

Mayhem 391

Chapter 391 – Axe-Destroying King (2)

“Elder!”

“How could this happen...”

The cries of the subordinates echoed around.

Voices of concern, voices unable to hide their shock, voices denying this situation.

At some point, all these sounds stopped reaching his ears.

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang was truly dumbfounded by this situation.

‘...Ha.’

It was even disheartening.

The person before him was not an opponent who could be called a formidable foe.

He was simply a monster incarnate.

Until now, only one person had ever overwhelmed him like this.

The current Heaven and Earth Society Society Leader.

‘Is this even possible?’

He is one of the Six Heavens, called the pinnacle of the current martial world.

That's why it was understandable.

But wasn't this guy a hostage from the righteous faction who had to fight for his life trapped in the Corpse Blood Valley just a few months ago?

He had heard rumors that his martial talent was exceptional enough to come out top of the Corpse Blood Valley, but he thought that at most, he would be at the late-stage Earth Master level.

How could he become such a monster in such a short time?

This growth rate was enough to inspire fear.

Ho Tae-gang looked at Mok Gyeong-un's face.

-Flinch!

For a moment, chills ran down his spine.

He thought he wouldn't be too excited since he had overwhelmingly subdued someone who could be called one of the Eight Stars, but he didn't expect to be looked at with such emotionless eyes.

'...It's different.'

There's a saying that you can know a person by looking into their eyes.

The moment their eyes met, Ho Tae-gang felt fear and terror from a human being for the first time in his life.

It wasn't from a momentary display of spirit or aura.

It was like a creeping chill rising up.

This being was fundamentally different on a genetic level.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been looking at him expressionlessly, opened his mouth.

"It seems you've calmed down a bit now. Shall we talk then?"

-Tak!

As soon as he finished speaking, he immediately released his hand from Ho Tae-gang's neck.

Though he hadn't held it for long, having his throat squeezed naturally led to coughing.

"Cough, cough."

Seeing Ho Tae-gang like this, his subordinates hesitated, holding their weapons, unable to decide what to do.

They too were martial artists, so their judgment wasn't poor.

They weren't foolish enough to recklessly charge at someone who their lord, who had reached the realm of a sect leader enough to receive the title of one of the Eight Stars, couldn't even properly face.

However, as subordinates, they couldn't just leave their lord in this state, so they felt frustrated by the situation.

At this moment, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang, having caught his breath, spoke.

“...I’ve lost. No, I was no match from the beginning.”

It was so overwhelming that he didn’t even have any lingering attachments.

The outcome had already been decided.

However,

“Haa.”

Ho Tae-gang let out a sigh.

What he had originally planned was now out of reach.

[Mok Gyeong-un. He told us to bring that guy. Of course, if he resists during the process, whether cutting off an arm or half-crippling him, that’s left to Axe-Destroying King’s judgment, he said.]

These were the words relayed by Mo Yak, Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s confidant.

To this, Ho Tae-gang had planned to fulfill Na Yul-ryang’s wishes and then gain his trust to implement a strategy of suffering a flesh wound.

“Are you disappointed?”

“It’s not because I lost.”

There was no way to explain it.

To dispel Young Master Na Yul-ryang's suspicions, he had left the watchers who followed them alone, but now this would surely reach his ears.

'Ah, Jong-hyeok. Jong-hyeok.'

The path to avenging his son was getting further and further away.

It was then.

"Ugh."

"Keu."

Groans were heard from somewhere.

Then, the sound of something being dragged across the ground was heard.

Everyone's gaze, including Ho Tae-gang's, turned in that direction.

'!?'

There, they saw someone wearing a mask with strange patterns dragging two masked individuals by their hair.

The moment Ho Tae-gang saw the masked man, his eyes flickered.

'That guy...'

Although he was concealing his qi, Ho Tae-gang could instinctively guess that the unfamiliar masked man had surpassed the wall and reached the Transformation Realm.

Was there such a person in the organization?

As he wondered, the masked being, no, Ma Ra-hyeon, brought the two people and presented them before them.

“I’ve done as ordered, my lord.”

‘My lord?’

At these words, not just Ho Tae-gang but even Shadow Clan Leader Hwan Ya-seon’s eyes widened.

Hwan Ya-seon was also seeing Ma Ra-hyeon for the first time, and he too realized that this person, whose martial prowess couldn’t be gauged by qi sense, was stronger than himself.

But for such a person to call Mok Gyeong-un ‘my lord’, he couldn’t help but be surprised.

Where did he gather such a powerful subordinate?

Then Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang sighed and opened his mouth.

“Now there’s no turning back.”

Since even the watchers sent by Young Master Na Yul-ryang had been captured, the plan was completely ruined.

Looking at him filled with disappointment, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“What do you mean there’s no turning back?”

“It’s complicated to explain...”

“Is it because you failed to gain his favor by defeating me in front of Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s watchers?”

“You?”

What on earth is this guy?

How does he know about his plan?

Come to think of it, earlier he had told him not to be swayed by Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s machinations.

Does he know something?

As he wondered, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and then approached the two masked individuals captured by the masked Ma Ra-hyeon.

“Isn’t this rather fortunate?”

“What?”

What does he mean by fortunate?

This had distanced him from getting closer to Na Yul-ryang, who might be the real culprit behind his son’s murder.

What on earth could be fortunate about this...

“Ah!”

Suddenly, Ho Tae-gang’s eyes wavered.

“It seems you’ve understood.”

“.....”

He certainly understood.

Originally, he had planned to use Mok Gyeong-un as a sacrificial lamb to show that he had clearly fallen out with them.

But there was no need for that now.

Although it was humiliating to be defeated, he had shown injury and disgrace in front of the watchers.

If this reaches Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s ears, he might try to keep him even closer.

He would think that Ho Tae-gang would be even more at odds with them to avenge this humiliation.

However,

“Haa.”

Ho Tae-gang, who had thought Mok Gyeong-un was right, let out another sigh.

“What’s wrong?”

"If it was before these guys were captured, it would have gone as you said. But now that they've been captured, how can we deceive anyone? Are you saying we should spread rumors that I was directly injured and defeated?"

Of course, that was one way to do it.

However, the watchers here had heard their conversation, so they would all have to be killed.

If they killed everyone and then spread rumors, would it really have a big effect?

It might only raise more suspicion.

But then,

"There were three watchers. As per my lord's orders, one was let go, so there's no need to worry about that."

At Ma Ra-hyeon's words, Ho Tae-gang was puzzled.

He was sure he had sensed only two following him.

"Three... you say?"

"He didn't follow you but had infiltrated this place first. And though he had mastered some special martial art that concealed his presence..."

Ma Ra-hyeon glanced at Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Gyeong-un had told him the location of the third watcher and ordered to just threaten him and let him go by a hair's breadth.

Ho Tae-gang let out a deep sigh at this.

Indeed, Young Master Na Yul-ryang wouldn't have just attached noticeable people.

Yet to detect such a person in such a short time and make the judgment to deliberately let him go, this guy's insight was as extraordinary as his martial prowess.

'Two died and one was let go, making it even more plausible.'

Ho Tae-gang stood up, holding his broken arm.

"I owe you a debt."

"Don't worry about it."

"I can't do that. I barged in here causing trouble without asking for understanding about the plan in advance, and even ended up owing a debt, so I must..."

"I think you're misunderstanding something. I haven't said I'm letting you go yet."

"What?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, wariness rose in Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang's eyes.

If this monster-like guy was determined to do something to him, there was nothing he could do about it.

Then Mok Gyeong-un suddenly turned his head and spoke to the watchers subdued and forced to kneel by Ma Ra-hyeon.

“Do you want to live?”

‘!?’

At his sudden words, the watchers' eyes wavered.

Judging from the flow of the conversation, they had thought they couldn't keep their lives and had given up.

But suddenly being asked if they wanted to live, they couldn't help but waver.

On the other hand,

“What do you mean by letting them live?”

These people had already heard their conversation.

If they were to be released in this situation, they would surely go to Young Master Na Yul-ryang and report everything.

If that happened, the strategy of suffering a flesh wound would truly fail.

‘Could it be?’

At that moment, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang frowned as he looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

He had thought it was too benevolent to not only let him go after barging in on his own but also to help ensure the strategy of suffering a flesh wound would succeed.

But now he realized that wasn't the case.

‘Is he trying to control me by using this to gain a weakness?’

Otherwise, there would be no reason to say such things to the watchers in front of him.

Then, one of the watchers hurriedly pleaded with Mok Gyeong-un.

“P-Please spare my life! If you do, I’ll keep everything I’ve seen and heard here absolutely secret.”

Then the other watcher shouted, not to be outdone,

“Please, if you just spare our lives, we’ll keep our mouths shut tight.”

Their desperate desire to live was almost pitiful to see.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring at them blankly, smiled faintly and said to them,

“There’s no need for that. If you leave here alive, I’d like you to deliver a message to Young Master Na Yul-ryang.”

At these words, everyone was bewildered.

Deliver a message? What on earth was he talking about?

Was he asking them to relay something?

“W-What message...”

“It’s nothing much, just relay these words exactly.”

“.....”

“If he doesn’t want to die, tell him to come himself and bow his head.”

‘!!!!!!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the expressions of everyone who had been bewildered hardened.

They had been wondering what kind of message he wanted to deliver, but hearing this, they couldn’t help but be shocked.

This was literally a provocation and a declaration of war.

With the Society Leader’s condition critical, Na Yul-ryang was currently the most likely successor candidate.

Moreover, many followed him even if just for legitimacy.

For Mok Gyeong-un, who was merely a hostage from the righteous faction even if he had become the Shadow Clan Leader’s disciple, to say such things to someone like that, Na Yul-ryang and his followers would surely be greatly angered.

“Hwa...”

Shadow Clan Leader Hwan Ya-seon, who almost called Mok Gyeong-un the incarnation, quickly caught himself due to others’ attention and showed apology through his eyes as he called his name.

“Gyeong-un. That might be too hasty a judgment. Even if we were fully prepared it would be one thing, but to provoke the Young Master like this right now and give him justification...”

“Ah! I forgot.”

“What do you mean?”

As he was saying this, Mok Gyeong-un approached one of the watchers, stroked his hair, and said,

“Deliver this message too.”

“W-What...”

“If I end up going to him, tell him it will be like this.”

“Like this, what do you mean...”

-Crack!

“Kek!”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s five fingers pierced into the watcher’s skull.

In that state, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the watcher’s shoulder, then gripped his skull and lifted it up.

-Kwa deu deuk!

With that, the watcher’s skull was torn from his body.

At this terribly gruesome sight, some turned their gaze away, while others frowned, not knowing what to do.

The earlier words alone were provocative enough, but if this too was delivered, how would Young Master Na Yul-ryang react?

He would surely be enraged and might try to settle this by any means necessary.

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang, who had been looking at Mok Gyeong-un with a hardened face, opened his mouth.

“...What on earth are you trying to do?”

“I’m giving you a choice.”

“A choice?”

“Yes, depending on your choice, I’ve prepared a path that might be annoyingly long and roundabout, and another that might be a bit rough but is an extremely short direct route.”

What on earth is this guy talking about?

A long roundabout path and a short direct route?

He himself had been part of his son Ho Jong-hyeok’s faction under the second young master Jang Neung-ak, and was trying to take revenge on Young Master Na Yul-ryang through a strategy of suffering a flesh wound to avenge his son.

But no matter how strong this guy’s martial arts were, wasn’t he just the Shadow Clan Leader’s disciple?

Why on earth would he do such a thing...

-Tak!

It was then.

The sound of a presence was heard from somewhere.

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang turned his head.

Someone revealed themselves there.

That someone was,

“Young Master Jang Neung-ak?”

It was Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader’s second disciple.

Seeing him appear suddenly, Ho Tae-gang hesitated for a moment before trying to make a fist-palm salute.

However,

-Pak!

At that moment, the second young master Jang Neung-ak knelt on one knee towards Mok Gyeong-un, put his hands together, and paid respects first.

What’s more, his next words brought even greater shock.

“My Lord!”

‘!!!!!!’

At that moment, everyone present lost their words in surprise.

They all doubted their own ears.

Did Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader’s second disciple and a successor candidate like Na Yul-ryang, just call Mok Gyeong-un ‘My Lord’?

Chapter 392 – Axe-Destroying King (3)

“My Lord!”

‘!!!!!!’

Everyone was stunned to see Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader’s second disciple, kneeling on one knee and paying respects.

Jang Neung-ak was none other than one of the successor candidates to lead the Heaven and Earth Society.

Why would someone like him suddenly call Mok Gyeong-un “My Lord”?

“What is this?”

“Why is Young Master Jang...?”

Mok Gyeong-un was merely the Shadow Clan Leader’s disciple, without any qualification for succession.

If he had shown such behavior towards Young Master Na Yul-ryang, one could assume he had given up on succession, but this was an incomprehensible scene.

Towards them, Jang Neung-ak raised his head and spoke with a raised voice.

“Who dares to be disrespectful to my Lord? Whoever it is, I, Jang Neung-ak, second disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society Society Leader, will not forgive them.”

After issuing this warning-like threat, Jang Neung-ak glanced at Mok Gyeong-un and mouthed, “Did I do well?”

He was glad to see him after a long time but still seemed to be mindful of his reactions.

-Go Chan, you came at a very appropriate time.

Mok Gyeong-un seemed to agree with Cheong-ryeong’s words, nodding slightly.

Though it wasn’t intentional, thanks to Go Chan, who was possessing the second young master Jang Neung-ak’s body, arriving at such a perfect moment, it became easier to make others understand the situation.

Mok Gyeong-un then spoke to Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang, who was at a loss for words due to this unexpected situation.

“Does this answer your question, Axe-Destroying King?”

‘Axe-Destroying King?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Go Chan, who was possessing the second young master Jang Neung-ak’s body, momentarily widened his eyes.

He had thought the face looked familiar from the body's memories, but only now did he recognize him as one of the Five Kings who held the title of one of the Eight Stars.

'No way. What's going on?'

Go Chan's surprised eyes naturally turned to Ho Tae-gang's broken wrist and wounds.

What on earth had happened here?

-Swish!

Seeing no injury marks on Mok Gyeong-un's body, it didn't seem like he had fought with him, so who had done this to Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang?

As he wondered, Go Chan inadvertently made eye contact with Ho Tae-gang.

-Flinch!

Befitting a supreme master who held the title of one of the Eight Stars, his gaze was so intense that for a moment, he wanted to avert his eyes.

However, maintaining the dignity of possessing the Society Leader's second disciple's body, he barely endured it.

"....."

Looking at him, a strange light flickered in Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang's eyes.

