reached this realm was truly astonishing.

‘Perhaps it was a predestined answer.’

An unbelievable aptitude to reenact what he saw in his mind’s eye.

In a way, it could be said that it was a talent even more fearsome than the owner of the footprint that first brought humiliation to Shaolin.

Thus, Museong finally clasped his hands together, bowed his head, and spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“Amitabha. Patron, or should I say Heavenly Demon Patron?”

“.....”

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un silently nodded his head.

“Yes.”

“The patron’s stomp can indeed be called the Domineering Steps. Therefore, as an elder of Shaolin.....”

Museong swept his gaze over the surrounding monks.

Then, with a deep sigh, he opened his mouth.

“I acknowledge the defeat of the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation.”

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

His words acknowledging defeat divided the reactions.

Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates were delighted, and some even cheered.

On the other hand, the warrior monks of Shaolin had dark expressions due to the second humiliating situation they had to face.

‘How can such a thing.....’

‘Ah.....’

Some warrior monks thought that this incident might also need to be kept secret.

However, contrary to their thoughts, this result would spread throughout the martial arts world faster than expected.

It would be said that Shaolin's Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation had knelt before the Heavenly Demon's Domineering Steps.

Chapter 307 – Domineering Steps (5)

Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong approached Mok Gyeong-un with a much more relaxed expression and spoke.

“Amitabha. I am genuinely astonished that you accomplished something even more difficult than the given task with such ease, Patron.”

The original task was to endure the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation for a moment with his companions.

However, Mok Gyeong-un single-handedly shattered it with a single stomp.

Museong's astonishment was sincere.

"I was fortunate."

"At such a young age, reaching that level of martial prowess could easily lead to arrogance, but to see that you also possess humility is truly admirable."

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly.

In fact, Mok Gyeong-un was not accustomed to feelings of arrogance or conceit.

He simply acted according to the situation he desired to create.

Moreover,

-There's no need to deliberately make enemies, Mortal. Just because someone is weak doesn't mean they can't become an enemy, and just because they're weak doesn't mean they can't be annoying.

-Is that so?

-A speck of snow at the peak can roll down and cause an avalanche. Shaolin is no different from a spiritual pillar in the orthodox martial arts world. I think you'll understand what I mean by just saying this much.

It was also because of Cheong-ryeong's advice.

Mok Gyeong-un, who deemed this reasonable, was gradually learning not to provoke the other party if it wasn't necessary.

Of course, being monks who cultivated the Buddhist path, most of the monks of Shaolin did not raise objections or hold grudges over what had already ended.

They cleanly accepted the result.

“The agreement is the agreement. Along with the monsters you brought.....”

“Ah! Is it alright if I also take Alyu over there?”

“Alyu?”

“I’m referring to the diabolic beast that was imprisoned in Shaolin’s Demon-Subduing Cave.”

“Amitabha. It seems you heard the name from the monster.”

“Yes. In order to control that monster, I unintentionally made it my spirit beast.”

“Spirit beast..... It’s a demon-taming technique.”

“Yes.”

Monks who cultivated the Buddhist path considered demon-taming techniques that went against the natural order to be unreasonable, so Museong also did not view it favorably.

However, not wanting to get involved with them in a negative way any further,

“Amitabha. Very well. However, I hope the patron will take good care of that monster and ensure it does not harm people recklessly.”

“I will do so.”

“Then take it with you.”

Despite granting permission, Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at Museong.

At this, Museong asked in puzzlement.

“Why are you doing that, Patron?”

“Are you not giving me the Small Restoration Pill?”

“Ah!”

Museong slapped his forehead as if he had forgotten and said.

“I nearly committed a mistake despite making an agreement. As I age, I sometimes forget things, so I ask for the patron’s understanding.”

“Not at all.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un looked at the surrounding monks.

As he brought up the Small Restoration Pill, they had quite regretful expressions.

At this, Cheong-ryeong giggled as if it were amusing.

-It seems those fellows hoped you would forget, Mortal.

-Indeed.

-Anyway, you're quite remarkable. In the midst of all this, how did you think to demand the Small Restoration Pill, knowing how the result would turn out?

-Should I say I learned it?

-Learned?

At Cheong-ryeong's question, Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly.

In any case, it was a natural reaction for the monks of Shaolin Temple to be so regretful.

Even if it wasn't the Great Restoration Pill, the Small Restoration Pill was also difficult to make.

Even the monks of Shaolin, who called this spiritual medicine a treasure, might only get to consume it once in their lifetime, so they couldn't help but feel regretful about it being taken outside.

Even for monks who had no material desires, receiving the Small Restoration Pill was an honorable thing.

"You all go to the Bodhi Hall and bring five Small Restoration Pills."

At his command, one of the monks asked in puzzlement.

"Huh? Master. Shouldn't four pills be enough? Clearly, the expelled Deokmun refused....."

"One pill is for that Bodhisattva."

Museong's gaze turned towards someone.

That someone was none other than the Holy Fire Priestess.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes gleamed with interest.

In fact, since the Holy Fire Priestess was not a martial artist, he had not included her as someone who should separately receive the Small Restoration Pill.

However, Museong had included her as a companion as well.

He was truly fair and had great depth.

-If only half, no, one-third of the hypocrites in the righteous faction learned from this old monk or Shaolin, there would have been fewer conflicts in the martial arts world.

-I suppose it's the same for the evil faction or anywhere else.

For Mok Gyeong-un, the righteous faction, no, all humans were the same.

In the end, they were bound to become cunning to achieve what they desired.

At that moment, a irritated voice was heard from somewhere.

“Oh my. How impudent!”

Turning his head, he saw Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok expressing his displeasure with an uncomfortable face.

The target of his anger was none other than the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

The moment Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong, the highest elder of Shaolin present, acknowledged the defeat of the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation, he had exclaimed with delight more than anyone else.

[Hahahahaha!]

Although he had been expelled, he did not hold a big grudge because of the grace of taking him in, but there was one exception.

It was none other than Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok.

From selecting him as one of the Ten Precept Monks to interfering with and obstructing his every move, it was him.

He had even tried to expel him from Shaolin several times by raising issues before he was expelled.

If it weren't for his master, Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, it might have already turned out the way Dae-deok wanted.

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong snorted at Dae-deok and said.

“What's impudent?”

“Even if you left Shaolin, how can you act so recklessly towards an elder who once taught you, no different from an elder?”

“Once I'm out, who's an elder or a venerable? And what's reckless about telling you to keep the agreement?”

“Oh my. This fellow still hasn't changed. Leaving Shaolin has turned you into a ruffian.”

“Yes. No matter what nonsense you spout, this monk will strike you once according to the agreement and leave, so just stand there as agreed.”

“This fellow truly wants to be taught a lesson.”

With those words, Dae-deok assumed the stance of the Dragon Blossom Fist.

He was ready to strike at Ja Geum-jeong at any moment.

Then, Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon approached, clicked his tongue, and spoke.

“Amitabha. Precepts Hall Master. How can you be so stubborn when an agreement was made?”

“This humble monk never agreed to the bet.”

“Hohoho. It’s not a pleasant sight. Aren’t you the one who demanded that everyone follow the precepts without exception? Yet, you’re making an exception for yourself?”

-Murmur murmur!

At Gong-jeon’s words, even the monks of the Commandment Hall murmured.

