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Chapter 1: Woon Seong

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His legs trembled.

Woon Seong's entire body was shaking roughly from overexertion of his internal qi and apparent injuries.

The barren dirt on the ground stung as it stuck to the bloody wounds on his body and his head was ringing with a massive headache.

All of this was nothing compared to what Woon Seong truly cared about. His teacher and master died. The man who took care of him and raised him like a child was murdered and dead laying in front of him. What was even more aggravating was the scene in front of him however.....

'The one who taught me the essence of martial arts and becoming a man. Is this how you go?'

Woon Seong's anger was directed at the people in front of him who murdered his teacher and were responsible for his current state. It was a group of people who were once respected as his teacher's peers and their disciples.

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The fact they had turned on the Spearmaster, his teacher, and his sect was a sad sight to see.

“Hahaha...”

Woon Seong laughed like a madman.

“Hahahahahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!”

As he slowly turned my head, He could see the body of his deceased teacher who had fallen first.

His Master, the current master of the Spearmaster sect in the Orthodox society of Murim, who was betrayed by those who falsely accused him and schemed against him, claiming he had been learning in secret the demonic path, killed him in cold blood.

When Woon Seong turned my gaze again, all he saw was the bastards who were responsible for everything.

The Sage of Bright Rock, from Mount Hua Sect.

The Three Swords of Qingcheng, and the First Apprentice.

The Legendary Mountain Cleaver and the Peng Clan.

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In addition to these people, were the 5 generations hailing from their respective factions that held together the Orthodox Alliance within all of Murim.

But lastly... was *that* bastard.

The Lord of the Martial Alliance, Jwa Do-Gyeul.

He was a fool and a bastard man who had always felt inferior to Woon Seong's master, who also was the person who most openly accused his master as "The vilest practitioner and master in all of Murim". It was likely he was the one behind all of this Woon Seong thought.

Woon Seong looked at Do-Gyeul's hypocritical facial expression and gritted his teeth.

Then he slowly opened his mouth, erasing his wrathful countenance as if it was a lie.

"Let me ask you one thing."

"Tell me."

The person who answered was the Sage of Bright Rock, hailing from the Mount Hua Sect.

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He was the only one who could not erase his expression of unease and guilt, even when he killed his teacher.

However, in Woon Seong's eyes, he looked the same as any of the other hypocrites gathered here.

Although the Sage may feel guilty or remorseful about his actions, he did absolutely nothing to save his Master's life.

Looking back at the group before him, Woon Seong slowly opened his dry, chapped lips to speak.

"I know that some of the people here are not fools. You know better than anyone that my Master nor I, practiced any demonic art."

"....."

At the words of Woon Seong, the people around him closed their mouths and remained speechless like puppets.

The only remaining shred of sanity within Woon Seong snapped at this disgusting sight before him.

He laughed inwardly to himself, and Woon Seong continued to talk.

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“Then let’s talk candidly. Why did you do this? My Master was virtuous and honest as any man to ever walk the path of Martial Arts. And yet.. You openly frame him and conspire to taint his image and then trample our sect?! WHY?!!”

The cry from Woon Seong was filled with both desperation and sadness, as if he were a wounded beast crying out in anger at his attacker before it’s last moments.

Those who stood before him and saw this were taken aback by the ferocious display of spirit and power in front of them.

One of the corners of Woon Seong’s mouth curled up as he saw them cower and step back.

‘Yeah, Of course none of you have any idea who did this to us. It’s because all of you fuckers are responsible for this!’

In fact, Woon Seong knew their personalities and tendencies

Why they would do this, and what false merit it would bring to their own image.

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The Spearmaster Sect was the smallest sect in number, as it was a one master and one disciple type of sect. It was obvious what would happen if several other Orthodox sects attacked them.

But his Master was already something else compared to these so-called masters before him.

His Master's ascension in his martial path and cultivation had long reached above and beyond his peer's levels.

Even the Lord of the entire Martial Alliance was compared to evenly matched to his master..

Despite all the false glory they would attain from purging an evil villain in name who was as strong as his master, there was definitely something else hidden in this accusation!

However, nobody defended them whatsoever when the accusations surfaced.

It started half a year ago. A strange rumor had started to spread all over the country that an ancient demonic text that was unparalleled in power was revived and found.