Though he didn't know what had happened between them from this scene and Mok Gyeong-un's words, it seemed that Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader's second disciple, had reversed roles and decided to serve Mok Gyeong-un as his lord.

“Ha.”

It was truly astounding.

Had there ever been such an incident since the founding of the Heaven and Earth Society?

A disciple of a single faction, and a hostage from the righteous faction at that, aiming for the pinnacle of the organization.

This was something he had never even imagined.

Most people in the Heaven and Earth Society thought they followed the rule of the strong, but they all drew one line in their minds.

That line was that only the Three Veins could succeed the Society Leader’s position.

Of course, most believed that among the Three Veins, only the Heavenly Vein had the highest bloodline and the most legitimacy.

‘For someone not of the Three Veins to harbor such ambition.’

The message he intended to deliver to Young Master Na Yul-ryang was literally a declaration of war.

In the end, this monster-like guy had only one goal.

That was the Society Leader’s position.

‘When he said he was giving me a choice, talking about a long roundabout path and a shorter but rougher path...’

Was he telling me to join his side instead of using a strategy of suffering a flesh wound?

If so, he was letting him know that he would clash with Na Yul-ryang in the near future, without needing to struggle under the Young Master's faction.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un pointed to the sole surviving masked watcher and said,

"I said I'd give you a choice, didn't I? What will you do now?"

"....."

At these words from Mok Gyeong-un, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang was overcome with a strange feeling.

Normally, if he had heard such words, he would have attacked or rebuked him without hesitation for harboring rebellious thoughts, being a hostage from the righteous faction.

However, the situation was completely different.

Though he lacked justification and legitimacy, this was the first time he had encountered such a monster.

Would even the Heaven and Earth Society Society Leader, one of the Six Heavens called the pinnacle of the current martial world, have had such a realm and such ambition at this age?

As a martial artist himself, he couldn't help but be drawn to such overwhelming talent.

But the problem was still his origin.

Finally, having made up his mind, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang reached for his large axe, his sect's unique weapon, lying on the ground.

-Pak!

Grabbing the axe handle, Ho Tae-gang approached the masked watcher and opened his mouth.

"Your martial prowess is strong. To be honest, I wonder if anyone besides the Society Leader could be your match."

"And even that Society Leader is not in good condition now, right?"

"...So you're aiming to seize this moment?"

To this question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and answered,

"Well, even if the Society Leader were in perfect health, my goal would be the same, so his condition doesn't really matter."

"....."

Ho Tae-gang inwardly exclaimed at this response.

Is this youthful spirit, or is he that absolutely confident in his own martial prowess?

Without justification or the legitimacy of being a successor of the Three Veins, most factions in the Heaven and Earth Society are likely to oppose and confront him, yet he's aiming for the top?

Whatever the case, if we hadn't met like this, he would have been quite to my liking.

However,

-Swish!

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang aimed the blade of his axe at the watcher and opened his mouth.

"It's unfortunate."

"What is?"

"Your martial prowess, and even the fact that you've subdued the second young master Zhang, gives me an idea of how great your capacity is. But you're not the one."

"....."

"If you were at least a disciple of the Society Leader, or even a successor of the Earthly Vein, I would have accepted your proposal without hesitation."

"But you can't accept it, is that right?"

"No matter how much our organization respects and reveres the strong, there's still a minimum established line. If it were a structure where we unconditionally followed someone just because they're strong, do you think the organization would function properly?"

"Are you rejecting out of fear of that?"

"I acknowledge your strength, but you lack crucial justification. Without that, the goal you're trying to achieve is absolutely..."

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grasped his sword-deciding talisman and took a sword stance.

Seeing this, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang hesitated in swinging his axe and couldn't take his eyes off the sword stance.

The sword stance Mok Gyeong-un took resembled the Heavenly Sword technique.

However, the atmosphere was subtly different.

It was then.

-Chwak!

Mok Gyeong-un's sword-deciding talisman cut through the air, tracing an orbit.

The gracefully flowing sword orbit was reminiscent of the moon, and Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang's eyes widened as he watched.

'Could it be?'

Although he had only seen a single move, something flashed through Ho Tae-gang's mind.

That was,

'The Moon Sword Technique?'

As one of the Five Kings, he was from a family that had supported the Heaven and Earth Society for generations as a top-tier faction.

Therefore, he naturally knew the sword techniques of the Heavenly and Earthly Veins better than anyone else.

He was so familiar with them that he could recall the moves just by seeing their sword stances, but the sword technique Mok Gyeong-un was displaying now was clearly different from the Heavenly and Earthly sword techniques.

‘There’s no doubt.’

This was clearly the Moon Sword Technique that he had only heard about in oral traditions.

He wasn’t the only one who recognized it.

Shadow Clan Leader Hwan Ya-seon also recognized it.

‘...So this was it! The real reason why Bright Blade King Son Yun insisted on bringing hostages.’

Hwan Ya-seon had suspected there must have been a special reason why Bright Blade King Son Yun, who had gone to the Yeon Mok Sword Manor on the Society Leader’s orders, had brought back two hostages.

But now, everything was falling into place.

He had found it strange that hostages from outside, no matter how talented, were suddenly sent to the Corpse Blood Valley.

If it was simply to kill them, they could have just done so, there was no need to send them to the Corpse Blood Valley.

But now it seemed all of this was related to their organization?

The Moon Vein and its sword technique, whose lineage had been cut off for nearly a hundred years.

Since no one could read the text within the secret manual, he thought a successor to that lineage would never appear.

But had Gyeong-un, no, the master of the Holy Fire and its incarnation, learned the Moon Sword Technique?

It was truly an extraordinary coincidence.

Was this the reason, beyond talent, why the Society Leader had mentioned a fourth disciple?

Everything was happening as if it were a predetermined sequence.

However, there was one thing he couldn't understand,

‘Why has he kept this secret until now?’

A successor to the Moon Vein who had learned the Moon Sword Technique had appeared.

Even if he was a hostage from the righteous faction, this was no less than a joyous event for the Heaven and Earth Society, filling the gap of the lost Three Veins.

Yet he had continually hidden this, which was incomprehensible.

Was there some other purpose?

Just as he was inwardly wondering about this,

“Hahahahahahaha!”

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang, who had been watching Mok Gyeong-un display the Moon Sword Technique, suddenly burst into laughter.

His subordinates couldn't help but wonder at his sudden change in attitude.

"Elder?"

"What's going on?"

Then Ho Tae-gang stopped laughing, shook his head, and said,

"I was the one who knew nothing."

No sooner had he finished speaking.

-Chwak! Roll roll roll!

Ho Tae-gang beheaded the only surviving masked watcher with an axe strike as quick as lightning.

'This...'

Hwan Ya-seon's expression hardened at this sight.

Even after showing the Moon Sword Technique, did he still reject the proposal?

But then,

-Pak!

At that moment, Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang knelt on one knee towards Mok Gyeong-un, put his hands together in respect, and said,

“I, Ho Tae-gang, head of the Axe Clan, wish to join Mok Gyeong-un, successor of the Moon Vein. Please accept this Ho’s loyalty and make me the vanguard to take Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s head.”

‘!?’

What’s this?

When he beheaded the watcher, they thought he had refused the proposal and decided not to join after all.

But now he was pledging loyalty, so everyone couldn’t help but be puzzled.

To this, Mok Gyeong-un asked with an expressionless face.

“This is unexpected. I thought you had chosen to take the long roundabout path.”

-Pak!

At these words, Ho Tae-gang bowed his head as if apologizing and answered.

“I apologize for beheading the watcher without a word. However, after pledging loyalty to you, even if it stemmed from sincere loyalty, if you insisted on delivering the message, my actions would become disloyalty, so I acted first.”

“Are you saying you acted before pledging loyalty?”

“That’s right. I fully understand that sending such a message is a necessary step for you to subjugate the organization by clashing with Young Master Na Yul-ryang.”

“If you understand, why did you behead him?”

“To make sure.”

“To make sure?”

“With your martial prowess, dealing with Young Master Na Yul-ryang wouldn’t be difficult. However, even a tiger gives its all and doesn’t let its guard down when hunting a rabbit, which is mere prey.”

“.....”

“The watcher to be sent with the message had heard too much. The watcher who was released earlier has already revealed how much your martial prowess has developed. In the midst of this, there’s no need to immediately reveal that you’re the successor of the Moon Vein with succession rights, or that you’ve gathered subordinates. Too much information will only raise unnecessary vigilance in the opponent.”

‘He’s right.’

Shadow Clan Leader Hwan Ya-seon nodded in agreement with these words.

There was nothing wrong with what he said.

Rather than showing confidence and raising wariness by revealing that one is stronger than the opponent, inducing carelessness until the end could actually reduce variables.

“If you had any other intentions, please reprimand this subordinate for his misguided judgment.”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and shrugged.

There was nothing particularly wrong with what he said, so what was there to reprimand?

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang, whom he thought would only be aggressive, turned out to have more patience and insight than expected.

He had thought he would stop at nothing for his son's revenge.

Mok Gyeong-un approached him, who was still paying respects, and said,

"Since that was your intention, there's nothing to reprimand."

"Thank you for accepting my disrespect before pledging loyalty as loyal advice."

"But in fact, it doesn't really matter whether Young Master Na Yul-ryang knows anything or not."

"...What do you mean?"

"Regardless of sending a message, I was planning to go to him directly anyway."

'!?'

Chapter 393 – Crossroads (1)

Young Master Na Yul-ryang downed a full cup of alcohol.

As he emptied the cup and was about to pour another, Mo Yak clicked his tongue and said,

“Why are you pouring drinks alone so pathetically?”

“It’s because you’re not drinking with me.”

“Aish. You never used to drink, but after your seclusion...”

No, to be precise, ever since he received that strange eye transplant surgery that the Elder Council had provided, he had been drinking constantly.

This had been increasingly bothering Mo Yak for some time.

He had been holding his tongue since this was his lord, but could it really be considered an eye transplant when the eye was originally lost?

Any skilled physician would say that once an eye is lost, that’s the end of it.

Even if you brought someone else’s eye, with current medical techniques, it’s impossible to connect the optic nerve.

Yet the physician brought by that envoy from the Elder Council had done this easily.

‘...But why didn’t he fix his own eyes?’

Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, had said he became blind due to burns.

As a martial artist, he too would want to see, so why didn’t he get eyes for himself?

No matter how much he thought about it, it didn’t make sense.

Even if his lord wasn't interested in other people's affairs, this was strange enough to wonder about, yet he didn't mention it at all.

Somehow, it felt like he was subtly changing from the person he used to know.

'Hmm.'

Mo Yak, who had been staring at Na Yul-ryang as he downed another cup, finally opened his mouth.

"What will you do about the Elder Council' proposal?"

"Proposal?"

"Yes, they spoke as if they knew something. Isn't that why you're considering it?"

"Considering..."

-Glug glug glug!

Na Yul-ryang raised an eyebrow as he filled his cup.

The words of Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, flashed through his mind.

[The Society Leader doesn't consider any of you young masters as successor.]

[...What do you mean?]

[I'm telling you because you might want to know.]

[I'm asking why you're telling me this now.]

This was at the time when rumors were spreading that the Society Leader's condition had worsened and he was on his deathbed.

So why was he suddenly saying such things?

-Pak!

Na Yul-ryang pressed his thumb against Yul-myeong's vital point and spoke in a cold voice.

[What is the Elder Council plotting?]

[Plotting? That's an interesting way to put it. The Elder Council is just a place where retired members of the organization gather to spend their twilight years.]

[You seem to like retirement. Why are such old folks so interested in the organization's future? Including the succession structure.]

[Well, even if retired, it's because the organization's future depends on it.]

[The organization's future? How ridiculous. Isn't it because you want to grasp power again despite being retired?]

[Are you talking about power?]

[Do I need to spell it out?]

[.....]

Na Yul-ryang, who had been staring at the silent Yul-myeong, finally released his hand from the vital point.

Unlike others, perhaps because he had no eyes, it was impossible to read his emotions or thoughts.

Na Yul-ryang spoke to him.

[Tell those old folks. I don't mind if they support me, but tell them to stop going beyond that.]

[That might be a bit difficult.]

[What?]

[As it happens, they have a proposal for you.]

[Proposal? I clearly...]

[The situation has changed. A fourth person that no one knows about will be selected as the successor. If that happens, it will cause division in the organization.]

[...A fourth person?]

[Yes. So the Elder Council wants to recommend you as the Society Leader.]

At these words from Yul-myeong, Young Master Na Yul-ryang's expression became much colder than before.

Even though he couldn't see Na Yul-ryang's expression, Yul-myeong seemed to sense the change in the air and took half a step back with a light joke.

[I'm surprised. I thought you didn't have much of a bond with the Society Leader.]

[That's none of your business.]

[Loyalty to your master... Is that it?]

[You...]

-Swish!

Suddenly, Yul-myeong had moved six steps away from him.

If he had been even a moment late, his throat would have been torn out for spouting nonsense.

[If that's the case, I understand your anger, but please listen to what I have to say first.]

[Get lost.]

[Please calm down. There's no more time. It's meaningless to regret later after losing your position.]

[Even without your interference, that position...]

[Cannot be yours. The reason the Society Leader hasn't decided on a successor even while on his sickbed is because he doesn't intend to give it to anyone.]

[.....]

[You still don't seem convinced. Then, do you know why the Society Leader has no children?]

[.....]

Na Yul-ryang's cold gaze narrowed.

He too wasn't particularly interested in women, so he had never specifically questioned this.

[Is it because he's not interested in women? Or because he's physically unable to have children?]

[...What are you trying to say?]

[The Society Leader simply chose not to marry or have children. Because the Heavenly Vein no longer wants to be the Society Leader.]

Na Yul-ryang's eyebrow raised.

What does he mean the Heavenly Vein no longer wants to be the Society Leader?

Things were becoming confusing.

Until now, he had thought the Society Leader's intention was for succession to happen through competition.

So he hadn't had any particular complaints.

Because none of the disciples could challenge his stronghold.

But to hear that the Society Leader didn't consider anyone as a successor was bound to be irritating.

Then why did he accept them as disciples in the first place?

At that moment, Yul-myeong said,

[The Elder Council has two requirements. They are not requests that will harm you in any way. If you agree to them, you can become the Society Leader.]

After a moment of silence at these words, Na Yul-ryang asked,

[...What are the requirements?]

[The first is to marry Miss Wi So-yeon, your youngest fellow disciple, along with your inauguration as Society Leader.]

[What?]

It was a completely unexpected demand.

Marry Wi So-yeon?

To Na Yul-ryang, who was puzzled, Yul-myeong smiled and said,

[It's for legitimacy. If you become Society Leader, if disciples of the Heavenly Vein have children together, everyone will accept it as a substitute for the Heavenly Vein's flying house.]