Seeing their reaction, Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok bit his lower lip with a resentful face.

Was it what they called tying oneself up with one’s own rope?

Although he wanted to strike down that impudent expelled monk, if he continued to refuse here, saying he didn’t want to be hit, it seemed his dignity would crumble even further.

‘Tch.’

Thus, Dae-deok finally released his stance and stepped forward in front of Ja Geum-jeong.

Then, glaring at Ja Geum-jeong as if he wanted to kill him, he said.

“Fine. Since you want it so badly, strike this humble monk once.”

‘Don’t think this is the end.’

Dae-deok inwardly vowed for the future.

He had to let him go for now, but he already had a justification to retrieve the supreme power that had been entrusted to him.

Using this as a pretext, he planned to visit him again and properly repay him.

‘But this fellow is too delighted.’

Dae-deok clicked his tongue inwardly.

Seeing this naive fellow grinning and being so happy just because he could strike him once, it was even absurd.

If he resented him so much, he should have asked for an arm instead. What a simple fellow.

Dae-deok, who had been clicking his tongue, finally spoke.

“Stop smiling and strike.”

With those words, Dae-deok drew up his true energy to protect his body.

At this, Gong-jeon frowned and said.

“Precepts Hall Master. You’re using true energy to protect your body just to be struck once?”

“I agreed to be struck once, not that I wouldn’t protect my body with true energy.”

At his sarcastic voice, even the monks coming from the same Precepts Hall shook their heads.

It was to the point where they thought he should cleanly take the hit and end it, considering their past relationship.

Meanwhile, the corners of Ja Geum-jeong’s mouth rose to his ears.

“Oh. So you’re saying it’s alright to use true energy.”

“What?”

“Didn’t you say so, Master?”

“No, that’s.....”

“You’re not saying that you can protect your body with true energy, but this monk should strike with bare fists, right?”

At Ja Geum-jeong’s words, Dae-deok soon cleared his throat and answered.

“Ahem. Who said to do that? Do as you wish.”

‘As if that will make a difference, you fool.’

Dae-deok inwardly mocked Ja Geum-jeong.

In any case, he prided himself on having reached the top in internal energy among orthodox martial artists by mastering the Bone Marrow Cleansing Scripture and the Mahayana Heavenly God Technique.

Even if he had learned the supreme power, comparing internal strength with himself, who had surpassed the wall, was out of the question.

-Thud! Thud!

‘I’ll show you this time.’

Dae-deok stomped his feet strongly on the ground, assuming a horse stance.

Seeing his stance, Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon sighed.

It was the stance of the Vajra Indestructible Body Divine Technique.

It was a technique that used true energy to transform the entire body’s skin to be nearly as strong as vajra, protecting it.

It seemed he had a strong will not to let Ja Geum-jeong vent his anger.

However, Ja Geum-jeong paid no heed to this.

Rather,

-Clench!

He clenched his fist, then pulled it back and assumed the stance of a mysterious fist technique.

Seeing this, the surrounding monks muttered softly.

“It’s the Hundred Steps Divine Fist.”

The Hundred Steps Divine Fist.

It was one of the 72 unique arts of Shaolin, possessing the power to shatter rocks a hundred steps away with fist energy.

The Hundred Steps Divine Fist was known externally for overcoming distance, but its true advantage lay in the distance getting shorter.

The closer the distance, the stronger the power of the Hundred Steps Divine Fist becomes.

‘The Hundred Steps Divine Fist..... I thought he only taught the Vajra Demon-Subduing Fist, but he taught him one more unique art.’

Dae-deok glanced at Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, Ja Geum-jeong’s master, and clicked his tongue.

However, it didn’t matter.

Even if the power of the Hundred Steps Divine Fist was ranked among the top five fist techniques of Shaolin’s 72 unique arts, his internal energy had already surpassed it.

‘Do as you please. As if that will even slightly impa.....’

-Whoosh!

At that moment.

-Flinch!

Dae-deok's eyes wavered.

The reason he was so startled was none other than the energy gathering in Ja Geum-jeong's fist.

He had thought that even if the fellow drew up the power of the Ten Stars realm, it would not be able to impact him.

However,

-Whoosh!

Energy was ceaselessly gathering in Ja Geum-jeong's fist, and the level exceeded his expectations. Yet, the energy continued to gather.

What in the world was happening?

With the fellow's realm, it was impossible for such energy to gather.

‘Amitabha.’

Sutra Pavilion Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who was watching Ja Geum-jeong, inwardly chanted a Buddhist prayer.

Back when Ja Geum-jeong, or Deokmun, was being expelled, he had told him to pretend to have learned the supreme power to prevent his martial arts from being sealed.

However, it seemed there was no need for that.

‘If that’s not the supreme power, then what is?’

The surrounding energy was being drawn in.

The enlightenment Deokmun had attained was truly the supreme power left behind by Bodhidharma during his wall-facing meditation.

The energy gathered in Ja Geum-jeong’s right fist was already approaching that of a master who had surpassed the wall.

In a confrontation between masters, there was no time to gather energy, but naturally, if there was no time limit like this,

-Kwaaaang!

“W-Wait a moment.....”

The startled Dae-deok tried to tell Ja Geum-jeong to stop.

However, Ja Geum-jeong, who had already gathered the greatest energy he could muster in his fist, launched the Hundred Steps Divine Fist towards Dae-deok’s abdomen.

-Baaang!

“Urk!!!!”

At that moment, time seemed to flow slowly in Ja Geum-jeong's eyes.

The instant the fist made contact with the abdomen, Dae-deok's eyes widened as if they would pop out, and his face grotesquely contorted.

-Trickle!

Beads of sweat that had sprung up on his forehead flowed down his flushed face.

Although he had protected his body with the Vajra Indestructible Body Divine Technique, the strike that surpassed it penetrated his abdomen, impacting his internal organs and even his danjeon.

-Thud! Thud! Crack!

Along with the sound of the fist power penetrating the abdomen,

-Bang! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Dae-deok's body flew backward, rolling on the ground and bouncing several times before finally stopping at a distance of over a dozen zhang.

"Ugh....."

Dae-deok, who had barely managed to stand up, staggering, glared at Ja Geum-jeong with bloodshot eyes.

Then, raising his hand,

"Y-You bas..... Blegh!"

He vomited a mouthful of blood and collapsed face-down on the ground.

-Thud!

‘!!!!!!’

The mouths of the Shaolin monks watching this scene fell open.

They had thought it was unlikely, but who would have imagined that Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, one of the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin, would end up like this from a single punch of the expelled monk?

Regardless, Ja Geum-jeong burst into laughter with a wide grin, as if he felt extremely refreshed.

“Kwahahahaha!”

It felt as if a decade’s worth of stagnant energy was being released, leaving him feeling too exhilarated.

Half an hour later,

The Demonic Beast Heum-won, who had managed to take flight despite the wound on his right wing, soared eastward from Shaolin.

Someone was quietly watching this scene from the downward slope of Mount Sung.

It was none other than Commander Kang-hak.

“Do you think I’ll let you bastards go just because Shaolin made an agreement? Deputy Commander, go at once and report their route. I will pursue that gigantic monster bird.”

“Yes, sir!”

“The warriors of the Guard Bureau and the government troops, follow me!”

“Yes, sir!!!!”