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All those who learned this art, were different from normal Unorthodox practitioners as they were purely demonic. Demonic Arts were powerful indeed, but their power depended on the amount of bloodshed of others, hence why those who learned it turned into disastrous murderers within all of Murim and were put down as soon as they came to power.

As soon as one learnt it, they would also lose all remaining sanity and completely turn into a different person.

But... the rumors turned towards his Master for some reason and he was accused of holding onto the book.

The Spearmaster sect had one of the largest libraries in all of Murim despite being the smallest when it came to texts and cultivation methods. But the rumors went as far to accuse his master that he had already started practicing the demonic arts!

Nobody listened to the cries of Woon Seong and his master, as two people cannot stand up to the entire world or Murim.

After a while, an investigative group was sent from the Alliance to check if the rumors were true or not.

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Both Woon Seong and his master were certain the rumors were complete falsehoods. But... something changed.

'I should've realized it sooner.', he thought.

For some reason during the rigorous investigation, the text of the demonic art was found in the investigators hands.

In no other place than the Spearmaster Sect's library!

The appearance of the demonic text, when first pulled out of the shelf, embarrassed even his Master since Woon Seong knew that neither his Master had any inclination to study or even look for that blasphemous text. Naturally, anxiety and worry appeared on both his master and his own face.

At that point Woon Seong realized.

It was a scheme to frame them. For some reason, somebody in Murim conspired against their sect and his Master.

And it just so happens that those bastards who framed him, were standing right in front of the bloodied and fierce-eyed Woon Seong at this very moment.

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“If you have a mouth, TELL ME!”, Woon Seong roared pointing his spear at the two-faced martial artists.

When the people of the group before him did not answer, Woon Seong shouted even louder.

It was then that the Lord of the Martial Alliance, Jwa Do-Gyeul emerged from the group and responded.

“How long are we going to let that demonic child spout his dirty lies?!”

As Jwa Do-Geul stepped forwards, Woon Seong grasped the blood-stained spear of his deceased teacher tightly in his grasp.

Woon Seong glared intensely at Jwa Do-Gyeul. If looks could kill, Woon Seong would have slaughtered the entirety of Murim with just that gaze alone.

“Of course, you always hated my Master. Not only were his merits higher than yours, but his skill was also leagues above yours!”, Woon Seong shouted in contempt.

The Do-Gyeul’s eyebrows wriggled and contorted in anger at the words spoken.

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"I guess your teacher didn't teach you any manners with that spiteful tongue of yours. Heh, I will purge all the laymen who practiced the devil's art starting with your master and you!"

"Bullshit!"

Woon Seong shot forwards with vigor, as his spear wound itself tightly in qi and moved with him towards his target.

It was a strike with such ferocity and stability that it was nearly impossible to imagine that Woon Seong had only been practicing for a short ten years.

And in fact, his skills were the most highly rated amongst the younger generation as well!

The smooth and refined movement of his spear proved it beyond a doubt.

As he moved towards the group, Woon Seong's movement resembled a thunderbolt.

Originally, it was Woon Seong's intention to catch Jwa Do-Gyeul and kill him right then and there.

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But, he wasn't the Lord of the Martial Alliance for no reason!

'I need to, if anybody is to die here. It must be that man!'

Woon Seong though moving incredibly fast-paced, almost like a mirage to the untrained eye, slowly glanced over at his Master's face who lied there on the ground to the left of him in sorrow and anger.

Woon Seong was bitter about it to the very end, since it wasn't like his master couldn't defend himself from all these masters. He was visibly poisoned, and Woon Seong had noticed the physical symptoms long ago.

In addition to poisoning and framing his master for practicing Demonic Arts, Woon Seong absolutely would not let Jwa Do-Gyeul live for what he had done!

"I'll kill him.. for as long as my body still breathes life, I will definitely kill him.'

It was a gathering of the most powerful masters within the entire Orthodox Alliance that were in front of him, Woon Seong knew there was no way he could escape them and that he would surely die here.

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Since that was the case, he had to at least avenge his master in some way.

As soon as Woon Seong shifted his gaze back towards his target, his eyes shone brilliantly with determination, the spear in his hand flashed with a bright orange aura and set fire.

“Y-You!”, Jwa Do-Gyeul shouted in surprise and a little bit of fear. Even a cornered rat would bite a cat. Jwa Do-Gyeul brought his sword in hand in front of him quickly and was forced to parry the fierce strike he tried to redirect as much as the pressure and force behind the spear, away from him.