It wasn't an unreasonable suggestion.

[What's the second one?]

[That is...]

Na Yul-ryang's expression became strange at the Elder Council' second requirement that followed.

This was a completely unexpected demand.

Because of this, Na Yul-ryang had taken time to consider their proposal, saying he would think it over.

Could their words be true?

Or were they deliberately causing confusion to paint the picture they wanted?

But Yul-myeong's words hadn't been wrong at all.

Apart from his illness getting worse, hadn't he continuously refused even private audiences?

Did the Society Leader, no, his master, truly no longer want the Heavenly Vein to lead the organization?

-Tak!

Na Yul-ryang emptied his cup and put it down on the table.

It was then.

Someone hurriedly ran to the rear garden where he had set up the drinking table.

Despite running, his footsteps were barely audible, and his energy was so well concealed it was hardly noticeable.

As soon as he saw him, Mo Yak stood up and said,

“It’s the one we attached to Axe-Destroying King.”

“His body technique is unique.”

“He’s Silent Saber, from the Four Great Assassins of the Central Plains, whom I introduced to you before. You said he was useful because of his unique energy-concealing technique.”

“...His face is different, is it a human skin mask?”

“It must be. But why is he running here so frantically?”

At Mo Yak’s question, the man who had run over caught his breath, put his hands together in respect, and said,

“I had to deliver this urgently, so I came in a hurry.”

At his response, Mo Yak clicked his tongue.

“Something seems to have gone wrong. We should probably give up on high expectations, Young Master.”

At these words, Young Master Na Yul-ryang snorted.

He didn’t have high expectations to begin with.

He had already anticipated that Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang would try to implement a strategy of suffering a flesh wound.

Even so, he thought he would take some action for that strategy, but judging from this man’s reaction, it seemed Axe-Destroying King hadn’t moved as desired.

“So, did Axe-Destroying King return from the Shadow Clan without doing anything?”

“N-No, that’s not it.”

“If that’s not it, then what happened?”

“Axe-Destroying King was overwhelmed one-sidedly.”

At these words, Mo Yak tilted his head.

What does this mean?

Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang was overwhelmed one-sidedly?

Did he perhaps have an argument with his master, the Shadow Clan Leader?

As he wondered, Silent Saber Hyeong-in continued in a serious voice.

“He... He tried to subdue someone called Mok Gyeong-un, but instead, in just a few moves, he suffered an injury with his arm broken and was forced to kneel.”

‘!?’

At these words, Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who was filling his cup, stopped.

He had no choice but to stop.

Who was Axe-Destroying King Ho Tae-gang?

He was one of the Five Kings, who could be considered the highest officials of the Heaven and Earth Society, and a supreme master who had received the title of one of the Eight Stars, a title held by only two people in the entire Heaven and Earth Society.

And such a person had his arm broken and was forced to kneel in just a few moves?

Mo Yak opened his mouth with an incredulous tone.

“...Huh? Are you joking?”

“N-No, it’s not a joke. It’s true.”

Silent Saber Hyeong-in waved his hands.

Even he couldn’t believe the scene he had witnessed with his own eyes.

Those who had received the title of one of the Eight Stars were recognized as the supreme masters of the martial arts world, except for the Six Heavens who were called the pinnacle of the current martial world.

But to see such a supreme master being toyed with by a young man who wasn’t even of age was shocking in itself.

“...Are you certain?”

“It’s true. And there was an incredibly powerful master in the Shadow Clan. He was able to find even me, who had completely concealed my presence and energy with the soundless technique...”

“Wait. So besides the watchers, you were also discovered?”

“...I apologize.”

“So you hurriedly escaped and came here?”

Mo Yak’s voice rose.

“D-Don’t worry. I didn’t come straight here. I took a detour and hid for a while to confirm if I was being tracked before coming.”

“Haa.”

At these words, Mo Yak sighed and shook his head.

The other watchers were intentionally sent to make it obvious they were watching Axe-Destroying King, but not this man.

He was someone who should never have been discovered from start to finish.

But not only was he discovered, he had essentially fled.

Mo Yak turned to Young Master Na Yul-ryang and said,

“Young Master. Putting aside the veracity of the report for now...”

“Are you certain?”

“Pardon?”

“That he subdued Axe-Destroying King in just a few moves.”

This question was directed not at Mo Yak, but at Silent Saber Hyeong-in.

“I can stake my life on it. Even Axe-Destroying King was no match for that person. It was as if his martial prowess was far higher...”

“That’s impossible.”

Mo Yak cut off his words.

Then, looking at Young Master Na Yul-ryang, he said,

“As you said, Young Master, this Mok Gyeong-un was just at the early-stage of the Transformation Realm before receiving the secret mission. But if Silent Saber’s report is correct, this would only be possible if he had reached a realm beyond the wall of walls, on par with the bedridden Society Leader. No matter how monstrous his rate of development is, this is...”

“Ha!”

At that moment, Young Master Na Yul-ryang let out a laugh as if in disbelief.

Why is he acting like this?

As they wondered, Young Master Na Yul-ryang suddenly burst into loud laughter.

“Hahahahahahaha!”

At this sight, Mo Yak frowned.

He had never shown such behavior before.

But suddenly laughing like a madman, they couldn't understand what was going on.

Finally, Na Yul-ryang stopped laughing, shook his head, and then downed his cup of alcohol.

After drinking, Na Yul-ryang put down his cup and stood up.

“Young Master?”

“Until now, I thought no one could match me in martial talent, but it seems I was mistaken.”

“Young Master... Surely you don’t believe Silent Saber’s report...”

“What if I do believe it?”

“.....”

“Do you think it’s possible to deal with a peerless master who received the title of one of the Eight Stars through trickery or deception in martial arts?”

At these words from Na Yul-ryang, Mo Yak took a deep breath and then exhaled.

Then, calming himself, he opened his mouth.

“So you’ve judged that he has truly become strong, Young Master.”

“It’s not a judgment, it’s a fact.”

He too had reached the extreme of the Transformation Realm through seclusion, and thanks to this demonic eye given by the Elder Council, he was slowly beginning to see beyond the wall of walls.

If he utilized the power of the eye, he had even gained confidence that he might be able to defeat the supreme masters who had received the title of one of the Eight Stars.

The determination to face a worthy opponent that had appeared for the first time had made him this strong.

But it seemed the guy had surpassed even his expectations.

'Did he encounter some fortuitous opportunity?'

It seemed he had encountered some fortuitous opportunity that allowed his martial prowess to rise dramatically while away from the organization on the secret mission.

There was no other explanation.

In fact, it wasn't very convincing.

If it was certain that the guy had truly surpassed the wall of walls, it would show a tremendous growth unprecedented in martial arts history.

For the first time, Na Yul-ryang experienced this kind of emotion.

'Is this... jealousy?'

While being astounded by the guy's rapid, no, insane growth, for a moment, anger surged up.

Perhaps this was what they called heaven-bestowed talent.

After venting his emotions with loud laughter and momentarily escaping from jealousy, Na Yul-ryang quickly regained his composure.

Then,

“Mo Yak.”

“Yes.”

“If we assume that he has reached the same realm as the Society Leader, what should we do from now on?”

“If he’s at the same realm as the Society Leader...”

“Yes.”

“...I’m sorry to say, but no one has a chance in a one-on-one fight.”

“I suppose so.”

If he had been given even a few more years, no, even one more year, perhaps he too could have trained like mad and somehow approached the wall of walls.

But right now, he couldn’t reach the same realm as that guy.

Then the only answer was to deal with him in a different way.

Mo Yak cautiously began to speak.

"If we mobilize all the forces we have, we might barely be able to face him. But now that we know his level, rather than not knowing, we can somehow find a way to..."

Before he could finish speaking.

-Tak!

'!?'

Mo Yak was momentarily speechless at the sound of someone landing right behind him.

A strange sense of unease sent chills down his spine, and as he hesitated for a moment whether to turn his head or not, a low voice was heard near his ear.

"That's right. That's why I'm not going to give you time to find a way."

Chapter 394 – Crossroads (2)

"That's right. That's why I'm not going to give you time to find a way."

A low voice echoed in his ear.

Startled by this, Mo Yak, Young Master Na Yul-ryang's confidant, leaped forward without a moment to think.

-Pat!

Simultaneously, he pulled out two daggers from both sleeves and, while doing a somersault, threw them towards the owner of the voice.

-Swish swish!

Was it because he was extremely tense?

It felt as if time was moving slowly.

Even in the midst of his somersault, he could clearly see the face of that being.

A face so beautiful.

It seemed even more beautiful than a woman's.

But that being slightly nodded his head as he looked at the incoming daggers.

It seemed like he had no intention of blocking them.

At that moment.

-Pa pak!

The flying daggers suddenly changed direction in mid-air, and then embedded themselves into Mo Yak's shoulder and thigh as he was mid-somersault.

-Puk! Puk!

“Aagh!”

-Ku dang tang!

Mo Yak, hit by his own daggers, couldn't land properly and fell.

"T-This is!"

At this, Silent Saber Hyeong-in, who was right beside him, hurriedly drew an extremely thin and flexible sword from his waist and tried to behead that being, Mok Gyeong-un, who had suddenly appeared.

However, before it could even reach him,

-Chaeng gang!

The sword broke and flew upwards,

-Pak!

"Kek!"

Silent Saber Hyeong-in's neck was caught in Mok Gyeong-un's hand as he was swinging his sword.

It happened so quickly that Silent Saber Hyeong-in couldn't even perceive what had been done.

As he was bewildered,

"So you're that rat who was sneaking peeks earlier."

"Kek kek... You... you?"

"If you're done with your business, shall we go?"

“G-Go, you say?”

-Kwa deuk!

Mok Gyeong-un tore out Hyeong-in's adam's apple as he questioned.

Hyeong-in, with blood pouring from where his adam's apple had been torn out, staggered with eyes wide open before falling backwards and sprawling out.

The sight of him twitching with blood gushing up was almost pitiful.

Despite two people being taken down in an instant, Young Master Na Yul-ryang's eyes never left Mok Gyeong-un.

He glanced up once with his eyes and then opened his mouth.

“Did you come by flying?”

“Yes, you guessed correctly.”

“.....”

Came by flying, he says.

Does that mean he used something like Sky-Traversing Void Path or Void-Stepping?

Even he, who had mastered the Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps, one of the greatest body techniques in history, and was more skilled in footwork than anyone, had not yet reached that level.

He tried to deny it inwardly, but still,

'...He has surpassed the wall of walls.'

If it came down to pure martial arts, he had to admit he had no chance of winning.

And the guy's aura had changed.

Even before, starting from his almost diluted emotions, he had thought him to be a similar type of person to himself in many ways, so he thought that if he wouldn't follow, he should naturally be killed.

But apart from this, there had been an immature feeling, but now that was completely gone.

If before he had been rough and unrefined, now he felt like a well-forged sword, complete.

'Became stronger...'

Na Yul-ryang's pupils moved minutely but continuously.

Though he knew Mok Gyeong-un had become overwhelmingly strong, being in an opposing situation, he was imagining countless scenarios of confrontation in his mind.

But even after envisioning dozens, hundreds of times in an instant, no answer came.

The guy had completely become a monster.

-Drip!

Feeling something strange on his forehead, Na Yul-ryang wiped it with the back of his hand.

It was cold sweat.

Seeing this, a strange light flickered in Na Yul-ryang's eyes.

Had he ever shed such sweat besides when training?

It was the first time in his life he had felt tense about something.

'Life and... death... Am I standing at that crossroads?'

Crossroads.

What an interesting crossroads.

A crossroads riddled with death where the path to life was barely visible.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said,

"I wanted to see you become more emotional, but since you're a rational person, it seems reality has sunk in quickly."

"Since I don't see any chance of winning, I won't particularly deny it."

"I'll give you a choice."

"A choice?"

"Yes."

“I suppose you’re going to give me unnecessary hope torture.”

“Consider it a chance to enjoy life a bit longer.”

“What is this choice you speak of?”

“If you sever the tendons and muscles of your limbs and destroy your danjeon yourself, I’ll let you keep your life.”

“Is that much different from telling a martial artist to die?”

“If death as a martial artist is the same as life to you, you can die right here.”

“Huh.”

Na Yul-ryang snorted.

At his reaction, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged.

Then Na Yul-ryang reached out somewhere.

The scabbard lying next to the drinking table was sucked into his hand by void grasping.

-Tak!

Na Yul-ryang, grasping the scabbard, opened his mouth.

“I have no intention of begging for my life so pitifully or living like that. But if I’m going anyway, it’s not bad to go as a martial artist.”

“How admirable.”

“Cut the insincere talk. Anyway, beyond the martial arts world, the world is about the strong eating the weak. It’s the law of nature that the weak are eliminated, and this time it was just me.”

Though he said this, it was truly a bitter moment.

It’s almost laughable that even though he had gained power nearly on par with the Eight Stars, he had become the weak one thanks to the guy becoming even stronger.

Na Yul-ryang, tightly gripping the sword hilt with his right hand, was about to remove the eye patch he was wearing.

Even in a fight with no chance of winning, shouldn’t one struggle?

Mok Gyeong-un also moved to grasp his sword-deciding talisman.

It was then.

“Time Stop Darkness.”

-Tsu tsu tsuk!

As if blinking, the world briefly darkened.

Along with this, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

‘!?’

This was because Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who had been right in front of him just a moment ago, had disappeared.

What on earth was going on?

It happened in such a brief instant that he was puzzled.

There was no movement of presence, no flow of energy, yet not only had he disappeared from sight midway...

-Rumble rumble rumble!

He felt numerous presences converging around him.

And there were a great many of them.

These too had appeared as if suddenly generated.

It was a strange phenomenon.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un slowly raised his head and looked at someone sitting on the roof tiles of the pavilion in the rear garden.

“Was this your doing?”

“Oh? I thought you’d be quite flustered no matter how strong you are, but to maintain such coolness in this situation. Truly impressive.”

The person sitting on the pavilion roof tiles at a distance.

It was Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council.

Seeing Yul-myeong's face full of horrible burn scars, Mok Gyeong-un immediately recognized him as the one who had tried to track him with mystical techniques.

How was he here, with Young Master Na Yul-ryang suddenly disappearing?

The reason was,

-Swish!

The demonic power of the Third Eye opened in Mok Gyeong-un's pupils.

Then he felt an immeasurably enormous spiritual power around him.

It had shaken the very space itself, and the surrounding flow was still unstable.

Observing this, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“What kind of mystical technique is this?”

At this question, the brow of Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, twitched.

He had a feeling it might be the case.

But had he read the remaining waves of spiritual power?