With Commander Kang-hak at the lead, the warriors of the Guard Bureau and the government troops pursued him.

Due to the demon beast Heum-won’s injury, his flying speed had slowed down considerably, making it seem possible to catch up to him.

As they chased after Heum-won, there were people watching them from a higher point halfway up the mountain.

They were none other than Mok Gyeong-un and his companions.

Looking at the backs of the government troops chasing after Heum-won with all their might, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and said,

“Somehow, they really don’t deviate from my expectations.”

Chapter 308 – Reunion (1)

Looking at the backs of the government troops chasing after the demon beast Heum-won with all their might, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and said,

“Somehow, they really don’t deviate from my expectations.”

“As expected, they were lying in wait.”

Seop Chun clicked his tongue while looking at the government troops.

After Reverse Muscle Scripture Hall Grand Monk Museong of Shaolin acknowledged the defeat of the Hundred and Eight Arhats Formation, Commander Kang-hak quietly disappeared.

He thought that Mok Gyeong-un and his companions would be too preoccupied with Shaolin to remember him, but that was a miscalculation.

As they were in a position to deter the ongoing pursuit of the imperial troops, they had been carefully watching Commander Kang-hak slip away.

Throughout his escape, his expression was filled with schemes, not at all resembling someone who was retreating.

“Since the monster bird is heading east, we’ll be able to throw off the pursuit for a while.”

Mong Mu-yak said as if it was a good thing.

If they could avoid the pursuit of the imperial troops, it could be said that they had accomplished more than 80% of their mission.

Meanwhile, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, gulping down liquor from a gourd, asked,

-Gulp gulp!

“Phew. But Master, is it alright to send that monster bird away like that? Even if it’s difficult for it to carry us due to its injured wing, it seems a bit of a waste to abandon it just for that.”

He was puzzled because when Shaolin told them to leave it behind, Mok Gyeong-un had tried his best to take it with them, but now it seemed he was using it as bait to lure the enemies.

To this, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly replied,

“Don’t worry. My spirit beast is connected to me, so even if it’s far away, it can find its way back. And it seems to need some time to recover its injured wing through magical power.”

“If that’s the case, then fine.”

Ja Geum-jeong spoke as if relieved, rubbing his bald head.

Seeing him like that, Seop Chun chuckled and said,

“It seems you’ve grown attached to it.”

“Ahem. Attached, my ass. It’s just convenient to ride on.”

“Hehehe.”

“I don’t like that laughter.”

“Who said what?”

Leaving the two of them bickering, Mong Mu-yak pointed to the southwest and said,

“For now, My Lord, I think we should hurry. Even if they’re fooled for the moment, they may soon catch on.”

“You’re right. Now stop being stubborn and ride.”

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

Then, the Holy Fire Priestess hurriedly averted her gaze with an awkward expression.

Where she averted her gaze, there was the diabolic beast Alyu.

Originally, its size was slightly larger than a two-story building, but as a high-ranking Imaemangnyang, it could adjust its size like Heum-won.

Now, it had become the same size as a horse that could carry a person on its back.

All the companions could use lightness skill, but since the Holy Fire Priestess’s walking speed was slow due to her old age, they told her to ride Alyu.

However, even though its size had been reduced, its appearance was still that of a ferocious monster, so the Holy Fire Priestess kept refusing to ride it.

“Are you really not going to ride?”

“I’d rather walk.”

As the Holy Fire Priestess firmly refused, shaking her head, the diabolic beast Alyu, who had been staring at her absentmindedly, muttered as if annoyed.

“Tsk. What a picky old human.”

As soon as those words ended, the diabolic beast’s red fur changed to a brown color, the horns on its head receded, and its appearance gradually transformed into that of a horse.

“Ooh! Look at this.”

“This fellow knows how to transform too?”

Seop Chun and Ja Geum-jeong made a fuss as if they found the diabolic beast Alyu’s transformation fascinating.

Feeling strangely proud of their reaction, the diabolic beast Alyu snorted, cleared its throat, and raised its tail.

‘The monster and the people have the same level of thinking.’

Watching them, Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue as if pathetic, crossing his arms.

Thanks to the diabolic beast Alyu transforming into the form of a horse, they were able to have the Holy Fire Priestess ride it, and the group hurriedly descended the southwest side of Mount Sung.

About four days had passed since then.

To avoid the pursuit of the imperial troops, the group moved southwest without rest.

However, as they entered the northern region of Hubei Province, it began to rain, making it difficult to continue moving.

In fact, if they pushed through, they could have done it, but the problem was, as always, the Holy Fire Priestess.

For her, an old woman who had not learned martial arts, the journey thus far had already been physically challenging.

This was the case even when the companions took turns infusing her with true energy.

Although she was riding a horse, or rather the diabolic beast Alyu, and one might think there would be no reason for her to get tired, even trained riders and cavalry would inevitably strain their hip bones and inner thighs if they rode a horse all day long.

The Holy Fire Priestess, whose muscles had deteriorated with age, was in an even more difficult situation, and as it began to rain, her body temperature dropped, making her even more vulnerable.

“Haa..... Haa..... I feel dizzy.”

“It seems it would be too much to continue.”

Seop Chun checked the Holy Fire Priestess’s pulse to examine her condition and said.

At this, Mong Mu-yak looked around and said,

“My Lord, since it has come to this, how about resting for a while at our association’s branch nearby? It should be not too far from here.”

“Branch?”

“Yes, according to the original plan, there is a midway point we need to stop by for reporting. We were going to head there directly as we had to move west towards Sichuan, but it seems difficult due to the rain. Rather than taking a slightly longer route, it would be better to stop by the branch, rest, and receive a carriage.”

“A carriage.....”

Looking at the Holy Fire Priestess, whose lips had turned blue and was shivering, Mok Gyeong-un nodded.

It seemed she had truly reached her limit.

Thus, they traveled south for about half a day, and before long, they arrived at a small village of about thirty households where the branch of the Heaven and Earth Society was located.

Mong Mu-yak, the only one who knew about the branch, pointed to a few dilapidated houses on the west side of the village with his finger.

“It’s over there.”

“How unexpected.”

“Yes, the northern part of Hubei Province is close to the righteous faction’s territory, so I heard they tried to make it as close to the civilian houses as possible.”

“I see. Let’s go for now.”

If they didn’t escape the rain quickly, the shivering Holy Fire Priestess seemed like she would collapse.

Contrary to its shabby exterior, the interior of the branch was clean and quite cozy.

“Elder, I brought you some tea. Please drink it.”

“Thank you.”

The Holy Fire Priestess, who was sitting in front of the firewood in the brazier, received the teacup as if she would survive.

If it weren't for the companions taking turns infusing her with true energy, she might have already died of hypothermia.

Although she was basking in the warmth, she was still shivering with a pale face, indicating that the cold had not subsided yet. Seeing this, Mong Mu-yak said,

“It seems we need to rest for about half a day.”

“You're right.”

“I hope the rain subsides a bit during that time, but.....”

-Rumble!

Judging by the continuous thunder and even lightning, it seemed unlikely.

In any case, they said it would take more than half a day to fetch a carriage, so it was better to rest properly.

Meanwhile, the middle-aged branch leader cautiously asked them,

“The meal will be ready soon, but is there anything else you need?”