Bang!

Zing-singgg-zingggg

A flurry of strikes unfolded at an unseeable pace before the group as the spear and sword clashed.

It wasn't a completely futile effort either.

Two fingers!

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The Mountain Cleaver and First Apprentice of the Sword Sect shouted out and approached Jwa Do-Gyeul.

Of course it was them. The two that hung around most with Jwa Do-Gyeul and were basically his loyal dogs.

They were the epitome of hypocrisy.

“You’re too young to even try and escape from us you little bastard!”

“His skills are as good as they say! Be careful!”

Pheng-teng-teng-

The cold, bloodied spear and the sword of the First Apprentice collided, causing a series of dangerous exchanges to be heard throughout the field.

Behind the First Apprentice who kept Woon Seong occupied, was the Mountain Cleaver gathering up his internal energy for a huge over-handed strike.

And as if that was not enough, even Jwa Do-Gyeul, which had stopped the bleeding from his wounded fingers, rushed toward the Woon Seong in anger with his sword.

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The remaining members of the group, including the Sage of Bright Rock, the renowned scholar of the Mount Hua Sect, just watched the fight in front of their eyes with bitter expressions.

The fierce battle continued for more than a few minutes.

And at the end of the battle, the sword of Jwa Do-Gyeul pierced the heart of the brutally beaten and wounded Woon Seong.

“Oh, my God! Is he still alive after even that?!”

Woon Seong staggered, gripping the hole in the left side of his chest. A chunk of blackened blood and unrecognizable organ tissue sputtered out from Woon Seong’s mouth.

It was the result of several inflicted strikes that harmed him internally in a cruel manner... This tortuous method of death was due to Jwa Do-Gyeul alone.

Even from an outsider’s perspective, it was impossible for Woon Seong to survive here. Even if he was left alone here, he would bleed out in a sad state since he wouldn’t be able to move a limb in his body.

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However, the Orthodox martial artists that attacked Woon Seong had different ideas.

'This guy.. He's a monster. He is still standing still, even after this much of a beating!', was the common thought between the assailants.

Woon Seong was outstanding as a martial artist to them, though they were even more frightened and wary at the fact a mere apprentice held out this long against 3 masters and was even able to injure one of them.

The next attack was one of zero practicality, and had more of a disgusting and vengeful feel to it, completely contradictory to any Orthodox belief or moral practice. It wasn't even a stance or move from any specific practice. Jwa Do-Gyeul grinned with a disgusting smile at the limp and completely broken Woon Seong who was supporting his weight against his tattered spear. He leapt up in the air and came down with his weight and holding his sword in a executioner type of manner.

Boom!

It was impossible for an already near-death practitioner to avoid such an obvious attack.

blaat-

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Blood splattered like paint being thrown on a canvas as Woon Seong's body was struck once more directly to the ground by Jwa Do-Gyeu and his sword that penetrated through Woon Seong's flesh.

Gasp!

Woon Seong couldn't even make out any sounds from the pain he was going through. He just gasped desperately for air as his lungs had been pierced in that final blow.

'I wanted to at least take one down with me...'

He truly wanted to kill at least one of the hypocritical bastards that caused this terrible event.

'Master, I'm sorry.'

In the midst of Woon Seong's collapsing consciousness, his gaze landed on his teacher's resting face.

'I told you it was Jwa Do-Gyeul. I told you not to be too nice to him.'

Woon Seong felt bitter as he cursed the man Jwa Do-Gyeul even in his last moments, while looking with endearment towards his master.

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If he and his master were to die like this here, there would be no one to recover their bodies.

No, even if they did, will these blasted and corrupt liars allow a tombstone to be built?

It was likely their bodies would be thrown into the woods and eaten by the wild animals residing there.

'Master... if I can live another life, I will avenge you. I swear to you and myself that I will kill at least that man if I had the chance.'

There was no such thing called living a second life, or re-incarnation. It was simply a fact accepted by every sane man and woman in the world.

Woon Seong's sight blurred as he sorrowfully wept for his caring Master.

His five senses were slowly getting more and more dulled, but to Woon Seong it seemed as if he could see his Master's very soul departing in front of him.

'So don't be too much of a pushover in the afterlife. Take care of your own interests, okay?'

Woon Seong felt his life slowly coming to an end.

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In the meantime, he could vaguely hear Jwa Do-Gyeul shouting something,

“I’ve knocked down these evil bastards HAHAH!”