“The secret records left by Primal Killing Pavilion Leader In Seo-ok said that Bangwol Jo Ui-gong was accepted as a disciple due to his outstanding talent, and it seems that was true.”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un, seemingly unconcerned, continued his own words.

"This level of spiritual power seems impossible for even an outstanding diviner to possess. Did you borrow the power of a ritual tool or some special medium?"

"Huh?"

"It seems I'm right. Did you just temporarily stop me alone?"

'!?'

At this question, the mouth of Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, opened slightly.

He seemed somewhat surprised.

Yul-myeong, who had opened his mouth and furrowed his brow, then said,

"...What on earth are you? How did you..."

"The bloodstains on the ground are towards the direction outside the pavilion, but they clearly didn't move while fallen, isn't it strange that they left that and disappeared from there?"

'Blood?'

In the direction Mok Gyeong-un was looking, there were a few very faint drops of blood remaining.

It seemed they had erased most traces, but had missed this one.

If Yul-myeong's eyes could see, he would have been very surprised at this.

Because he had immediately found a trace that was so difficult to find.

"And for so many people to approach this close without me sensing even a hint of their presence, it's only possible if I alone was somehow separated and suddenly dropped here... Ah. Perhaps you temporarily separated me with some special technique? No, not just from space, but even from the flow of time?"

'!!!!'

At this question, Yul-myeong was truly dumbfounded.

For a moment, he felt chills all over his body.

He might be able to sense spiritual power because he had learned mystical arts, but this insight was terrifying.

He had figured out the use of the divine artifact Time Stop Darkness from just part of the situation.

Time Stop Darkness was one of the few remaining divine artifacts from the era of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, a treasure that could only be used when spiritual power accumulated naturally.

However, the conditions for this divine artifact were quite strict compared to other divine artifacts.

For instance, once used, all spiritual power was consumed and had to be gathered again, and only one-thousandth of the accumulated spiritual power was actually manifested.

If spiritual power accumulated for a thousand years, it could completely separate the desired target from the world's space and time for one year, one-thousandth of that time.

It was absolute enough to be called a divine artifact, so no being could escape from it.

'...What on earth is this guy?'

No matter how much he had learned mystical arts, no matter how strong his insight was, this was beyond common sense, so it was extremely difficult to deduce in an instant.

Yet he had accurately grasped what the divine artifact had done in such a short moment.

'What a monstrous guy.'

Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, truly clicked his tongue.

Because he had been using the divine artifact whenever necessary, he hadn't gathered much spiritual power and could only confine him for half a quarter hour.

However, because he was confined for such a short time, it should have been even more difficult to grasp the situation, yet this guy was truly unbelievable.

While surprised, Yul-myeong felt somewhat regretful inwardly.

To only now discover such a person.

He had heard that he wasn't even of age yet, but with martial arts that had surpassed the wall of walls and even such talent in mystical arts, he was a talent anyone would covet.

At this, Yul-myeong, with a hopeful heart, opened his mouth.

"You're truly intelligent. I don't think I've ever seen anyone as clever as you among all the people I've met."

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“So, I was wondering...”

“If it’s persuasion, I’ll decline. More importantly, where did you send the Young Master?”

“.....”

To refuse even before he could speak.

He hadn’t had high expectations to begin with, but this guy was truly resolute.

It seemed persuasion would really be difficult.

At this, Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, shook his head and opened his mouth.

“Do you think I’d simply tell you that?”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and replied,

“Well, who knows? When your life is in imminent danger, your mouth might reveal where the Young Master went?”

-Grooowl!

Mok Gyeong-un intentionally revealed his killing intent.

This was a clear threat.

Despite this, Yul-myeong spoke nonchalantly, as if joking,

"My, how scary. Well. But that would be difficult. The Young Master is a very important existence to us, you see."

"Is that so? Then I'll have to find him myself."

Judging from the remaining blood traces, he hadn't been confined for too long.

If so, there was still plenty of room to track him.

There was no need to face all the people surrounding this place, it would be enough to just deal with this guy and go.

It was at that moment.

-Pak!

Someone appeared and stood on top of the east wall.

That someone was an old man with white hair and sharp features, and in his hand was a familiar face held by the nape of the neck.

It was,

'Mok Yu-cheon?'

It was Mok Yu-cheon, his half-brother who had been taken hostage along with him at the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

Of course, to be precise, he was the real Mok Gyeong-un's half-brother.

There were signs of injury on his face, as if he had been forcibly captured.

-Clap clap clap!

Yul-myeong clapped his hands and said with a raised corner of his mouth,

“You’ve arrived just in time.”

At these words, the white-haired old man snorted and said, pressing down on Mok Yu-cheon’s neck,

“To bring such a guy in just half a quarter hour, you’re really troubling this old body.”

“I’m still grateful nonetheless. In any case...”

-Swish! Tak!

Yul-myeong came down from the roof tile he was sitting on, and continued speaking to Mok Gyeong-un with a sneer,

“Now the situation is reversed. With that clever head of yours, why don’t you try to guess what I’m going to say...”

“Just kill him.”

‘!?’

Chapter 395 – Crossroads (3)

“Now the situation is reversed. With that clever head of yours, why don’t you try to guess what I’m going to say...”

“Just kill him.”

‘...!?’

The expression of Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, hardened.

What did he just hear?

Kill him?

“Mok Gyeong-un... That younger brother is your...”

“I said, kill him.”

“.....”

At these resolute words, not only Yul-myeong but even the white-haired old man who had brought Mok Yu-cheon couldn’t hide their bewilderment.

They clearly knew these two were brothers who had been taken hostage together.

That’s why they thought he would be a good card to restrain Mok Gyeong-un.

But what on earth was this guy?

‘Is it a bluff? But to say that...’

There wasn’t even a hint of hesitation.

There wasn’t even a tremor in his voice.

It was so dumbfounding, as if they were complete strangers.

‘No. Even if they don’t get along, there can’t be someone who wants their own flesh and blood to die. He must be controlling his emotions extremely well.’

If his enlightenment was high enough to have reached the realm of Manifestation after surpassing the wall of walls, as Young Master Na Yul-ryang said, he should be able to easily control his own emotions.

Then it was just a matter of testing him.

-Swish!

Yul-myeong raised his hand and gave a hand signal.

At this, the white-haired old man sighed and pressed down on Mok Yu-cheon’s left shoulder.

-Grip!

“Kuk.”

“You’re suffering unnecessary harm due to your brother’s stubbornness.”

“Brother... what... I clearly... kuk! ...told you he wouldn’t... even blink...”

Mok Yu-cheon had already been told that he would be used as a card to threaten Mok Gyeong-un while being captured.

To this, Mok Yu-cheon had snorted and said it absolutely wouldn’t work.

That guy was literally a demon.

If he had considered him a brother, he would never have done such things in the Corpse Blood Valley.

-Grip!

“Keuup!”

Mok Yu-cheon’s groans grew louder at the pain that felt like his shoulder was being torn off.

Then Yul-myeong said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“Let’s see if you still say to kill him when your brother’s shoulder is being torn off...”

-Swish!

Before his words could finish.

Mok Gyeong-un’s form appeared in front of him in an instant.

As he appeared, Mok Gyeong-un’s hand moved to grab Yul-myeong’s neck in one go.

-Pat!

At that moment, Yul-myeong hurriedly threw his body backward, and something invisible and unknown created a repulsive force in front of Mok Gyeong-un as he tried to follow.

-Pa ang!

‘This is?’

With an incredibly heavy force, Mok Gyeong-un’s form was pushed back about five steps in an instant.

Yul-myeong raised his voice at him.

“So it was a bluff after all. Do you think you can safely retrieve your brother by taking me hostage?”

“I told you I don’t care whether you kill him or not.”

“Do you think I’d believe that? Elder Kang. Just tear off his left shoulder.”

“As you wish.”

-Kwak!

The white-haired old man called Elder Kang immediately drove his fingers into Mok Yu-cheon’s shoulder.

However, he didn’t do it in one go.

Since it was meant to threaten and control the opponent’s actions by using a hostage, he deliberately pushed his fingers in slowly.

But at that very moment.

“As expected, if you do that...”

-Woo jik! Woo ji jik!

Mok Yu-cheon’s shoulder muscles began to twitch, and then blood vessels bulged on his facial skin as his body started to swell.

Startled by the sudden change, Elder Kang tried to tear off Mok Yu-cheon’s shoulder, thinking ‘Oh no’.

However, Mok Yu-cheon grabbed his wrist,

-Pak!

And broke it right there.

-Crack!

“Kuk! You bastard!”

Elder Kang, with his wrist broken, tried to pierce Mok Yu-cheon’s neck in one go by raising energy in his other hand.

However, before he could do so, Mok Yu-cheon threw his body forward and avoided it.

After dodging like that, Mok Yu-cheon turned his head to look at Elder Kang as if to check on him, but,

-Flinch!

Elder Kang hesitated for a moment and felt creeped out by the sight of blood vessels bulging all over his face, his eyes completely red, and his skin turned black and grotesque.

At that moment, Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, shouted.

“What’s this? Did you let him go?”

“This bastard was hiding a strange energy circulation technique.”

Elder Kang had felt the energy suddenly reverse while holding his shoulder.

Such a reversal was an extremely dangerous energy circulation technique that could lead to qi deviation.

Just looking at his current appearance was enough to confirm this.

‘His internal energy has exploded.’

In an instant, he had surpassed himself.

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that in terms of internal energy alone, he had almost reached the peak of the transcendent realm.

However, this must be temporary due to that dangerous energy circulation technique, so it’s not a state that can be maintained for long.

-Chang!

I need to subdue him first.

Elder Kang drew his sword and flew towards Mok Yu-cheon.

However,

-Pat!

Instead of blocking Elder Kang's sword, Mok Yu-cheon flew his body towards an unexpected person.

It was Mok Gyeong-un.

The momentum with which he flew his body looked almost like an attack.

As they were thinking 'Surely not',

-Pa pak!

Mok Yu-cheon, raising energy in his hand, unleashed the third move of Bright Blade King's unique sword technique, the Bright Sun Sword Technique, One Son Sword Return, towards Mok Gyeong-un with tremendous internal energy.

The momentum of the move was incredibly domineering, as if he truly intended to kill his opponent.

'I was a fool for harboring even a sliver of hope.'

In truth, Mok Yu-cheon could have avoided being captured using the reverse blood energy circulation technique.

However, he wanted to use this opportunity to test one last time whether Mok Gyeong-un truly considered him as flesh and blood.

If he had shown even a slight hesitation, no matter how demonic he was, Mok Yu-cheon would have thought he was human after all.

But now, he had no hope or lingering attachment left.

‘You were going to abandon me too, so I’ll defeat you here and cut off all ties of blood and kinship.’

With that, Mok Yu-cheon’s sword energy, at its peak due to the reverse blood energy circulation technique, rushed mercilessly towards Mok Gyeong-un.

However,

-Cha ang!

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un casually caught Mok Yu-cheon’s sword energy with his bare hand.

The domineering aura and internal energy in the sword move were no exaggeration to say they had reached the peak of the transcendent realm.

But what on earth was this?

As he was bewildered, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Why did you attack me?”

“You... How?”

When they had fought before, they were almost evenly matched thanks to the reverse blood energy circulation technique.

But what was this now?

-Par reu reu reu!

-Crack! Crack!

Even though he had raised his reverse blood energy to ten-fold, his hand didn't budge at all.

How could he withstand his sword energy, which was close to strong qi, with his bare hand without even raising any special energy?

To the puzzled Mok Yu-cheon, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Looking at your eyes, your mind hasn’t been consumed. You’ve improved somewhat too.”

“Improved? You...”

“If you attacked because you were upset about me saying to kill you, I’ll let it slide this once.”

“What?”

“Stop being a nuisance and just go.”

-Puk!

“Keuok!”

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un's fist struck Mok Yu-cheon's abdomen.

It didn't seem like he had swung hard, but just lightly hit him, yet Mok Yu-cheon's body bent like a shrimp and was sent flying backward.

-Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

He even flew through a wall about ten zhang away.

After breaking through the wall and rolling several times, Mok Yu-cheon finally came to a stop.

"Uuuu."

Sprawled out, Mok Yu-cheon was truly dumbfounded.

He had devoted himself madly to martial arts training with the sole intention of paying back that guy for what happened then.

But what was this?

Far from being a match for that guy, his internal organs were shaken by a light punch.

As blood rose in his throat, he couldn't maintain the reverse blood energy circulation technique, and his body was gradually returning to its original state.

'Damn it.'

-Kwang!

Mok Yu-cheon's eyes reddened as he slammed his fist on the ground.

After all that hardship, that guy had become so strong that he felt like not just a youngster, but lower than an insect on the ground compared to him.

It felt so unfair.

Meanwhile, Yul-myeong, the envoy from the Elder Council, inwardly clicked his tongue at the sight of Mok Yu-cheon being sent flying after receiving a single punch from Mok Gyeong-un when he had rushed at him.

He had thought he could use him as a card to control Mok Gyeong-un because they were blood relatives, but at this rate, it seemed they were almost worse than enemies.

'A completely useless card.'

Then there was no choice.

Since the hostage play had become useless, now there were only two options left.

Those surrounding this place now were a group of masters secretly nurtured by the Elder Council, and high-level masters of Great Commander rank and above that Young Master Na Yul-ryang had persuaded, along with their subordinate forces.

There were 10 transcendent realm masters, at least 50 people at the peak realm or above, and nearly 400 first-class master level forces that could be scraped together.

If there had been more time, they would have gathered more forces, but this was the limit for half a quarter hour.

Of course, this alone could be considered a tremendous force, but if the opponent was truly a grand master who had surpassed the wall of walls and reached the level of the Six Heavens, this wouldn't be enough.

Therefore, the best prepared force could be said to be himself.

-Swish!

Yul-myeong formed a hand seal with one hand and opened his mouth.

“Since the hostage play has become meaningless, it seems we have no choice but to shed blood. I truly hoped a young man like you would join us.”

“That won’t happen. And...”

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes were directed towards the front of Yul-myeong, or more precisely, towards a transparent being emitting a faint demonic energy.

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un’s gaze, Yul-myeong clicked his tongue.

“Truly remarkable talent. If we had met a little earlier, I would have wanted to take you as a disciple as a diviner.”

He meant it sincerely.

This faint demonic being protecting him was an evil spirit exceptionally skilled at concealing its appearance, which couldn’t be detected even by moon-level spiritual power.

At least sun-level or above was needed to perceive it, but this guy who wasn’t even of age possessed extraordinary qualities.

“I’ve heard that a lot. All the diviners from Primal Killing Pavilion said the same thing before they died.”

“Before they died? Wait... You don’t mean?”

“They dared to kill my spirit servant and even try to track me.”