In response to that question, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong answered as if he had been waiting,

“My throat is dry, so I need to drink some warm liquor.”

“Ah, then I’ll warm up some white liquor and.....”

“White liquor? Don’t you have anything else?”

“I happen to have rice wine brought from Jiangnan. I’ll warm it up and bring it to you.”

“Hahaha, good.”

For Ja Geum-jeong, who had started drinking to cope with the agony of seeing things he shouldn’t have seen, at some point, he could no longer live without alcohol.

As the branch leader left, Mok Gyeong-un, as if remembering something,

“It’s a good timing.”

He took out a pouch from his bosom.

Seeing the pouch, everyone’s gaze turned towards it.

That was because inside that pouch were the spiritual medicine Small Restoration Pills given by Shaolin Temple.

Mok Gyeong-un had received them all at once, and since they had to urgently move to avoid pursuit, everyone had momentarily forgotten about them.

‘Small Restoration Pill..... I wonder if it’s true that there is absolutely no loss of true energy when circulating it, unlike all other spiritual medicines.’

There were quite a few famous spiritual medicines besides the Small Restoration Pill.

For example, there was the Purple Essence Pill of the Huashan Sect and the Great Clarity Pill of the Wudang Sect.

However, the reason why Shaolin's spiritual medicine was particularly famous was that there was no loss of true energy compared to others.

Loss referred to the energy that dispersed during the process of absorbing the spiritual medicine.

Usually, no matter how excellent a spiritual medicine was, it was very rare to be able to absorb it close to 100%.

However, Shaolin's Small Restoration Pill and Great Restoration Pill boasted an absorption rate close to 100% regardless of one's constitution or aptitude.

That was why they were called the supreme spiritual medicines.

"Gulp."

Seop Chun licked his lips while looking at the pouch of spiritual medicine.

He wanted to ask for one pill, thinking it was an individual reward, but since it was something the lord had obtained, regardless of the reason, he was hesitant to ask for it recklessly.

The others felt the same way.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un took out five Small Restoration Pills from the pouch.

Then he said,

“I’ll give you one each, so take this opportunity to consume it and circulate your energy.”

“M-My Lord!”

As soon as those words were spoken, Seop Chun knelt before Mok Gyeong-un as if he was moved.

From his perspective, he had inwardly thought that Mok Gyeong-un, his lord, might not give them the Small Restoration Pills out of greed, so he couldn’t help but be delighted.

“I will serve you with unwavering loyalty!”

“Weren’t you doing that already?”

“H-How could that be? I have always been prepared to give my life for you.”

At Seop Chun’s flustered response, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and tossed him a Small Restoration Pill.

-Tap!

Seop Chun received it as preciously as a sacred object.

“Next, Mong Mu-yak.”

-Tap!

“Thank you! My Lord!”

Although Mong Mu-yak was a man of few words, the corners of his mouth rose after receiving the Small Restoration Pill, indicating his good mood.

He had suffered a lot since pledging his loyalty to Mok Gyeong-un, and it felt like he was finally being rewarded.

After giving Mong Mu-yak a Small Restoration Pill, Mok Gyeong-un called the next person.

“Ma Ra-hyeon.”

“……Yes, My Lord.”

“Take it.”

-Tap!

Ma Ra-hyeon caught the Small Restoration Pill tossed by Mok Gyeong-un.

‘!?’

Ma Ra-hyeon’s eyes gleamed with surprise.

Unlike the other two, he had become a subordinate not long ago, and he thought that Mok Gyeong-un might not trust him due to the incident with the Holy Fire Priestess, so he had considered the possibility of not receiving a Small Restoration Pill.

However, seeing him readily hand over this treasure, which was no different from a treasure to a martial artist, without any hesitation, he felt a strange feeling.

‘Even if he absorbed them all himself, no one would be able to complain.’

Truly an unpredictable person.

Does he generously bestow upon those he considers his people?

While he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un held one of the two remaining pills and called out to the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

“Ja Geum-jeong.”

At this, everyone was puzzled.

He had refused the Small Restoration Pill with his own mouth and chosen to strike Precepts Hall Master Dae-deok, one of the Three Supreme Monks of Shaolin, once.

Was he really going to give his share to someone like that?

‘Huh?’

Mok Gyeong-un was really about to toss a Small Restoration Pill to Ja Geum-jeong.

Then, Ja Geum-jeong hurriedly waved his hand.

“This monk doesn’t need it.”

“You don’t need it?”

“While it may be necessary for those who need to fill their vessel, what this monk needs is enlightenment, Master.”

At those words, Seop Chun spoke in a tone of incomprehension.

“What? Are you refusing the lord’s favor? Don’t regret it later and just take it.”

“Hahaha. I said I don’t need it.”

“How can you, at such a good opportunity.....”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said,

“No. Ja Geum-jeong is right. This spiritual medicine is indeed meaningless to him.”

“Huh?”

At those words, Seop Chun tilted his head.

He didn’t understand, but Mok Gyeong-un knew that Ja Geum-jeong had comprehended the supreme energy circulation technique that allowed him to draw in the surrounding energy at any time, so he did not insist further.

The spiritual medicine was of no significance to him.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un, holding the Small Restoration Pill, looked at the Holy Fire Priestess.

The Holy Fire Priestess, who had been basking in the firewood of the brazier, saw it and shook her head, saying,

“From what I see, that spiritual medicine seems to be more useful for you who have learned martial arts. There’s no need to give it to this old man.”

Due to her refusal, two Small Restoration Pills remained in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand.

At this, Seop Chun said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“My Lord. It’s a spiritual medicine you obtained. Please consume both pills.”

“Seop Chun is right. My Lord, please consume them all.”

Mong Mu-yak also supported his words.

The stronger Mok Gyeong-un, whom they served as their lord, became, the more beneficial it would be for them, and there was nothing bad about it.

However, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly looked at them and,

-Tap! Tap!

He abruptly tossed the remaining Small Restoration Pills, one each, to them.

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak, who received them in a daze, spoke with a dumbfounded expression.

“My Lord, why?”

“Why are you giving us this?”

“I don’t need them.”

“My Lord. I understand that your martial arts have advanced, but two Small Restoration Pills can grant twenty years’ worth of internal energy. How can you give up such an opportunity.....”

“It’s alright. Rather, it seems you two need them the most.”

“H-How so?”

“I want you to become more useful.”

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

The words about becoming more useful didn’t even register in their ears.

They had been grateful and satisfied just by receiving one Small Restoration Pill.

However, not only that, but when he handed over two Small Restoration Pills, which were no different from his own share, to them, they couldn’t help but be truly moved.

‘……My Lord truly cherishes us sincerely.’

‘No matter how much of a subordinate one is, how many people could give up such a treasure? Despite being younger than us, his magnanimity is truly great.’

It wasn’t just them who were surprised by this.

Ma Ra-hyeon and Ja Geum-jeong also began to view Mok Gyeong-un in a different light, seeing him distribute the remaining spiritual medicine to his subordinates without a moment’s hesitation.

Most of them had become followers of Mok Gyeong-un regardless of their own will, so they had been vigilant about being used and possibly abandoned at any time.

However, from the incident at Shaolin where he tried to protect even a mere monster to him generously distributing the precious spiritual medicine, their perception of him gradually changed.