Woon Seong gathered all his strength to spit out the last curse while his consciousness was blurring.

“You fucking dog.”

The last word of a warrior and martial artist devoted to the spear that couldn’t defend his master due to his lack of strength.

But even as he said this, Woon Seong couldn’t hear anything or see anything else. He had lost consciousness.

But... no one knew nor did they notice it.

On the neck of the deceased Woon Seong, hidden beneath his robes.

There was an emerald green necklace with a crystal embedded in the center of it, shining ever so faintly.

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Chapter 2: Second Chance (1)

Chapter 2: Second Chance (1)

“Hmm.”

Sang In-Hyo, the General Director for the Cave of Latent Demons, a training facility for youth within the Cult of the Heavenly Demon, handed over the pile of documents piled up in front of him.

All the documents he received were sent from the upper echelons of the Cult.

Sang In-Hyo looked carefully through the papers.

Skimming his eyes over the documents he rubbed his forehead out of habit from stress.

The Cave of Latent Demons was a similar training facility used to nurture youth and find talents, it was similarly designed to several programs within the Murim Alliance.

However, they did not educate the youth in a similar and ‘polite’ manner as the Orthodox Factions within the Alliance. This was due to the Cult being part of the Unorthodox Faction.

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It was unlike the selective processes that the Orthodox went through as their code was similar to survival of the fittest. Only the most talented youth that showed promise would survive by the end of the training. The unfortunate ones however, were not so lucky.

While handing over the documents, Sang In-hyo recalled the three main teachings in the facility. More specifically, they were referred to as the 3 'nots'

Keep up not, you die.

Strengthen not, you die.

Endure not, you die.

That very code they lived by, was what made the Cave of Latent Demons one of the most well-known programs for it's harshness.

It was inevitable to be brutal since the remaining talents would surely strengthen the power of the cult, and was only held every 20 years.

The reason for the 20 year periods in between, was to bring fresh talent of the younger generation to stimulate and compete with the older ones.

This training was surprisingly, just that effective.

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It was inevitable that those who survived would become masters in their own right, and be able to hold themselves accountable and at least have means to protect themselves within all of Murim.

Though rigorous and harsh, one would wonder why even try to attempt the arduous training that walked the tightrope of life and death? It was simple. If one was a master, they could overcome any kind of pre-existing status and make a name for themselves and their loved ones.

However, there are no shortcuts to power.

This remained true for even the brightest of talents among the many youth gathered.

If a thousand children entered the Cave of Latent Demons, not more than 100 would make it out alive. One-tenth. That was just the survival rate. Finding the most supreme talents among them to become masters was even lower.

But, as difficult as the training was, there had to be some youth that continuously overcame setbacks and proved themselves to stand out.

“Who among the batch of youth has been standing out?”

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Sang In-hyo would not be the only person to want to know either. The upper echelons wanted the director and his subordinates to keep their eyes peeled too.

When Sang In-Hyo was briefed half a year ago, his assistant mentioned three particular children to him.

Even if they stood out though, they would not get any kind of special treatment. One could die at any time here.

That was just the cruel reality of it all.

'I wonder if anybody new has entered the lead.'

Sang In-hyo smacked his lips in curiosity to see if any new talents had shown up other than the three.

The assistant answered in earnest.

"As I mentioned before, Numbers 1, 17, and 109 continue to stand out amongst their peers."

"So none of them have died yet."

When Sang In-hyo heard his assistant's report, he nodded.

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The number of students that are taken in the Cave of Latent Demons consists of a thousand children each time.

And as soon as they enter the Cave of Latent Demons, they must abandon their names and receive numbers to identify themselves according to their talent level amongst their peers.

The one with the greatest talent was number 1, and the one with the worst talent was labeled as 1000.

'Hm.. number Seventeen.....'

Sang In-hyo knocked on the table with his fingers, recalling No. 17.

She received a number of seventeen for certain reasons, even though she had talent rivaling the No. 1.

Considering her background, she would not be allowed to die, even if she failed here.

One of the most surprising things is that no. 109, who numbered in the hundreds, was being noticed among the children who stood out.

'His resolve must be impressive.'

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Sang In-hyo finished his thoughts about no. 109 and covered up the report.

Then, he asked in a passive tone,

“Anyone else except those three?”

At Sang In-hyo’s words, the assistant hesitated and opened his mouth.