‘!?’

At these words, Yul-myeong’s ears perked up.

He had thought that since the one controlling In Seo-ok, the Primal Killing Pavilion leader who had been turned into a living corpse spirit, was a diviner from Harmonious Immortal Pavilion, naturally the Red Eyebrow Old Immortal, one of the Six Divine Practitioners, must be behind it.

He had thought no one else could deflect his tracking technique.

But,

‘This guy... deflected my tracking technique?’

Yul-myeong was truly shocked.

A mere youngster who wasn’t even of age, let alone holding the title of Divine Practitioner, had deflected his tracking technique.

What kind of guy was this?

His martial arts were on par with the Six Heavens, the pinnacle of the current martial world, and his spiritual power as a diviner had also reached the Divine Practitioner level?

To the astonished Yul-myeong, Mok Gyeong-un grasped the hilt of the demonic sword Evil Commandment Sword and said,

“So I was determined to kill you if I ever saw you, and how fortunate. You’ve appeared before me on your own feet.”

“Kill me? Ha!”

To him who scoffed, Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly and said,

“You shouldn’t rely too much on that invisible spirit servant.”

“Pft.”

At these words, Yul-myeong let out a sneer.

Mok Gyeong-un, not minding his reaction at all, half-drew Evil Commandment Sword.

-Seureung!

Then Yul-myeong stopped sneering and said,

“It’s the first time my face has been so disgraced since receiving the title of Divine Practitioner. Well then.”

“Divine Practitioner?”

Did he just call himself a Divine Practitioner?

As Mok Gyeong-un wondered, Yul-myeong formed a hand seal with one hand.

-Chak! Chak! Chak! Chak!

Lim! Byeong! Gae! Jin!

-Hwa reu reu reuk!

At that moment, balls of fire began to fall from the air like hail.

-Kung! Kung! Kung! Kung!

Even Elder Kang, who was on the same side as him, widened his eyes at this strange sight.

What on earth was this bizarre phenomenon?

Then Yul-myeong opened his mouth in a meaningful voice.

“I am Myeong-ryul, the Grand Divination Master of the Golden Origin Pavilion. One of the Six Divine Practitioners, the first to take a Spiritual beast, the highest rank among evil spirits, as a spirit servant.”

-Kwa a a a a a!

As soon as he finished speaking, a huge white being that hadn't been visible before revealed itself and let out a roar so loud it shook the surroundings.

Chapter 396 – Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul (1)

“Cough... cough... Damn it...”

Mok Yu-cheon, his internal organs severely shaken by just one punch, staggered as he barely managed to stand up.

He wanted to circulate his qi right there, but the incoming crowd made it impossible.

From what he could sense, there were hundreds of people approaching. Were they mobilizing this many to catch that bastard Mok Gyeong-un?

Mok Yu-cheon clicked his tongue.

Just how strong had he become for so many people to be deployed?

“Hah...”

It was mind-boggling.

He and that guy had been imprisoned here for barely half a year.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un seemed to be causing a storm in the Heaven and Earth Society, one of the three major powers currently dividing the Central Plains.

If even the elders, known as Heaven and Earth Society's hidden strength, were getting involved, what the hell had he done?

‘…Is this really the same guy?’

Now he couldn't help but think he was a completely different person.

“Cough, cough.”

For now, it seemed he'd have to think about what that bastard had done to cause this uproar later.

-Rumble!

The crowd was getting closer.

If he didn't hurry and escape, even he could get caught up in this.

-Whoosh!

Mok Yu-cheon launched his body.

Though it was difficult to sense qi due to his internal injuries, he had to get out of this estate while avoiding the crowd as much as possible.

But before he could get far, someone blocked his path.

It was a middle-aged man holding hook-shaped exotic weapons in both hands.

-Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Mok Yu-cheon and the middle-aged man exchanged four moves in an instant before creating distance between them.

After crossing hands with him, Mok Yu-cheon's expression darkened.

Whoever this was, with this level of martial arts he had to be at least a branch leader in Heaven and Earth Society.

No, was he a grand branch leader level?

‘…Early stage of Transcendent Realm.’

It seemed the rumors about Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang recruiting many neutral masters into his ranks weren’t unfounded.

“Over here!”

As the middle-aged man shouted, Mok Yu-cheon could sense part of the crowd that had been heading towards the rear garden rushing towards them.

Mok Yu-cheon bit his lip hard.

‘Shit.’

In his current injured state, this was quite overwhelming.

If he used the reverse blood circulation technique to explosively increase his power, he might be able to subdue them within 10 moves, but due to his internal injuries, he wasn’t sure how long he could maintain the technique.

But he had no choice now.

Just as Mok Yu-cheon was about to perform the reverse blood circulation technique...

“Stop!”

At someone’s shout, the gazes of both the middle-aged man who seemed to be a grand branch leader and Mok Yu-cheon naturally turned.

There, standing proudly on top of the wall while fanning himself, was a man with curly hair and a bright appearance.

Seeing this, the middle-aged man furrowed his brows and muttered.

“Second Young Master?”

The one who appeared on the wall was none other than Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society Leader.

More precisely, it was Go Chan who had possessed him.

In any case, with the sudden appearance of Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society Leader, a look of embarrassment clouded the eyes of the middle-aged man who seemed to be a grand branch leader.

‘Why the hell is that Jang Neung-ak here?’

As a competitor for succession, he wasn’t someone who would rashly appear here at Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s estate.

But with his sudden appearance, it was inevitable to be at a loss on how to deal with this situation.

‘Second Young Master?’

Having become a disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun, Mok Yu-cheon had come to know some of Heaven and Earth Society’s internal affairs.

That’s why this situation couldn’t help but seem strange to him.

Then Jang Neung-ak pointed his fan at Mok Yu-cheon and said:

“I’ll take this one with me.”

‘What?’

Why would Second Young Master Jang Neung-ak try to help him?

It made no sense to Mok Yu-cheon.

Of course, that’s what he thought, but Go Chan, who had possessed Jang Neung-ak, was helping Mok Yu-cheon purely because of his master, Mok Gyeong-un.

‘There must be a reason why our lord wants to keep Mok Yu-cheon alive.’

And although everything had been overturned, he wanted to help because of their past connection when he had once tried to retire as an assassin and settle down at Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

From an outsider’s perspective it might seem random, but Go Chan’s intentions were pure.

However,

“I apologize, Second Young Master... but we’ll have to keep that man here. This is the Eldest Young Master’s domain. I don’t know how you came in here, but this is overstepping your bounds.”

“Overstepping my bounds? Did you just say I’m overstepping my bounds?”

-Rumble!

Go Chan, possessing Jang Neung-ak, deliberately released his aura.

-Flinch!

At this, wariness flashed in the eyes of the middle-aged man who seemed to be a grand branch leader.

As Jang Neung-ak's body had reached the peak of the Transcendent Realm, he didn't have many equals even within Heaven and Earth Society.

But then,

-Rumble!

-Clank! Clank! Clank!

Just then, martial artists who could be considered reinforcements rushed to this location.

They were heavily armored individuals in thick iron armor, advancing in full battle gear.

Seeing the one at the forefront, the face of the middle-aged man who seemed to be a grand branch leader lit up.

It was none other than Gong Jonggak, one of the Three Clan Masters and leader of Heaven and Earth Society's Mobile Armor Corps, a high-ranking executive.

“Clan Master Gong!”

Regaining confidence at the appearance of a master with outstanding skills, the middle-aged man who seemed to be a grand branch leader shouted at Go Chan, who was possessing Jang Neung-ak:

“If you don't withdraw right now, it's you, Second Young Master who will regret it!”

“Regret?”

“It doesn’t matter if you’re a Second Young Master, it doesn’t negate the fact that you can’t face us alone.”

“You’ve gained some confidence because your numbers increased a bit? Hehe. But who said I came alone?”

No sooner had those words ended.

-Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Warriors in black attire revealed themselves, climbing over the wall where Go Chan was standing.

With “Shadow” written on their chests, they were warriors of the Shadow Clan.

And someone lightly jumped up next to Go Chan with nimble movements.

It was,

“Shadow Clan Master?”

Shadow Clan Master Hwan Ya-seon.

“Ohoho. It’s been a while, Gong Clan Master.”

At his appearance, Gong Jonggak, who had appeared leading the Mobile Armor Corps, clicked his tongue and said:

“Have you come to help your disciple?”

“Of course. What kind of master would send their disciple alone into danger?”

While saying this, Hwan Ya-seon inwardly sneered.

The truth was, he hadn’t come to help out of worry.

It didn’t seem likely that the monstrous Mok Gyeong-un would be in any real danger, but he wanted to use this opportunity to decisively crush Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s momentum.

Gong Jonggak drew his thick sword and said:

-Shing!

“Then it seems you’ll be going to the afterlife with your disciple today.”

“Shouldn’t we see who’s better first? Ohoho.”

-Shing!

Likewise, Shadow Clan Master Hwan Ya-seon drew his treasured sword.

Gong Jonggak mocked him.

“If you’re relying on the Second Young Master’s influence, that’s a foolish judgment. You were already on the kill list before the Eldest Young Master’s ascension anyway. And you think you can overturn the situation with just Shadow Clan warriors who only deal with information...”

-Boom!

Before those words could even finish.

Someone launched a sudden attack into the middle of the Mobile Armor Corps, instantly sending about five men flying.

-Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

“Ugh!”

“W-What the?”

Gong Jonggak hurriedly raised his sword to block the momentum of the fist strike that had even sent armored men flying.

“Who dares!”

-Clang!

“Kuk!”

Charging in like a rampaging boar with unstoppable momentum, the Gong Clan Master’s form was pushed back nearly five steps.

-Screech!

The Gong Clan Master Jonggak, pushed back like that, frowned.

And for good reason, as the being that appeared before his eyes was none other than the renegade monk Bogwon-sa Jageum-jeong.

With his broken prayer beads and tattered kasaya, he was instantly recognizable.

“Mad Monk?”

No, isn’t this one of the Three Madmen?

How did this wandering lunatic monk who doesn’t even belong to Heaven and Earth Society suddenly appear here?

While he was bewildered, Jageum-jeong excitedly clashed his fists together and said:

-Thump! Thump!

“Kekeke. Very good. You seem quite capable. Why don’t you have a match with this monk?”

“Huh? Was this your trump card?”

Jonggak clicked his tongue and took a stance with his sword.

Though it was an unexpected appearance, this alone wasn’t enough to overturn the situation.

To him, Shadow Clan Master Hwan Ya-seon raised the corner of his mouth and said:

“You think that’s all? Surely you don’t think this is the extent of it?”

“What do you mean by that?”

What is he talking about?

-Waaaaaaah!!!

-Clang! Clang!

While he was puzzled, from the opposite side, the western part of the estate, sounds of battle cries and clashing weapons erupted as if a war had broken out.

‘What the? What’s going on?’

Could there be other reinforcements besides the Shadow Clan?

That ominous prediction turned out to be exactly right.

The masters from the Elder Council and grand branch leader and branch leader level experts who had tried to enter from the west side of Elder Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s estate had their path to the rear garden blocked by the sudden appearance of Axe-Destroying King Ho Taegang and his subordinates of the same group.

-Boom! Boom! Boom!

“Argh!”

“Guk!”

Despite having one arm injured, he was swinging a massive axe with his other hand, slaughtering anyone who approached, preventing anyone from passing through.

“This, this monster...”

He wasn’t just an executive, but someone who had received the title of one of the Eight Stars, considered the highest in the martial world.

How could they possibly deal with such a monstrous guy?

Moreover,

-Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

‘What? What the hell is that guy?’

‘How can his lightness skill be so fast?’

The masters from the Elder Council who had tried to climb over the walls to avoid the beast-like Ho Taegang were unable to enter due to the masked Ma Ra-hyeon, who was sweeping through the enemies with incredible lightness skill and leg techniques reminiscent of a storm.

Those trying to hurry inside couldn’t help but grow increasingly anxious.

It was then.

-Boom! Boom! Boom!

Everyone’s gaze suddenly turned towards the sky above the rear garden.

This was because countless fiery masses were raining down like hailstones.

Even the masters from the Elder Council couldn’t help but be momentarily captivated by this strange phenomenon they hadn’t expected.

-Boom! Boom! Boom!

The fiery masses raining down like hailstones began to set the rear garden ablaze.

-Crackle!

As various parts of the rear garden caught fire due to the flames, the surrounding area became hot with heat.

It was as if the surroundings had turned into a scene from hell.

-Roar!

And in the center of it all, a huge white being could be seen roaring.

It had a single horn on its head, looked like a mix between a dog and a horse, its body resembled a pure white tiger without stripes, and strangely, white flames were burning on its long tail.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and said:

-Mortal... It's a Spiritual Beast, White-Flaming Dokgok (Foo Dog, or Dugu).

-A Spiritual Beast, you say?

-There's said to be a flame cave deep in Mount Beiyu that's filled with jade and heat. It's a Spiritual Beast that lives there.

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

Spiritual Beast.

Even Imaemangyang had names they were called according to their rank.

The weakest Imaemangyang were called Fierce Beasts, and above them were Monstrous Beasts, Demonic Beasts, and Diabolic Beasts.

Even Demonic Beasts and above were difficult for ordinary martial artists to handle, let alone diviners, but Spiritual Beasts could be considered the highest existence among known Imaemangyang.

-To have a Spiritual Beast as a familiar. That diviner bastard is truly a monster.

-It seems so.

The magical power spreading out was on a completely different level from the diviners they had seen so far.

It wasn't for nothing that he was called a divine diviner.

‘The Six Divine Diviners... Is this that legendary divine diviner who even made that Spiritual Beast his familiar?’

He had reason to be proud of himself.

At that moment, the words of the diviner Jo Ui-gong flashed through Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

[The Chain of Spells is a magical tool created by Golden Origin Pavilion Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, one of the Six Divine Diviners. It was one of four gifts given to my master who attended the 64th Corner Assembly of the Six Origins.]

‘Ah.’

He remembered.

Golden Origin Pavilion Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul.

So he was the one who made that Chain of Spells.

Given that he had the skill to create such an incredibly controlling magical tool, it was possible he had even subjugated a Spiritual Beast.

-Shing!

Mok Gyeong-un fully unsheathed the demonic Evil Commandment Sword, which he had half-drawn.

If the opponent was one of the Six Divine Diviners and his familiar was a Spiritual Beast, he could be considered an existence like the Six Heavens in the martial world.

This wasn't an opponent to be taken lightly.

Just as he was about to step forward to properly fight...

-Sniff? Sniff?

At that moment, the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok (White-Flaming Foo Dog), which had been roaring with tremendous magical power, started sniffing the air. Then it frowned, showing a perplexed expression.