As their gazes toward Mok Gyeong-un became even more favorable, Cheong-ryeong chuckled and said,

-Was it intentional?

-Would you believe me if I said it was pure goodwill?

-As if you would do such a thing.

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

Whether it was a whim or not, goodwill was not something that suited Mok Gyeong-un.

-Anyway, you gave them something you didn't even need and increased their loyalty, so you got quite a good deal out of it.

For Mok Gyeong-un, who relied on the energy of death, the spiritual medicine of Shaolin that boosted the true energy of nourishing life held no meaning.

Therefore, he had simply utilized the useless spiritual medicine appropriately.

-The more useful cards, the better.

~.....

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Cheong-ryeong felt inwardly pleased.

Is this fellow Mortal aware of his own changes?

Compared to her, a vengeful spirit, Mortal's weakness was his particularly lacking relationship with others because he didn't believe in humans.

However, he was gradually becoming skilled at forming relationships and leading a group.

Revenge might still be his priority, but this was clearly a positive change.

-Gasp!

Suddenly, Cheong-ryeong froze.

What was that just now?

An unknown emotion surged beyond the satisfaction of his change.

Such an unfamiliar emotion was something she had only felt when she was alive.

Chapter 309 – Reunion (2)

On a rainy midnight.

Someone wearing a bamboo hat and a bamboo raincoat was looking down at a small village with flickering lights from halfway up the mountain.

As he was staring intently at the village, the sound of a cane tapping on the muddy ground came from behind.

Then, a voice was heard.

“Indeed, it’s just as you said. They ended up coming here. The bait was certainly effective.”

“Although they had no choice but to escape due to unfavorable circumstances, unless they’re fools, they have no reason to do anything conspicuous.”

“That’s right. Thanks to that, the wait was worth it, and you won the bet.”

-Ting!

Someone behind him flicked a silver coin with his finger.

The person wearing the bamboo raincoat caught it without turning his head.

The silver coin was the price of the bet.

Putting the silver coin he received into his bosom, the bamboo hat-wearing man said,

“Are you certain about the preparations?”

“Hohoho, do you not trust this old man?”

“How could that be? If that were the case, there would be no reason for me to be with you, Elder So. Now, let’s see your skills.”

“Just wait and see. I can handle this quietly.”

The one called “elder” showed strong confidence.

-Thud!

“Hah!”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had put down a wine jar the size of a five-year-old child, looked at Seop Chun across from him with a grin on his face.

Seop Chun was also grabbing a wine jar with both hands and gulping it down, but more than half of the alcohol was soaking his chin and upper garment instead of his mouth.

Then, Seop Chun staggered and put down the wine jar.

-Thud!

“D-Damn it!”

“Hahaha, you’re no match for this monk.”

Ja Geum-jeong, who checked the remaining alcohol in Seop Chun’s wine jar, spoke with a triumphant expression.

At this, Seop Chun looked at Ja Geum-jeong with a disgusted face.

He had prided himself on being a drinker, so he had purposely challenged him, but this was not just a living wine jar but a level of pouring alcohol down his throat.

He wasn’t even pushing out the alcohol’s effects with internal energy, so how could he be so unaffected?

“Are you really not feeling anything?”

“Do you think I would get drunk just by emptying three wine jars of this size? Hahahaha!”

After being expelled, he had been drinking almost every day.

Not wanting to see the invisible things and always wanting to be in a drunken state, he had been drinking continuously, thanks to which he had become one of the most renowned drinkers in the martial arts world of the Central Plains.

“Haa haa.....”

“Youngster. Now that you know you can’t do it, don’t try to challenge me.”

“What are you talking about? It’s still far from over. Let’s do it again.”

“I told you, you can’t do it.”

“I said let’s do it again!”

Seop Chun grabbed the wine jar with determination and started gulping it down again.

After a few mouthfuls went down his throat, he couldn’t endure it any longer and vomit rose up, so he ran outside.

“Blegh!”

“Foolish kid. Hahaha.”

Ja Geum-jeong, who was watching him with a sneer, started drinking again.

Mong Mu-yak looked at the two of them pathetically, shaking his head, and then took a sip of the warm rice wine.

“They don’t even know the way of alcohol.”

What’s the point of enjoying alcohol if you drink it like that?

They were truly pathetic fellows.

-Tap!

Putting down the cup, Mong Mu-yak raised the corners of his mouth, feeling much better.

Since entering the imperial palace for the mission, he had to maintain a state of tension, so he didn’t have the leisure to drink alcohol like this.

“Phew.”

However, he had a drink to relieve the fatigue of nearly five days of non-stop southward travel, and he felt the blood circulating throughout his body and his stomach warming up.

Perhaps because of that, the alcohol tasted exceptionally sweet.

“Branch leader. Did you say this rice wine is Shaoxing wine?”

“That’s right. I brought it from Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province while going down to Jiangnan this time. How is it? Is the taste good?”

“It’s delicious. The six flavors of sweetness, sourness, bitterness, spiciness, and astringency are well-balanced. It is indeed the wine that King Goujian of the Yue Kingdom enjoyed.”

The Henan region, where the Yue Kingdom was located, was a granary, so the rice wine brewing method was developed, thanks to which there were many famous rice wine (yellow wine) varieties.

Shaoxing wine was a specialty rice wine of Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province.

Among rice wine, Shaoxing wine, which was considered the best, was also famous for being distributed by King Goujian of the Yue Kingdom to his soldiers before going to punish the Wu Kingdom, using a brewing method that had been passed down since the Spring and Autumn period.

“As expected from the deputy head of the intelligence department under the Society Leader, your knowledge is extensive. Truly brilliant.”

At the branch leader’s flattery, Mong Mu-yak smiled nonchalantly.

His father, Vice-Leader Mong Seo-cheon, had a deep understanding of alcohol and placed great importance on the way of alcohol, so he had also let his son, Mong Mu-yak, taste various regional alcohols of the Central Plains.

Therefore, Mong Mu-yak had also experienced many unique alcohols and had his own insights into alcohol.

“Puhahaha! You’re putting on all sorts of airs just for drinking alcohol.”

At that moment, Ja Geum-jeong provoked Mong Mu-yak with a sneer.

At his provocation, one of Mong Mu-yak’s eyebrows rose.

However, he soon ignored it.

Playing along with those who lacked class would only tire out his noble self.

“The way you drink is just like pretty Bodhisattvas saying, ‘Oh, I can’t drink,’ and just putting their lips to it and sipping. Puhahahaha!”

‘……Huh? Sipping?’

A vein bulged on the forehead of Mong Mu-yak, who had been trying hard to ignore him.

Ja Geum-jeong made a ridiculous expression and provoked him further.

“Why, feeling bad? But it’s the truth, isn’t it? A true man can’t even drink properly and can’t join in a drinking game……”

-Smack!

Before he could even finish his words, Mong Mu-yak abruptly stood up from his seat, grabbed a wine jar, and started gulping it down.

He drained it in one go without stopping even once.

But that wasn’t the end of it.

Immediately after, Mong Mu-yak grabbed the wine jar next to him and started gulping it down as well.

Up to the first jar,

‘The youngster fell for it.’

Ja Geum-jeong, who had been looking relaxed with this expression, soon swallowed his dry saliva, and his eyes widened.

I thought this fellow, who was pretentious about the way of alcohol, was just a clumsy noble, but it seems that's not the case.