“.....we have no. 900.”

Sang In-hyo’s eyebrows wriggled in skepticism at his assistant’s words.

“No. 900?”

A number like 900 was a talent almost on the verge of garbage.

In fact, those in the last 100 were intended to be used to alert the more talented children by dying early rather than using them as members of the Cult.

But, the 900th child was standing out.

It might have been understandable at the start when everybody had a fresh start... But, now of all times?

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Wouldn't this be considered a record in all the history for the Cave of Latent Demons, that someone numbering in the 900's was even alive this long?

There were only 600 children alive!

Sang In-hyo's countenance demanded an explanation for what was going on with no. 900.

The assistant noticed this and continued to explain his findings.

"It was about half a year ago when no. 900 first started to change..."

* * *

"Whooh..."

Inside the dark stone room, was a young boy who looked to be about eleven years old.

The boy fell down with a look of exhaustion plastered all over his face.

"Ughhh."

The floor was hard and his muscles were sore.

He was incredibly tired at this point and wanted to fall asleep right away.

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His eyelids felt as heavy as iron ingots as they wavered in the darkness of the room.

The boy could feel clearly all the kinds of bones and muscle fibers screaming at him to rest his adolescent body at once.

Any other ordinary boy would have fallen asleep as soon as they lay down.

But he wasn't some ordinary boy.

'I can't fall asleep right now.'

The boy got up from his seat and went to a corner of the stone room.

Then soon he lit a small candle wick with a match.

whoohaa-

The small flame flickered to life in the darkness of the small cave that was the size of about 1 pyeong. Illuminating the corners of the room, the boy felt a warm and cozy air embrace his body.

It was obvious, this little stone chamber wasn't his real home.

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It was just another small room that each child received when they entered the Cave of Latent Demons.

It was becoming a familiar place to him now.

The boy, who lit the candle, returned to his original seated position and sat with his back leaning slightly against the wall.

The unique cold touch of the cave transmitted its temperature to his back, awakening his mind and body from its exhausted state.

“Whoo-huuu.”

Tapping into his 5 senses, no. 900 slowly closed his eyes and sank deep into his thoughts.

‘It’s been about half a year.’

The identity of No. 900 was actually Hyuk Woon Seong, the deceased apprentice of the Spearmaster Sect.

The very one who had been falsely accused with his master, and killed brutally by the hypocrites within the Orthodox Faction.

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In fact, even he didn't fully understand the situation when he first woke up.

It was a matter of something fundamentally impossible.

'I definitely died.'

He knew better than anybody what his own ending was like.

The situation at hand, was not something he could dare to even try comprehending.

He first awoke in this body half a year ago.

It was incredibly embarrassing at first.

Why would a person who died in his mid-twenties be in the body of a child?

And he had these new memories that were not his, meddling and mixing with his previous life's memories. Who could possibly give him a reasonable explanation for what happened?

As half a year was not a short time, it was natural that there were many theories he tried to conjecture in that time.

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And after contemplating his thoughts for that half-year, Woon Seong came to a conclusion.

'I don't know why I'm here... but if there was anything at all that could point to this happening, then it would be....'

The gaze of Woon Seong subconsciously fell to an area around his chest.

It was a small, old necklace hanging around his neck.

Surprisingly, it was the same exact necklace that Woon Seong was wearing just before he died.

The artifact of the Spearmaster Sect.

It wasn't just some imitation of the artifact, but the real deal.

At first, Woon Seong thought he was coincidentally wearing a similar necklace.

However, there was no way that he, the former apprentice of the Spearmaster Sect, could not recognize the treasured artifact of his Sect.

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It was a necklace that he had worn around his neck for over five years in his previous life.

Woon-seong knew by touching the emerald prism that was laced around the string with his fingertips.

He knew that he would always be loyal to the Spearmaster Sect and his deceased master, even in this life.

However, it didn't explain why he had been shoved into the body of some child that was in the Cave of Latent Demons. It was one the most powerful Sect of all the Unorthodox Factions.

But, Woon Seong had a slight hunch as to why he had been reincarnated into this body which was trying to get into the Cult of the Heavenly Demon.

What power could have possibly interfered with his destiny to place him here of all places? Even as he went through the grueling training of the Cult with this child's body, he still practiced the qi cultivation art that he learned in his previous life.

'It's still not nearly enough.'