Unaware of this, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, who had created a space full of scorching heat where White-Flaming Dokgok could exert its full power using sorcery, opened his mouth.

“White-Flaming Dokgok. I permit you to feast after a long time.”

-Growl...

But something was strange.

The Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok showed no intention of moving despite his command.

At this, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul issued another command.

“…What are you doing? I said kill him already.”

Then the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok opened its mouth.

-Master. Must we really kill that one?

“What?”

No matter that it was a Spiritual Beast, how dare a mere familiar question his orders?

As he was dumbfounded, the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok spoke as if troubled:

-Master. I sense the demonic energy of the Hundred-Faced King, known as the worst among the Six Demons, from that human.

‘!?’

Chapter 397 – Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul (2)

“Master, I sense the demonic energy of Hundred-Faced King, known as the worst among the Six Demons, from that human.”

‘!?’

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul furrowed his brow at the serious warning from the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok.

Hundred-Faced King?

He suddenly recalled a long-forgotten memory from long ago.

[...Why? Why can't I subdue it?]

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul muttered with a disappointed expression as his spell of Forgetting One's Will failed to work.

He had barely managed to subdue it with His help and quite a few sacrifices.

Yet the spell he had so carefully prepared didn't work at all.

Even though it was said to be the leader among Spiritual Beasts, this spell had subdued even Spiritual Beasts of the same rank, so why?

To his puzzlement, the battered White-Flaming Dokgok said:

“Thanks to that monstrous being, you may have subdued me, but the Six Demons are completely different from ordinary Spiritual Beasts like us.”

[I acknowledge they're stronger than ordinary Spiritual Beasts, but how can a subdued being have such a strong will?]

“Their strength transcends Spiritual Beasts and is infinitely close to divine beasts.”

[Divine beasts don't exist.]

“They do exist. It's just that the world can't withstand their power.”

[The world can't withstand it?]

“At the point of reaching divine beast status, their existence completely deviates from the natural order.”

[Natural order?]

“The natural order is what sustains this world.”

[...Is it like the principle of providence?]

“Similar. However, providence is not in the realm of principles, but in the realm of fundamentals and laws. The natural order is more like a flow.”

At these words from White-Flaming Dokgok, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul clicked his tongue.

He had thought he had reached the highest realm of sorcery, having subdued a Spiritual Beast as a familiar and achieved numerous feats as a diviner, but there was still much he didn't know.

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul grabbed the golden mane of the fallen being and said:

[In any case, it seems impossible to use it as a familiar. Well, it doesn't matter. Even without that, this has plenty of uses.]

“.....”

[White-Flaming Dokgok. If you know of any other Six Demons, tell me.]

To this demand, White-Flaming Dokgok spoke as if troubled:

“Do you think such luck will work again, even though that monster helped?”

[Luck?]

“We were barely able to capture Lion-Grasping King[1] because it was weakened from a battle with White Phoenix Demon King[2] long ago. But a Six Demon in its full state is completely different.”

[A Six Demon in its full state?]

“Yes. Their power is beyond what you can imagine, Master. And among such Six Demons, there are two beings that must never be touched.”

[Beings that must never be touched?]

“Even though the other Six Demons are in a position that ordinary Spiritual Beasts cannot handle, those two are completely different.”

Puzzled by this serious warning, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul asked:

[What are those two?]

“Great Strength King[3] and Hundred-Faced King. If you ever encounter those beings, abandon any sliver of hope, any ‘what if’, ‘maybe’, or ‘perhaps’.”

It was a conversation from quite a long time ago.

Since then, he hadn't had the chance to encounter beings called the Six Demons, so he had completely forgotten about it, but now he remembered.

The great nine-tailed golden-furred fox monster. Hundred-Faced King, or Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

It was said to be even worse than Great Strength King, known as the oldest of the Six Demons, and its malice was said to have led numerous countries and humans to destruction.

The most notable examples were the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

‘…Hundred-Faced King. Golden Nine-Tailed Fox.’

He senses that being's demonic energy from Mok Gyeong-un?

What on earth does that mean?

Puzzled, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul asked:

“What do you mean by the Hundred-Faced King's demonic energy? Surely you're not saying that guy is the Hundred-Faced King?”

“That's not it. But he has something imbued with strong remnants of its demonic energy.”

“Remnants of demonic energy?”

At their conversation, Mok Gyeong-un smirked.

It must be referring to the accessory made from the tail that Golden Nine-Tailed Fox had given him.

Even though a Spiritual Beast would be just below the Six Demons, seeing how even such a being was so wary and conscious of Golden Nine-Tailed Fox, it seemed their levels were indeed different.

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul clicked his tongue and said:

“So it’s not the Hundred-Faced King itself, just remnants of its demonic energy or whatever?”

“It’s not such a simple matter, Master.”

“What?”

“…For him to possess an object so strongly imbued with remnants of demonic energy means he might be owned by the Hundred-Faced King or related to it.”

“So what are you saying we should do?”

“If we carelessly touch that human, we might incur the wrath of the Hundred-Faced King.”

Despite the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok’s warning, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul soon sneered.

“This is even better.”

“Better...?”

“He needs more cards anyway. We can’t miss this chance to draw out another of the Six Demons.”

“Master... The Hundred-Faced King is completely...”

“Enough. In any case, things are different now from back then. And we can’t avoid fighting that guy anyway. So fulfill your duty as a familiar.”

“.....”

Realizing he couldn’t persuade his master, the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok closed his mouth and looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Aah.’

If he weren’t in the position of a familiar, he would want to flee this place immediately.

However, he had no choice.

In any case, if Myeong-ryul forcefully gave an order through their karmic bond, he would have to obey, and if he decided to sever the bond, he could even take his life.

In the end, he had to follow orders one way or another.

“Devour hi—”

Before those words could finish.

White-Flaming Dokgok's tail, flickering with white flames, moved like a whip and struck at something.

-Bang!

At the same time, Mok Gyeong-un landed in a stance as if he had blocked something with the demonic Evil Commandment Sword about ten steps away.

Seeing this, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul inwardly clicked his tongue.

‘He’s not one to be careless with.’

He hadn’t even noticed the guy move.

It seemed certain that, as Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang had said, he had indeed reached a realm comparable to the Six Heavens, surpassing the wall of walls.

Though he too had learned martial arts for self-protection, this opponent was difficult to handle with martial arts alone.

However,

“I’ll show you how a diviner with the title of Divine Diviner fights.”

With those words, he formed a hand seal with his left hand and softly chanted a spell.

Then, with the sound of one of the wooden dolls at his waist breaking, strong demonic energy rose and something appeared.

-Pop!

That being wasn't particularly large.

It was similar to a human form, but more precisely, it resembled a monkey.

It had two red spots on its forehead and was covered in floral patterns and small spines all over its body.

Interestingly, its mouth was so large it reached to both ears, and it wore a smiling expression.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and said:

“To carry around a monster-class monster sealed like that...”

“…Is it a Diabolic Beast?”

The aura of demonic energy it emitted was not ordinary.

“It's a Yual (Youyan)[4].”

The Diabolic Beast Yual.

It was a monster that lived in Mount Bianchun north of Mount Danxun, known for its movements being so fast that it was difficult to spot its actual form.

Due to its habit of eating fruits and leaves, unlike other monsters, it didn't greatly harm humans, but it wasn't called a Diabolic Beast for nothing, as the demonic energy it emitted was tremendous.

Though not as much as the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok, which was a level higher, a monster with this much demonic energy was dangerous all the same.

Then Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul spread his arms wide.

At this, the Diabolic Beast Yual did a backflip and climbed onto Myeong-ryul's shoulders, then clung to his back as if being piggybacked.

-Pop!

At this, thinking he was about to do something, Mok Gyeong-un was about to move when,

-Roar!

The Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok roared and opened its mouth towards Mok Gyeong-un, spewing flames.

-Whoosh!

The released flames spread out in a fan shape, instantly engulfing Mok Gyeong-un and the entire area around him.

Riding the momentum, White-Flaming Dokgok drew out even more demonic energy.

Then the flames it was spewing gradually changed from scarlet to blue, and then to white.

As the color of the flames changed, with a thunderous roar, the ground of the rear garden went beyond burning and began to turn to ash and disappear upon contact.

‘Is he dead?’

White-Flaming Dokgok, who had been continuously spewing white flames, thought Mok Gyeong-un might be dead when it couldn't sense anything within the flames.

But then,

-Swish!

At that moment, the flames parted and Mok Gyeong-un flew through the gap, attempting to slash White-Flaming Dokgok's neck.

“Not there!”

However, in an instant, White-Flaming Dokgok swung its huge front paw and struck Mok Gyeong-un away.

-Clang!

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un blocked White-Flaming Dokgok's front paw claws with Evil Commandment Sword.

But the force behind it was extraordinary, sending him flying in the direction the front paw had swung.

After being flung back about ten zhang, Mok Gyeong-un kicked off the air midway, trying to fly back towards White-Flaming Dokgok.

But then,

-Swish!

Someone appeared behind Mok Gyeong-un.

That being tried to strike down on Mok Gyeong-un's head with both hands clasped together.

However, Mok Gyeong-un, sensing the presence,

-Clang!

Raised the demonic Evil Commandment Sword upwards to block it.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes gleamed as he blocked the attack with Evil Commandment Sword's blade.

And for good reason, as the being attacking him was Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, but his entire body was covered in armor-like floral patterns.

Tremendous demonic energy along with spiritual power could be felt from Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul.

‘This is?’

“Human-Monster Unity.”

-Bang!

No sooner had those words ended than Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's kick targeted Mok Gyeong-un's face like lightning.

It was so fast and powerful that the air seemed to rip with a sound, creating an enormous wind pressure.

Moreover,

-Rip!

Mok Gyeong-un's form was indeed torn apart by the kick.

But Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's brow twitched.

-Swish!

It was because it was an afterimage of Mok Gyeong-un left behind due to the technique of Shifting Form and Position.

‘He dodged this?’

As Yual was a Diabolic Beast known for its incredibly fast movements, his speed had increased after achieving Human-Monster Unity.

Yet he had lost track of Mok Gyeong-un's movements for an instant.

Then Mok Gyeong-un appeared about ten steps away from him.

“You dodge well.”

“Is that the Diabolic Beast Yual covering your body?”

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's ears perked up at Mok Gyeong-un's question.

Even experienced diviners didn't know all monsters.

Yet seeing him recognize it at a glance, he thought inwardly that his knowledge of sorcery must be beyond that of ordinary diviners.

“Quite unusual.”

To Mok Gyeong-un's words showing interest, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul shrugged and replied:

“The Diabolic Beast Yual is capable of Human-Monster Unity by transforming its own body, even among monsters.”

That's why he had gone all the way to Mount Bianchun to barely capture it.

Thanks to the technique of Human-Monster Unity, his body, now covered in Yual's form like armor, combined spiritual power and demonic energy to the point where it was no exaggeration to say he could match a master of the Profound Realm who had surpassed the wall of walls.

And then,

“White-Flaming Dokgok. White Fire Form.”

-Roar!

As soon as his command fell, the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok let out a roar, and its body, which had been as large as a house, began to shrink.

Then, becoming about the size of a tiger, its entire body was covered in white flames.

-Whoosh!

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul raised the corner of his mouth and said:

“You'd better be tense.”

Though its size had decreased, the demonic energy of the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok in White Fire Form was more condensed, increasing its power, and its speed had also increased several times.

“Even a great master who has reached the Profound Realm couldn’t handle the combined attack of White-Flaming Dokgok and myself.”

-Swish!

Just as Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul exchanged glances with White-Flaming Dokgok and was about to move,

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly sheathed the demonic Evil Commandment Sword.

Myeong-ryul, sensitive to sound, found this puzzling.

“Don’t tell me you’re giving up?”

“Yes.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul inwardly sneered.

It seems he’s underestimating me.

Having achieved Human-Monster Unity with Yual, his ability to sense energy and aura had become even more sensitive.

It seems like he’s withdrawing his energy, but something feels like the air is seething.

He’s probably trying to induce carelessness and then attack, but that’s a deception only those with eyes would fall for.

But then,

“Let’s stop holding back, shall we?”

“What?”

What nonsense is he...

-Woong!

At that moment, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul felt chills run down his spine from the sharp sword energy rushing in from all directions.

What on earth is this?

He sheathed the sword, so why does the sword feel so clearly present?

As he was puzzling over this,

-Swish!

-Roar!

The Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok’s roar, so loud it felt like it could rupture eardrums, rang out.

‘!?’

But no matter how he listened, this didn’t seem like a roar.

It was closer to a scream mixed with pain.

Chapter 398 – Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul (3)

Over two hundred jang above the inner city of Heaven and Earth Society.

There, a small bird, not particularly large, was quietly gliding through the air without flapping its wings, looking down at the ground below.

From afar, it looked like an ordinary bird, but up close, its appearance was completely different from what we commonly know.

Its ears, mouth, and nose were remarkably similar to a human's, while its body resembled that of an owl.

Even more chilling was that it had three feet and four eyes.

This bizarre owl-like creature was a Monstrous Beast called Ong (Yu/Yong,), a type of monster.

To the east of Mount Danzuan, about 2,700 li away, there's Mount Lingqiu, where many areas lack vegetation.

This Monstrous Beast Ong is a monster that only roams in dry areas of the mountain. Its appearance is said to be an omen of crop failure for the year, making it a symbol of ill fortune.

-Ong! Ong! Ong!

Peculiarly, this Ong only seeks out dry land, so why is it in the sky above Heaven and Earth Society?

Strangely, the pupils of the four eyes on the Monstrous Beast Ong had characters inscribed in them.

(Si).

This meant “to show”.

-Kirik! Kirik!

The four eyeballs moved independently in an eerie manner, looking down below.

The way the eyes moved separately made it seem as if it was observing all directions at once.

However, these independently moving eyeballs, except for one focused on the main compound of the inner city, all three others were directed towards one place.

That place was none other than Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s estate.

-Swish!

As the Monstrous Beast Ong’s pupil view narrowed, the fights taking place in the estate became visible.

But as if quickly losing interest in those fights, the gaze of the three eyeballs soon focused on just one person.

That person was Mok Gyeong-un.

The three eyeballs focused on Mok Gyeong-un began to examine every minute detail.

Everything from his appearance to his movements.

But it was right then.

‘!?’

The surroundings of the Monstrous Beast Ong, which had been concentrating on looking down at the ground, suddenly darkened.

Belatedly noticing this, the Monstrous Beast Ong tried to flee without even thinking to check the shadow that had covered it.

However,

-Chomp!

The Monstrous Beast Ong was swallowed whole by something’s mouth.