-Thud!

Mong Mu-yak, who had emptied two jars in one go, soon found a full wine jar.

Then, he shouted at the branch leader at the same time as Ja Geum-jeong.

“Bring out all the alcohol you have.”

“Please bring more alcohol.”

At the requests of the two, the branch leader was perplexed, but unable to resist their urging, he gestured to his subordinates to go to the warehouse.

-Rumble! Rumble!

Despite this noisy situation, the Holy Fire Priestess was sleeping with a blanket over her, even snoring, in front of the warm brazier.

It was only natural that she couldn't endure it, as she had not been able to sleep properly, and now that she had satisfied her hunger and was in a warm place.

There was someone staring at the Holy Fire Priestess with disapproval.

It was the masked Ma Ra-hyeon.

If it weren't for the agreement with his lord, Mok Gyeong-un, he would have kicked her right away to find out how his father had died.

However, since he had made an agreement, he had to endure until Mok Gyeong-un's business was finished.

"Hmph."

Ma Ra-hyeon snorted and then drank his tea.

Mok Gyeong-un, who was tilting his wine cup, pointed to the full cup and said,

"If you're in a bad mood, why don't you have a drink of that alcohol?"

"No, thank you."

"This is my first time drinking warm alcohol, and it's quite delicious."

"It's alright. If everyone drinks alcohol, their senses will naturally become dull, so someone needs to stand guard and protect the lord with a clear mind."

Ma Ra-hyeon firmly refused.

He had traveled southward for five days without rest, and although there had been no pursuit during that time, he still believed that they should not let their guard down.

Looking at him, Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly.

Mok Gyeong-un had a favorable view of him, seeing him as inflexible but never neglecting his vigilance even after entering this place, constantly releasing his energy.

“Not bad. Having a drink or two would warm up your body and be good for you.”

-Clink!

Mok Gyeong-un clinked his cup against Ma Ra-hyeon's full cup and downed it.

At this, Ma Ra-hyeon stretched out his hand towards the wine cup for a moment, but then politely grasped the teacup with both hands, raised it towards Mok Gyeong-un, and said,

“I will use this as a substitute.”

With that, he drank the warm tea in one gulp.

Mok Gyeong-un did not urge him to drink anymore.

In the dark dawn, about two hours later.

-Swish!

Outside, it was still noisy with the sound of rain.

The once noisy and bustling inn was now dark and silent, with only the sound of snoring heard.

A middle-aged man carefully opened the door and came out of the inn building.

He was the branch leader of this place.

The branch leader, who had come out of the inn, soon raised his hand, sent a signal, and lightly flicked his fingers.

-Tap!

As soon as he did that, dark figures appeared from the surrounding buildings.

They were all wearing black masks.

Thanks to the sound of rain, they were not hindered in their movements and boldly surrounded the inn building.

The number of masked individuals surrounding the building reached several dozens.

Nevertheless, even more masked individuals appeared from somewhere.

Meanwhile, unlike the masked individuals, an old man with a fierce appearance, wearing a bamboo hat and leaning on a bizarre-looking cane with a snake's head, walked towards the branch leader.

When he appeared, the branch leader smiled and said,

“Just as you said, Elder, after about an hour passed, they really started collapsing one by one and fell asleep.”

“Didn't I tell you? I told you they would all fall asleep after an hour. But you said there was someone who endured for nearly two hours. What a tenacious fellow.”

“Come to think of it, I couldn't put much of the medicinal ingredient you gave me into the golden bell tea just in case, so I think that's why the masked fellow fell asleep late. But there was one fellow who drank a lot of alcohol but fell asleep the latest.”

“He must have some tolerance.”

“Tolerance?”

“Yes. That medicinal ingredient is closer to a medicine than a poison. So it doesn’t harm the body and naturally makes one fall asleep slowly, even for masters, so it makes them lower their guard. However, if they have ever been prescribed that medicinal ingredient even a little, they will have a tolerance and fall asleep late.”

“I see. Anyway, you are amazing. Indeed, Elder, you have reached the highest level not only in poisons but also in all medicinal ingredients.”

“Hohoho. Stop the flattery there. Did you make sure they were sound asleep?”

“Yes. I even pressed the acupuncture points you mentioned, and they didn’t budge.”

“Good.”

With those words, the old man turned his head.

Then, as if waiting, the person wearing the bamboo hat and bamboo raincoat walked over from behind and said,

“It was worth bringing Elder So.”

-Swish!

The person wearing the bamboo raincoat slightly raised his hand.

Then, some of the masked individuals stepped forward.

They were skilled in concealing their presence and had extraordinary martial arts abilities.

As a total of six people came out, the bamboo hat-wearing man ordered,

“Bring out only the old woman and pierce the hearts of the rest to kill them instantly.”

“Yes, sir!”

As soon as the order was given, the six masked individuals cautiously approached the inn.

-Swish!

Due to the heavy sound of rain, there was no problem concealing their presence.

Thus, they entered the dark building one by one, where the lights were out.

As they entered, the bamboo hat-wearing man crossed his arms and silently watched.

Fortunately, things were resolved more easily than expected.

The fellow who was said to resemble that bastard had already lost his life in the imperial palace, so they just needed to deal with the rest and take away the Holy Fire Priestess.

Meanwhile, the branch leader of the Heaven and Earth Society approached him and cautiously said,

“Now that we have successfully completed this mission, can you recommend me to the Three Realms as promised?”

At his question, the bamboo hat-wearing man answered in a heavy voice,

“Don’t be impatient. Since you played an important role, you will naturally be rewarded.”

“I-I apologize.”

The branch leader of the Heaven and Earth Society bowed his head in apology and then stepped aside.

The bamboo hat-wearing man looked at him with disapproval.

‘Cockroach-like bastard.’

The fellow’s martial arts were only at the Fourth Realm level, yet he was greedy despite being entrusted with such an easy task.

As he was thinking of him as pathetic, the old man leaning on the cane with a snake’s head shape opened his mouth, tilting his head.

“They’re late.”

At the old man’s words, the bamboo hat-wearing man’s eyes narrowed between the gaps of the bamboo hat.

Indeed, they were late.

Those who had eaten the medicinal ingredient made by the old man and fallen asleep would not easily wake up even if they were beaten, shaken, or even had their acupuncture points pressed.

It was taking too long for killing such people.

-Creak!

Then, the closed door of the inn opened.

As the door opened, a figure's face could be seen from the dark inn.

Judging by the shape, it seemed to be one of the masked individuals, but,

‘!?’

At that moment, the bamboo hat-wearing man frowned.

He thought one of the masked individuals was coming out, but it was none other than the head of a masked individual.

In the darkness, someone was grasping the masked individual's hair and sticking out their head.

‘W-What the hell is this?’

The startled branch leader was at a loss.

What on earth was going on?

Clearly, everyone inside had fallen asleep, and he had personally confirmed it by pressing their acupuncture points.

Yet, who was the one inside, holding out the severed head of a masked individual?

Then, a voice was heard.

“I thought it was a considerate gesture to make us sleep soundly with the medicinal ingredients like Liriodendron root, angelica, and jujube seeds, but it seems that’s not the case.”

‘!?’

At that voice, the eyes of the old man leaning on the cane with a snake’s head shape widened.

‘How..... Did he figure it out?’

That was because the person had accurately identified the medicinal ingredients used, even though they had been refined with a special secret method to change the aroma and taste.

-Splash!

At that moment, the severed head of the masked individual fell into the puddle of rainwater on the ground.

Along with it, someone who appeared to be in his twenties, wearing two sword sheaths at his waist, walked out from the darkness.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un, wearing a human skin mask.

Chapter 310 – Reunion (3)

‘Are they all dead?’

The bamboo hat-wearing man, with narrowed eyes, stared at the inn building shrouded in darkness.

-Swish!

When it rains, the noise interferes with sound perception.

This is because when internal energy is used to enhance hearing, even the sounds of countless raindrops become amplified.

However, this isn't the only problem.

Rain, which can be considered a natural phenomenon, is filled with a kind of water energy that causes the surrounding energy to disperse.

As a result, discerning something through energy sensing amidst the pouring rain is difficult even for exceptional masters.

‘Does it matter?’

In any case, from the moment one person woke up, the original plan was disrupted.

It was as if sacrifices had already been made.

At that moment, the old man leaning on the cane with a snake's head spoke in an intrigued tone.

“Who is that fellow?”

At that question, the branch leader of this place spoke with perplexity.

“Th-That person! It's the one who fell asleep the latest.”

“The latest?”

“Yes.”

“What are you trying to say by only mentioning it like that? You should tell us his name or which sect of the Heaven and Earth Society he is from.”

“I don’t know. They all addressed each other as ‘Lord’, ‘Lord’..... Yes. Even Vice-Leader Mong Secheon’s son called him ‘Lord’.”

“The Vice-Leader’s son called him ‘Lord’?”

‘Hmm?’

The bamboo hat-wearing man couldn’t hide his puzzlement at the branch leader’s words.

Come to think of it, there should only be three people, including the Holy Fire Priestess, since that look-alike bastard died, but their total number was six.

That meant there were others included who weren’t part of the original plan.

However, for the Vice-Leader’s son to be in a position to be called ‘Lord’, he had to be at least a disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society Leader.

‘The Society Leader wouldn’t have secretly dispatched his disciple.’

I don’t know what his identity is.

The bamboo hat-wearing man then spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“Is that your real face? Or is it a human skin mask?”

“Oh my..... I thought you were from the imperial palace, but it seems that’s not the case.”

“What?”

“Then it’s one of the two, but since the branch leader over there obviously betrayed us, it’s not the Heaven and Earth Society, so is it the organization of the mark?”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un drew a mark in the air with his finger, a vertical line penetrating the center of the character ‘two’.

‘!?’

As soon as they saw this, the eyes of the branch leader and all the masked individuals changed.

This was the same for the old man leaning on the snake cane and the one wearing the bamboo hat and bamboo raincoat.

‘Who the hell is this bastard?’

He knows about our existence?

This wasn’t simply a matter of considering it as such.

-Swoosh!

Two of the masked individuals surrounding Mok Gyeong-un moved and attempted to subdue him in an instant with a skilled joint attack.

Targeting the right and left sides simultaneously,

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un lightly moved his hands separately and instead grabbed the arms of the masked individuals with the technique of Capturing Arm.

And then,

-Crack!

He pulled the two arms he had grabbed and tore them off as if it were nothing.

The masked individuals, whose arms were torn off in an instant, screamed and rolled on the ground filled with rainwater.

-Splash!

“Aaaargh!”

“M-My arm!”

“You’re noisy.”

-Thud! Crack! Thud! Squish!

With Mok Gyeong-un’s kick, one masked individual’s neck twisted and broke, and another masked individual’s head was torn off along with the spine by Mok Gyeong-un’s hand.

The eyes of the surrounding masked individuals were filled with vigilance at the excessively cruel handling.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un tossed the severed head and said,

-Splash!

“The masked individuals are obviously small fries, and you two gentlemen and the branch leader are probably higher-ups in the organization, right? At least Three Realms or above.....”

Before he could even finish his words,

-Swoosh!

The old man with the snake cane disappeared and instantly appeared in front of Mok Gyeong-un, swinging the head of the cane towards his head.

However,

-Clang!

The cane was blocked by the blade of the Evil Commandment Sword that Mok Gyeong-un had halfway drawn.

As the snake head of the cane made a metallic sound instead of being cut by the exceptionally sharp blade of the Evil Commandment Sword, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with interest.

“It seems it’s not an ordinary cane.”

“Who the hell are you? How much do you know.....”

-Tremble tremble!

The old man's eyes gleamed with surprise.

Although the young fellow's inner strength was quite impressive, he thought it couldn't be that strong.

However, as he slowly drew up his inner strength, the snake cane only trembled but didn't budge.

This fellow was no ordinary person.

-Whoosh!

What is this sword?

It's only halfway drawn and clashing, but a bizarre demonic energy can be felt from it.

It's definitely not an ordinary sword.

'It seems his safe escape from the imperial palace wasn't just due to luck. He's definitely not at the level of the late-stage warriors. Good. Then!'

-Swoosh!

The old man began to draw up his energy in earnest.

Then, a green haze rose from his snake cane.

It was none other than poisonous energy.

As the poisonous energy flowed out, the old man's inner strength doubled, and Mok Gyeong-un's body was pushed back due to the repelling force.

-Splash! Splash!

However, as soon as his feet touched the ground, there was no phenomenon of being pushed back or anything.

At this sight, the old man's eyes narrowed.

He had infused poisonous energy into the repelling force, albeit partially, but the fact that Mok Gyeong-un was unaffected made him puzzled.

Come to think of it, not only was he the only one who didn't fall asleep from the medicinal ingredient he had concocted, but he even figured out what was in it.

‘This fellow has some knowledge of poisons or has built up a tolerance.’

It was impossible to be like this without studying poisons.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“Old man, it seems you've learned poison techniques?”

At that question, the old man laughed as if it were absurd.

“Hohohoho. You are the first youngster to address me in such a manner. Yes, I have mastered poison techniques. Even before you were born.”

-Swoosh!

As soon as those words ended, a green haze rose from the old man's entire body.

Even his hair had a dark green color and fluttered, and the force was so strong that the raindrops instantly turned into steam upon contact.

It was a tremendous poisonous energy.

At that moment,

-Swish!

The bamboo hat-wearing man raised his hand and pointed at the inn.

As soon as that signal was given, the masked individuals surrounding the inn rushed towards it as if they had been waiting.

-Swoosh swoosh!

-Swish!

‘Indeed.’

As if he understood the bamboo hat-wearing man's intention, the old man, who was emitting poisonous energy, raised the corners of his mouth and swiftly moved towards Mok Gyeong-un.

It was to prevent Mok Gyeong-un from stopping the masked individuals.

As the snake cane, infused with green poisonous energy, skillfully created a barrier, Mok Gyeong-un fully drew out the Evil Commandment Sword to block it.

-Clang clang clang!

-Swoosh swoosh!

As the snake cane, imbued with green poisonous energy, and the Evil Commandment Sword clashed, blue sparks flew, and the raindrops scattered in all directions.

The places where the scattered raindrops touched,

-Sizzle!

They turned black due to the poisonous energy.

The masked individuals who were unlucky enough to be hit by it quickly lost consciousness as the poison spread throughout their bodies.