It was none other than the Demonic Beast Heumwon, a monster with the upper body of a bird and the lower body resembling a hornet with spines.

The Monstrous Beast Ong, just one rank below, struggled desperately to escape from inside the mouth, but

-Crunch! Crunch!

It was crushed inside the Demonic Beast Heumwon’s mouth and breathed its last.

At the same time,

In a dark space.

-Drip drip!

Tears of blood flowed from the left eye of a being seated on a chair shrouded in shadows.

As blood tears flowed, an eye on the forehead of this being suddenly opened wide, and then maniacal laughter erupted from its mouth.

“Kuhahahahahahaha!”

As the laughter spread, the surroundings shook as if an earthquake had occurred.

After laughing for a while, the being in the shadows stopped and muttered in a voice that had regained sanity:

“There are always meddlers, it seems.”

-Swish!

‘!?’

Along with a sharp sensation cutting into flesh, the sensation that had been continuing suddenly disappeared.

The right leg that had been burning white was severed and fell limply to the ground.

With this, a scream of pain burst from the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok’s mouth.

-Roar!

“Hmm.”

Mok Gyeong-un glanced back and smirked.

He had aimed to behead it in one strike, but White-Flaming Dokgok had tried to dodge at the last moment by kicking off with its front legs, resulting in just this much.

It could be said that it had barely saved its life.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un looked up.

There, he could see the familiar Demonic Beast Heumwon, appearing as small as a fingernail, flapping its wings and circling in the sky.

‘Well handled.’

Now that annoying gaze was finally gone.

He had first felt this irritation since arriving at Heaven and Earth Society.

It clearly felt like someone was watching him.

But it was difficult to easily spot it with just a gaze alone.

However, after arriving at Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s estate, the faint irritation he had felt began to grow stronger.

Because of this, he finally found where that gaze was coming from.

‘Above.’

It was positioned higher in the sky than expected.

Which meant it wasn’t human.

It was a monster.

If he tried to approach to catch it, it would surely flee given the distance.

So all he had to do was draw its attention by fighting without going all out, controlling his strength, and then deal with it.

The Demonic Beast Heumwon had already recovered from the injuries it suffered from the magical tools at Shaolin Temple.

Thanks to Heumwon, the annoying gaze had completely disappeared.

There was no longer any reason to hold back his strength.

“…What on earth are you?”

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul couldn’t hide his bewilderment at Mok Gyeong-un’s suddenly changed aura.

Though masked by the scream, it seemed the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok had been injured.

‘Because of the sharp energy, my senses keep...’

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul’s brow furrowed.

In place of his missing eyes, all his other senses were extremely developed, and normally he could spread his spiritual energy in all directions to accurately perceive everything invisible.

However, due to this sharp sword energy spreading from Mok Gyeong-un, his senses were disrupted, making it impossible to perceive with spiritual energy.

‘I don’t know what technique he used, but if we don’t hurry and attack together, instead...’

-Swish!

It was at that moment.

Something brushed past him, and a voice was heard from behind.

“Let’s start with the right arm, shall we?”

-Thud! Splash!

No sooner had those words ended than his arm fell off from the shoulder, and blood spurted like a fountain from the cut surface.

-Screech!

The Diabolic Beast Yual, which had become Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul’s armor through Human-Monster Unity, also screamed in pain.

“Kuuuh. Yu, Yual!”

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul also wanted to scream in pain.

But with extreme endurance, he suppressed it and called out to Yual.

At this, Yual’s body near the severed area of the right arm began to undulate, compressing the cut surface and simultaneously blocking it.

Thanks to this, the blood that had been spurting like a fountain immediately stopped.

“Quite a useful Diabolic Beast, isn’t it?”

-Pop!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s voice, which could have been either sarcasm or genuine praise, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul hurriedly leaped to create distance and shouted:

“White-Flaming Dokgok!”

At his cry, White-Flaming Dokgok, which had been suffering after losing one of its front legs, immediately kicked off the ground with its hind legs and launched itself upward,

-Whoosh!

It curled its body and began rotating at an incredibly fast speed.

As White-Flaming Dokgok, its entire body now white flames, started rotating, the surrounding area wavered with heat.

-Crackle!

-Pop!

In sync with this, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul launched his body.

Although it was difficult to spread spiritual energy around, there was no problem with his other senses, so he could at least guess the position.

‘In this case, with our combined secret technique, we’ll...’

-Swish!

It was at that moment.

A black line appeared diagonally from the ground,

-Flutter!

Then the body of White-Flaming Dokgok, which had been rotating rapidly in a spherical shape, began to stop.

But that wasn’t the end.

The white flames covering its entire body were slowly extinguishing.

Then,

-Thud!

Eventually, the body of the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok fell limply to the ground.

“White-Flaming Dokgok!”

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul shouted with an even more distorted expression at the sound of White-Flaming Dokgok falling, having lost its strength before they could even unleash their secret technique.

What on earth just happened?

A sharp energy that could even split the air soared into the sky.

From that moment, along with the heat, the demonic energy of the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok was rapidly dispersing.

-Tap!

To Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, who had stopped mid-flight, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile:

“Shall I give it to you?”

“What?”

“This.”

-Whoosh! Thud! Roll!

Something heavy rolled on the ground and then stopped at Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul’s feet.

Heat was still emanating from it, indicating how hot it had been just moments ago.

‘…White-Flaming Dokgok.’

Indeed.

It was none other than White-Flaming Dokgok’s severed head.

-Throb!

Suddenly, he felt pain in his chest.

Because of this, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul could know for certain.

Just now, as the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok’s head and body were separated and it completely ceased breathing, the karmic bond of the familiar was also severed.

As a result, the backlash had rushed to him.

‘This can’t be.’

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul was genuinely shocked.

It wasn’t just anything, but a Spiritual Beast.

Although it might not match up to the Six Demons, said to be close to divine beasts, Spiritual Beasts were at nearly the highest rank among monsters.

Even though he had made such a being his familiar, something many diviners wouldn't dare dream of, he too had to fight for nearly three days and nights to capture it.

Yet, the Spiritual Beast White-Flaming Dokgok, which even he had struggled so much to make his familiar, had lost its life in such a pitifully easy manner.

-Gnash!

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul bit his lip hard before opening his mouth.

“You... what... What on earth are you? How can you have such power...?”

“I told you I was giving up on holding back, didn't I? Ah, more precisely, there's no need to do so anymore since there are no more watching eyes.”

At these words, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul unconsciously swallowed.

Though he couldn't see, judging from Mok Gyeong-un's words and the fact that he was pointing his finger at the sky above, it was clear.

[He will be watching.]

[Watching? You don't mean...]

[Do your job, Grand Divination Master.]

Myeong-ryul suddenly recalled the words that person had said to him.

Does that mean this guy somehow dealt with His eyes?

As he was bewildered, he felt Mok Gyeong-un approaching.

“Now then, shall we hear everything you know?”

-Flinch!

Myeong-ryul, overwhelmed by the pressure just from Mok Gyeong-un’s approach, unconsciously took a step back.

What could he possibly do against a monster capable of killing a Spiritual Beast like White-Flaming Dokgok in an instant?

It was then.

-Rumble!

“It’s him!”

“Kill him!”

Dozens of martial artists began pouring in through the doors of the northern pavilion of the rear garden.

These were Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul’s reinforcements that had arrived belatedly.

‘Ah!’

Although they might be somewhat inferior to those coming from the east and west sides, there were still some branch leader-level experts among them, so it seemed they could buy some time.

He needed to slip in between them and use them as shields...

“How annoying.”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un slightly raised his foot and then,

-Boom!

Stomped down hard on the ground.

Instantly, the ground split and the surrounding air spread out in a wave-like pattern.

Simultaneously, the dozens of martial artists rushing towards them clutched their chests, spat blood, and collapsed.

“Kuk!”

“Kuuk!”

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

At the sound of them falling, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul stopped in his tracks, his whole body trembling as if having a seizure.

‘In one step?’

As so many experts fell with just one stomp, something flashed through his mind like lightning.

It was an urgent report he had received not long ago.

It was about the bizarre rumor of a new Seventh Heaven appearing.

The new storm that was said to have collapsed Shaolin's One Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation with a single step and single-handedly forced the closure of Sichuan Tang Clan.

Hearing such an unbelievable rumor, he had been more skeptical than believing.

But this one step... could it be...

“Cheon...ma?”

Chapter 399 – Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul (4)

-Tap tap tap tap!

“Haa...”

Hearing the changed breathing from his back, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang spoke.

“Have you come to your senses?”

To his question, Mo Yak, who was being carried on his back, said:

“To think you'd do this instead of using the excellent lightness skill Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps... Of course I'd wake up if you run like this.”

“If I used Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps for high-speed movement, you'd have trouble breathing.”

“...That... Should I thank you?”

“If you’re awake, focus on circulating your qi again. Though I’ve stopped the bleeding, your energy is still very scattered.”

At Na Yul-ryang’s words, Mo Yak nodded and then said:

“Wait... You stopped the bleeding? Does that mean you didn’t do what you were supposed to?”

“The Elder Council said they’d take care of Jang Neung-ak’s side, and the main compound said they’ve made preparations.”

“What about Young Lady Wi So-yeon?”

“Stone Gate Valley Lord Yeon Baek said he’d go personally to bring her, so unless there’s a major variable, he should bring her.”

He had sent Yeon Baek, one of the Four Valley Lords.

But then,

“Young Master! ...Cough cough.”

“Lower your voice.”

“Cough cough... Instead of wasting time treating my internal injuries, you should have personally gone after Young Lady Wi So-yeon or targeted the Shadow Clan. Even if not the former, I made a promise before losing consciousness to secure the latter...”

“You promised. Didn’t you say the Society Leader’s secret would be in the Shadow Clan’s estate?”

“You knew that...”

“As for the Shadow Clan, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak went personally with his disciples and some close aides.”

“Ah?”

At these words, Mo Yak’s eyes gleamed.

“Even if it’s an empty house, if there’s something important, they would have left some people to guard it. That’s why I sent the Thunderbolt Fist King.”

At his answer, Mo Yak showed a slightly relieved look.

Na Yul-ryang’s judgment was correct.

The Elder Council had told them to secure the youngest disciple Wi So-yeon’s safety and bring her to the main compound somehow, but that was what they wanted.

What was important wasn’t the youngest disciple Wi So-yeon, but the Society Leader’s secret.

The secret that Mok Gyeong-un had brought to the Shadow Clan after completing his confidential mission would be the real important card.

Nevertheless, the Elder Council side hadn’t mentioned this to them.

That meant they were trying to secretly take the Society Leader’s secret for themselves.

“…Still, if you had gone with the Thunderbolt Fist King instead of treating me, you could have obtained it more easily.”

“It doesn’t matter. And if Mok Gyeong-un survives at the estate, the main compound is more urgent than the Shadow Clan.”

“Eldest Young Master!”

“Be quiet. And... you’re more important to me.”

At these words, Mo Yak was bewildered and then blushed.

How can someone usually so cold and emotionless say such things so well?

Mo Yak unconsciously leaned on Na Yul-ryang’s back.

-Throb!

It seemed her upper clothes had been removed for treatment, and even the bandages compressing her chest had been loosened.

She was actually a woman.

Mo Yak’s parents, from a small sect, had hoped she would marry into a good sect to help the family rather than make a name for herself.

However, Mo Yak wanted to create her own destiny rather than live such a life.

It was Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang who didn’t mock this wish of hers and accepted it readily without any fuss.

That’s why she had decided to devote everything to assist him.

Mo Yak, who had leaned on his back and then lifted her head, spoke in a small voice:

“I’m just a card on the path you want to take, so please don’t worry about someone like me and take care of yourself.”

“Shut up.”

“Hah. You stubborn fool.”

But she didn’t dislike it.

Just as Mo Yak was about to lean on his back again with a softened expression,

-Boom! Boom!

Red firecrackers that could be considered signal flares could be seen exploding in the direction of the not-too-distant main compound.

‘!!!!’

Mo Yak’s expression hardened at the sight.

The meaning of those red firecrackers illuminating the sky of the inner city was only one.

“Eldest Young Master?”

“…I saw it too.”

Young Master Na Yul-ryang's expression was ominous as he looked at the firecrackers.

At the same time.

The Shadow Clan's estate.

There were intruders who had entered this place where more than 80% of the forces were absent.

They were Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, his capable outer commander, and guard warriors among his close aides.

Beside Won Byeong-hak was Mu Jang-yak, whom he had taken as a disciple a few months ago at Corpse Blood Valley.

Originally planning to go take Yeon Mu-ung from Esoteric Realm Gate as a disciple, he had instead taken Mu Jang-yak, who had reached the pinnacle-stage of the Transcendent Realm with outstanding talent.

As he had hoped, Mu Jang-yak's talent was indeed second to none.

Moreover, the origin of the martial arts he possessed as his main skill was quite excellent. His Right Fist Left Palm technique originated from the Twin Hand Tiger Fist of the Jeonjin Sect, a technique that could exert two martial arts simultaneously, and was an extraordinary secret skill that could only be learned with a unique mental technique and talent that could split one's mind in two.

Perhaps because he had learned this technique, Mu Jang-yak had reached the early stage of the Transcendent Realm in just a few months.

At this rate, it seemed he could expect to fully grasp his secret skills and even surpass the wall before long.

‘All this child needs is diverse experience.’

The more practical experience, the easier it was to gain insights.

That’s why he was keeping him close and letting him experience real battles, despite cherishing him.

But then,

“Master, I’ve been hearing sounds from over there for a while?”

“…Indeed.”

Won Byeong-hak too had been hearing what sounded like screams.

It seemed to be coming from their target location, but what on earth was happening?

They had entered after confirming that manpower had been withdrawn from the Shadow Clan.

But there was no way they had returned already, and there shouldn’t be anyone else who could enter besides them, so what was going on?

“Let’s go!”

“Yes!”

So they hurriedly headed towards where their target was presumed to be.

But then,

-Roar!

“W-What on earth is that?”

Won Byeong-hak's outer commander Woo Neung couldn't hide his bewilderment.

And for good reason, as in the rear garden was a bizarre and giant being with a horn on its head resembling a dragon, its entire body covered in red fur, and its body looking like a mix between a dog and an ox.

It was so large that they had to look up at it.

This giant being was none other than Mok Gyeong-un's familiar, the Diabolic Beast Alyu.

“Grrrr.”

“Haa... haa...”

Around this Diabolic Beast Alyu were several masked martial artists, but their condition and surroundings were terrible.

This was because purple smoke was flowing around, and the area was filled with people whose entire bodies had melted into horrific shapes.

That purple smoke seemed to be some kind of acid.

‘What on earth is this?’