At this, the surrounding masked individuals shouted,

“Everyone, get back!”

“Don’t go near the elder!”

The masked individuals hurriedly distanced themselves from them.

As they distanced themselves, the masked individuals couldn’t help but be surprised inwardly.

That’s because, as far as they knew, although they were aware that these individuals possessed extraordinary skills to escape from the imperial palace, they thought they would be considered among the top of the late-stage warriors at most.

‘Who the hell is that fellow?’

‘How is that youngster enduring against Elder So like that?’

‘Is he simply enduring the poison?’

It was to the point where they couldn’t understand the confrontation at all.

In the meantime, the two had already clashed their sword and snake cane over 40 times.

-Clang clang clang!

The old man, swinging the snake cane, spoke with a voice filled with exhilaration.

“Not bad. I never expected to encounter someone other than that damn bastard Tang In-hae who could properly endure five out of my Eight Poisons in a place like this.”

The old man couldn’t hide his genuine admiration.

He thought that even if one had studied poisons and had a tolerance, he could easily knock them down with just five poisons.

However, despite such potent poisonous energy, Mok Gyeong-un wasn’t being pushed back at all.

Where did this fellow come from?

If it was to this extent, it seemed alright to raise it to six poisons.

‘Huh?’

However, the old man suddenly found it strange.

This fellow is impressive for enduring against him, but shouldn’t he be impatient by now?

Thanks to being blocked by him, Mok Gyeong-un couldn’t stop the masked individuals from entering the inn.

Then, he should be anxious and eager to get away from him somehow to go and save his companions, but there was no such sign at all.

Does he prioritize his own safety over his companions’?

Curious about this, the old man asked bluntly.

“You’re quite peculiar. Of course, it would be difficult to escape from me, but do you not care at all even if your companions die?”

“Companions?”

“That’s right.”

“Well. Rather than that, shouldn’t you be more concerned about your subordinates first?”

“What?”

-Boom!

As soon as those words ended, the wall of the inn shattered, and someone was sent flying out.

At this, the old man swung his snake cane widely to create distance and turned his gaze towards the one who was sent flying.

‘!?’

The old man frowned.

That’s because the one who was sent flying from inside was none other than a masked individual.

The masked individual, whose chest was caved in by a fist strike, soon lost his breath and dropped his head.

“You damn rats, how dare you sneak in wearing masks?”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong walked out from the broken wall, clashing his fists together.

He wasn’t the only one who came out.

Seop Chun emerged from inside, with his blood-soaked Gwangmudo sword slung over his shoulder, and right behind him, Mong Mu-yak could be seen holding what appeared to be a masked individual’s arm.

-Boom!

“Ugh!”

Moreover, the ceiling of the inn shattered, and one of the masked individuals was sent flying upwards by a series of rising kicks.

The masked individual, whose waist was almost broken by the storm-like kicks reminiscent of the Shadowless Leg technique, soon tumbled down from the roof.

-Thud! Roll roll! Splash!

The one who landed on the roof after taking down a masked individual was none other than the masked Ma Ra-hyeon.

At the sight of them, the eyes of the masked individuals were filled with perplexity.

They thought only one fellow was awake, but it seemed they were all awake.

What is going on?

The old man raised one eyebrow and glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

“It was you. You were the one who did something.”

The old man instinctively thought that the cause was Mok Gyeong-un.

If he had a tolerance to endure his poison and could even identify the sleeping medicinal ingredients, he should be able to prepare countermeasures against it.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and spoke with a sneer.

“Then, did you think I would let them continue sleeping even though I knew it was a trap? You’re simpler than you look.”

-Grind!

At this, the old man, whose anger surged, gritted his teeth.

-Swoosh!

Then, he spewed out a green poisonous energy incomparable to before.

It was the realm of the Seven Poisons among the Eight Poisons he had comprehended.

The Seven Poisons could be considered the realm of the Poison Man, and it was to the extent that even the surroundings where he stood and the falling raindrops were affected.

As the green haze spread in all directions, the bamboo hat-wearing man hurriedly shouted,

“Elder! Restrain your poisonous energy!”

If there were only enemies, it would be fine, but there were also subordinates, the masked individuals, nearby.

If he turned into a Poison Man and spewed out such potent poison, even the masked individuals would be poisoned and suffer damage.

“This..... My god.....”

At that moment, Mong Mu-yak, who had come out following Seop Chun while carrying the arm of a masked individual, couldn't hide his perplexity upon seeing the old man holding the snake head-shaped cane.

At this, Seop Chun asked in puzzlement,

“Why are you acting like that?”

“That old man..... is Guyang Sa-oh.”

“Guyang Sa-oh? Guyang Sa-oh..... Could it be?”

“That’s right. He is Guyang Sa-oh, the Eight Poison Snake Staff and the head of the Guyang family.”

Eight Poison Snake Staff Guyang Sa-oh.

If one were to name the masters of poison throughout the martial arts world, the ones who were always mentioned were the Eight Poison Snake Staff Guyang Sa-oh and the Thousand Poison Hand Tang In-hae, one of the Eight Stars.

Both of them had reached the realm of the Poison Man, but only Tang In-hae had his name listed among the Eight Stars, so there were some who considered Guyang Sa-oh to be slightly inferior.

However, that was the kind of inference that novices in the martial arts world would make.

The reason Guyang Sa-oh couldn’t have his name listed among the Eight Stars was that he belonged to the Western Regions, such as Nanman or Beihai, outside the Central Plains.

Having reached the realm of the Poison Man, considered the pinnacle of poison techniques, he could be said to be the most specialized in killing people among all the masters who wielded various weapons.

At this, Mong Mu-yak hurriedly shouted,

“My Lord! That old man is the Eight Poison Snake Staff Guyang Sa-oh! Don’t engage him in close combat!”

At his warning, the old man, no, Guyang Sa-oh, snorted.

“It’s already too late. You were so confident, so let’s see how much of my poison you can..... Where are you looking, you bastard?”

Guyang Sa-oh, whose fighting spirit had risen, frowned.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un was not looking at him but at the person behind him.

The one Mok Gyeong-un was staring at was none other than the bamboo hat-wearing man.

He was staring at him very intently, which was absurd.

‘This bastard is looking down on me.’

He had drawn up to the Seven Poisons among the Eight Poisons in an instant.

Since he had turned into a Poison Man, each of his attacks was no different from extreme poison.

Yet, in such a dangerous situation, he was looking away?

He must be crazy, wanting to die.

-Smack!

Guyang Sa-oh, who had stabbed his cane into the ground, assumed the stance of the Toad Skill.

He crouched down like a toad with his legs bent, which was his unique technique, the Toad Poison Skill.

He would make him pay the price for looking away.....

-Shiver!

At that moment, Guyang Sa-oh's eyes wavered due to the chills running down his spine.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un was smiling so eerily that the corners of his mouth reached his ears, and he was exuding a tremendous killing intent that was unbelievable.

It wasn't just him who felt this tremendous killing intent.

All the masked individuals surrounding them were overwhelmed by the killing intent in an instant, flinching and taking steps back.

‘W-What killing intent?’

‘This..... What the hell.....’

-Clench!

At some point, the bamboo hat-wearing man had moved his hand to the sword hilt hidden inside his bamboo raincoat.

It was because he instinctively realized that the tremendous killing intent was directed at him.