It was clear that this being wasn't a beast but a monster.

But why was such a monster in the Shadow Clan, and why was it fighting with these unidentified masked individuals?

Could there be others besides themselves after what Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang had ordered?

As he was puzzling over this,

“This old one will take care of these.”

-Kiririk. Do as you please, human.

Mu Jang-yak’s eyes widened.

Did that monster just open its mouth and speak?

As he was finding this too bizarre, someone appeared like a shadow in front of them.

-Swish! Tap!

It was a young man with a youthful appearance.

But this young man was standing slightly hunched as if he were an old man, holding a staff with a snake head in one hand.

The young man smiled and said to them:

“It seems you too have come to take that old woman away.”

“.....”

At these words, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak's expression became strange.

Not knowing why he was acting like this, Won Byeong-hak's outer commander Woo Neung aimed his fist at him and said:

“Speak. What is that monster, and who are you...”

-Thwack!

“Ugh!”

Before those words could finish, outer commander Woo Neung was struck on the head by the staff and fell face-first to the ground with a death cry.

“The young one is rude.”

‘!?’

Won Byeong-hak's close aides were stunned and at a loss at what had happened in an instant.

Mu Jang-yak, who had become Won Byeong-hak's disciple, was equally surprised.

‘This person... is strong. Too strong.’

Though he had only swung his staff once, Mu Jang-yak, who had reached the early stage of the Transcendent Realm, could instinctively tell that the young man before him was an unfathomably strong being.

Glancing at his master Won Byeong-hak, it seemed he felt the same way.

-Clench!

Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak clenched his fist, drawing up his energy, and opened his mouth.

“…Who are you? I’ve never heard nor seen a master like you in the Shadow Clan.”

“Hohoho. As expected of one of the Five Kings of Heaven and Earth Society. None of those fellows focused on anything but appearances, so no one checked this old one.”

‘Old one?’

Did he just refer to himself as an old one?

Come to think of it, his manner of speech and voice seemed quite experienced.

Given that this face strangely doesn’t match his voice, could it be a human skin mask?

Just then,

The snake head staff suddenly extended towards his face.

‘Huh?’

-Clang!

At that moment, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak swung his fist upward with all his might.

But as he struck the staff upward, the aftermath of the impact sent him flying back more than ten steps.

-Screech!

His close aides couldn't hide their shock as their lord, who was at the pinnacle-stage of the Transcendent Realm, no, close to the wall, was pushed back a whole ten steps, not just one or two.

Just who on earth is this person?

They hadn't realized yet, but his identity was none other than Guyang Sa-oh, the Eight Poison Snake Staff, one of Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates.

Though he hadn't received the title of one of the Eight Stars because his main area of activity was in the Western Regions, it was no exaggeration to say his martial prowess was on par with Thousand Poison Hand Dang Inhae.

-Clench!

Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak gritted his teeth.

He had thought it wouldn't be a difficult mission since a significant portion of the Shadow Clan's forces had been withdrawn, but a real variable had occurred.

Both that bizarre monster and this unidentified person with the snake staff were truly monsters.

'...Rashly dealing with them will end in disaster.'

Should he retreat?

Or should he fight even if it's risky?

As he was deliberating for a moment,

-Whoosh! Boom! Boom!

With the sound of something exploding, red firecrackers could be seen embroidering the sky in the direction of the main compound.

Seeing this, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak's pupils trembled.

‘Emergency... assembly? That can't be? Surely the details...’

-Boom!

A stomp directed at the ground.

The aftermath of that stomp caused ripples like waves, and the dozens of martial artists rushing towards them clutched their chests, spat blood, and collapsed on the spot.

“Kuk!”

“Kuuk!”

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

At the sound of them falling, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul muttered in disbelief:

“Heavenly... Demon?”

He had thought that the report he received would have some exaggeration mixed in.

But how could something like this be possible?

Even if the Society Leader, one of the Six Heavens, stepped forward, could he so easily take down so many with just one stomp?

As he was bewildered, a voice came from behind him.

“Now things have been cleared up a bit around us.”

-Flinch!

He was startled for a moment, but how did he come behind without any presence?

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul unconsciously swallowed dry saliva.

-Gulp!

Despite becoming stronger through Human-Monster Unity with the Diabolic Beast Yual, once caught in tension and fear, it wasn't easy to calm down.

To him in this state, Mok Gyeong-un asked with a smile:

“What did you just say?”

At this question, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's breathing began to quicken slightly.

If his guess was correct, this guy was surely...

“You... You... Could it be...”

“Could it be what?”

“.....”

Perhaps because he was caught from behind, he couldn't bring himself to speak.

It felt like he had learned some major secret about this guy, so it was hard to carelessly speak up.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un didn't mind this at all.

Rather,

“Your heart is beating rapidly. Are you afraid?”

“.....”

“How interesting. Fear... If using that title puts more pressure on you people, it might not be bad to use it.”

‘What is he saying...’

-Grab!

“Kuk.”

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the back of Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's neck, forcibly making him kneel, and then spoke in a low voice next to his ear:

“That's right, I am the Heavenly Demon (Cheonma).”

‘!!!!!!’

-Boom! Boom!

As soon as those words ended, coincidentally, the sky was covered with red firecrackers.

Chapter 400 – Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul (5)

Boom! Boom!

As the sky was covered with firecrackers, the interior of Heaven and Earth Society began to stir and become noisy.

This was because everyone knew what these red signal flares meant.

It was something no one had expected.

Because of this, all forces and crowds within Heaven and Earth Society, each guarding their own positions, began to move.

-Boom! Boom!

“Ah?”

Though he could hear the sound of firecrackers, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, unable to see them, only had Mok Gyeong-un's voice ringing in his head.

“That's right, I am the Heavenly Demon.”

Those brief words revealing his own identity.

Though spoken in a low voice, the pressure contained in them was tremendous.

His heart was beating so violently that it wouldn't calm down.

[To collapse Shaolin's One Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation in one step and single-handedly force the closure of Sichuan Tang Clan... For an urgent report, its reliability seems a bit low.]

[It's hard to believe, but it seems to be true.]

[However, to accept it at face value...]

[If even the Righteous Alliance is moving, it means they too see the gravity of this situation as significant.]

[...Does that mean He is also paying attention to this?]

[He's showing great interest.]

[He... To the extent of showing interest...]

Despite having achieved numerous merits, making a Spiritual Beast his familiar, and becoming strong enough to compete with Profound Realm martial artists through Human-Monster Unity techniques, He had never shown much interest, let alone in his own realm.

Yet for Him to show interest to this extent.

[The seventh heaven... What did you say they call him?]

[Rather than being called, it seems he referred to himself as the Heavenly Demon.]

[The Demon of Heaven?]

-Grip!

“Kuk.”

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul suffered as the force around his neck tightened.

While numerous thoughts flashed through his mind, the most prominent one was why no one had known this person was the Heavenly Demon?

Or is it stranger that anyone would have noticed his identity in the first place?

Come to think of it, he truly is a bizarre fellow.

When he was first brought as a hostage to the righteous Yeon Mok Sword Manor, he hadn't received any attention at all.

The most he became known was after Corpse Blood Valley, but even then he was only at the level of a late-stage Qi Refinement.

Who would have thought such a person would be the seventh heaven, the Heavenly Demon, currently the most renowned in the martial world?

-Squeeze!

“Kuuuh.”

“You certainly have good endurance.”

“Uuuh.”

“Then shall I tell you? Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang said he absolutely needed something, what was it?”

“Th-That... I won’t... say...”

“You’ll talk when you wish for death.”

“It’s... futile... K-Kill me...”

“Well, I didn’t expect you to open your mouth easily.”

-Pop!

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his left shoulder.

“Wait, what are you doing now...”

“If I had time, I’d start with a single fingernail, but since I don’t, we’ll go in order of arms, then legs.”

No sooner had those words ended than Mok Gyeong-un tried to pull off his left arm.

It was at that moment.

The part of the Diabolic Beast Yual’s body that was in armor form on his shoulder shot out like a tentacle and grabbed Mok Gyeong-un’s hand.

-Swish!

‘!?’

Simultaneously with that grab,

-Pop pop pop pop pop!

The spines densely covering its entire body sprang out as if they had been waiting for this moment.

The spines were so small that it was hard to count their number.

It was the Diabolic Beast Yual’s trump card, having become one with its master through Human-Monster Unity and waiting for an opportunity to protect him.

But then,

-Sizzle!

The moment those numerous spines sprang out, they melted away as if oxidizing.

The Diabolic Beast Yual couldn't hide its bewilderment.

-Damn it!

An aura of death surrounded Mok Gyeong-un's body.

As he was approaching Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, who had achieved Human-Monster Unity with a monster, he had kept this aura around him as a precaution, which is why it didn't work.

“That's unfortunate. You must have been waiting for that chance.”

-Crack!

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un ripped off Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's left arm from the shoulder.

“Aaaaaargh!”

-Kak kak kak kak!

As a result, screams of pain erupted simultaneously from Myeong-ryul and the Diabolic Beast Yual.

Even for Myeong-ryul, who had strong endurance against pain, it was hard to bear having his left arm torn off after his right.

In fact, being unable to see, his other senses had developed more, making him more sensitive to pain than ordinary people.

However, he had endured it with his unique tenacity, but as the pain of having his arm torn off continued, he felt like he was about to lose his mind from the agony.

Mok Gyeong-un whispered in his ear:

“You can be as comfortable as you want if you just give the answer I want.”

“Kuuuh... Y-Young Master is...”

-Squeeze!

“Kup!”

Just as he was about to say something,

The flesh of the Diabolic Beast Yual, which was protecting his body like armor, suddenly began to constrict Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's body.

“Yu, Yual... St-Stop...”

-Squeeze!

Despite Myeong-ryul's cry, the constricting force of the Diabolic Beast Yual did not weaken.

Rather, it applied even more severe pressure.

As his familiar disobeyed even his own command to act like this, something flashed through Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul's mind.

‘A prohibition spell?’

He was a master of sorcery worthy of the title of Divine Diviner.

Especially, his most outstanding field was prohibition spells.

Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul, who had established a unique realm in prohibiting things, had even managed to break His prohibition spell.

Although he had sworn loyalty, he didn't want to stake his life as collateral.

But,

‘Huh?’

To think He would have placed a prohibition spell even on his own familiar.

He thought He wouldn't have noticed since he had kept his mouth shut, but it was right on top of his head.

-Crack!

“Kup.”

As he was suffering with his ribs cracking from the pressure,

“You've been abandoned.”

“Kuuuh.”

“Shall I save you?”

‘!?’

Save... me?

At Mok Gyeong-un's sudden proposal, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul fell into deep thought for a moment.

The fact that He had taken such measures meant that He could detect any betrayal from him at any time.

Perhaps He even knew that he had dabbled in the soul transfer technique, a notorious evil person's prohibition spell from long ago.

That's why he hadn't feared even death.

However, if He knew about his own measures, everything might end regardless of any prepared techniques.

-Crack!

“Kuuuh!”

More bones were crushed under the pressure of the Diabolic Beast Yual.

After numerous considerations in a split second, Grand Divination Master Myeong-ryul finally shouted hurriedly:

“S-Save... me!”

At his cry, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth turned up.

In front of the main compound where the Society Leader of Heaven and Earth Society's inner city resides.

Numerous people were rushing there.

The reason they were gathering like this was only one.

-Boom! Boom!

It was because of the red firecrackers that were still embroidering the sky.

Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who had arrived first at the square in front of the main compound as he was already heading there, had a strange expression.

And for good reason,

“Is it really the Society Leader who called?”

“.....”

At Mo Yak's question, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang exhaled a long breath without answering.

The meaning of those red firecrackers, those signal flares, was the Society Leader's emergency assembly.

When seeing that, regardless of who they were in the association, everyone had to gather in one place by the authority of the Society Leader.

‘Has his condition improved?’

According to the Elder Council’s information, the Society Leader had reached a state where recovery was nearly impossible.

But how could there be an emergency assembly?

Even if he had miraculously regained consciousness, it was impossible to recover so quickly in such a short time.

Then could this also be a ploy by the Elder Council?

If so, it was quite excessive.

No matter what, how could they exploit the Society Leader’s situation like this when he was practically unconscious...

-Creak!

It was then.

The main gate of the main compound opened.

As a procession began to come out from there, Mo Yak called out to Young Master Na Yul-ryang in a surprised voice:

“Young Master, is that?”

At the forefront of those coming out in a procession was none other than a severed head impaled on the end of a long spear.

-Murmur murmur!

The society members under Na Yul-ryang, who had gathered first, stirred.

What on earth was going on?

The main compound's guard corps was coming out in lines as if to display the severed head.

Their number was quite large, and while everyone was puzzled, a sect leader of an upper sect opened his mouth with surprised eyes, looking at one of the heads impaled on a spear tip:

“E-Elder In?”

‘Elder In?’

At this cry, one of Young Master Na Yul-ryang's eyebrows raised.

That head with its tongue sticking out and eyes wide open was Elder In Jigu.

He was someone who had retired 12 years ago, and as a former grand branch leader with excellent martial arts and many achievements, he had entered the Elder Council.

Na Yul-ryang also knew his face.

But for Elder In to be displayed like this,

‘…Something has gone wrong.’

It seemed that the plan the Elder Council had said they would prepare in advance had failed.

Otherwise, there was no way such a procession of displayed heads would continue.

Na Yul-ryang’s gaze sharpened as he looked up at the top floor of the main compound building where the Society Leader resided.

“Young Master?”

“It seems both the Elder Council and we have underestimated too much.”

Na Yul-ryang’s eyes could see someone’s silhouette looking down with hands behind their back through the wide-open window.

That silhouette was so familiar that he could recognize it at once.

“…Master.”

It was none other than the Society Leader of Heaven and Earth Society.

Unlike the last time he had seen him, he wasn’t even bandaged.

Along with Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s gaze, the eyes of the gathered Heaven and Earth Society warriors and various sect members naturally turned upwards.

“A-Society Leader?”

“Is the Society Leader safe?”

“Look! The Society Leader is safe!”

“Waaaaaaah!!!!”

Rumors had spread that the Society Leader’s condition was not good.

Because of this, the interior of Heaven and Earth Society had been in turmoil, but when the Society Leader not only called an emergency assembly but also showed himself in good health after a long time, the square in front of the main compound was filled with cheers.

The forces under Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang couldn’t be too pleased with these cheers.

It was then that a group entered the center of the square in five rows.

Seeing them, exclamations of surprise flowed from here and there.

“It’s the Earth Vein!”

“The Earth Vein has returned to the association!”

Those entering the center of the square like victorious generals were none other than the faction of the Earth Vein, one of the two pillars leading Heaven and Earth Society.