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Woon Seong eventually just gave up trying to think about what impossible forces were moving him around and just went with what was in front of him.

He couldn't find any true purpose to this life for over half a year.

Even if he thought about it for a while now, nothing would really change in his path as a martial artist if he did nothing to improve.

If anything, it would be better to adapt to his current situation and decide later on what he needed to do in the future.

'No, it's actually clear what I need to do.'

The faces of the bastards who framed and brutally murdered his master and him.

By comparing and contrasting the memories between 900 and his old memories, it had been about 1 year since 'he' had died.

Of course those hypocrites would still be alive.

'Then this time, surely Jwa Do-Gyeul... I will kill you for what you did.'Hyuk
Woon Seong gritted his teeth and recalled the face of the parties involved with his master's death.

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The faces of the sect leaders of several orthodox factions like the Mountain Cleaver, the First Apprentice and the Sage of Bright Rock came to mind.

They would surely die by his hands as well.

'With another chance at vengeance, I can't screw this up!'

Woon Seong, determined to get revenge for his master, checked his situation.

His body was untrained and didn't have a speck of talent to be seen, when he first came to.

The place where he woke up was in the Cave of Latent Demons within the Cult of the Heavenly Demon.

The body of an untalented child wasn't really a problem. He had changed at least that much through his own training and hard work.

There were many and countless Qi cultivation techniques in the entirety of Murim, and there were also specific types of techniques that could even help cultivate talent.

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And the previous Woon Seong happened to know one of those techniques.

第二章 건혼곤신(乾魂坤身) : The Heavenward Soul Earthen Body.

He paved the road to heaven by igniting his soul and he molded his body to become as firm as the earth itself in all its entirety.

So you had the soul of the heavens and the body of the earth.

That was the essence of this Qi Cultivation Art he was using.

This incredible Cultivation Art, fell into the hands of his Master when the Quanzhen Sect fell.

It belonged to the library hidden deep within the Spearmaster Sect, unreachable to anybody besides Woon Seong and his Master.

The effects of the Earthen Body were showing effect quickly, but the Soul that would change his talent was very slow since it was like pouring water into a dried up pond.

‘It’s not an easy process by any means. It should take at least 10 years to accumulate the amount of talent and internal qi needed to reach my old level.’

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Although slow, the body of No. 900, now Woon Seong, has steadily grown in earnest. And there were some tangible results starting to finally show.

“We can solve the physical problem with this, but I just had to revive here didn't I?”

The Cult of the Heavenly Demon.

Actually, it was a little ironic and comical.

If there was someone writing the script of fate in the heavens above, then they surely liked to pull pranks.

The Unorthodox Factions.

In other words, in the Orthodox Factions, they would openly despise and condemn practitioners of the unorthodox path calling them, calling them ‘demons’.

Woon Seong felt the image of his master smiling at him, stimulate emotions within himself. He had lived an earnest and loving life, taking a child like Woon Seong in, who had nothing to live for. And what he did was nothing short of a miracle; giving Woon Seong a purpose in his

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life. But that life had been reaped by the very hypocritical bastards of the other Orthodox Sects.

'But, I really can't believe I'm here, of all places.'

Woon Seong smiled faintly without realizing it.

However, there were always sides to both stories as his master had told him.

The Cult of the Heavenly Demon and even the Unorthodox as a whole, were a little different than how the Orthodox portrayed them.

Yes, they might be condemned as evil, but even they had all been wronged by someone in the past that led them to create their purpose and group. Woon Seong focused back on observing his internal circuitry and total internal qi he possessed. Even though Woon Seong had just come into this new body half a year ago, he had accumulated about 3 years worth of qi.

As his hidden identity being the deceased apprentice of the Spearmaster Sect, he needed to stay pursue his lonely road of vengeance alone.

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He was making some progress steadily and shouldn't complain too much really. If anyone else had his knowledge at 11 years old, they would be an unheard-of prodigy. Even though at first Woon Seong felt disgusted about reviving in the Cult of the Heavenly Demon, his master told him dearly in the past that not all Unorthodox Practitioners were 'demonic'.

'Maybe this is a good thing.'

Since he had to walk his path of vengeance alone, it might not be such a bad idea to take all that he could from here before his leave.

On top of all the teachings his master left him. He always emphasized harmony. If he was to use a so-called 'righteous' attitude with a mid-level cultivation technique and stubbornly challenge his enemies like he did in the past, then it would all be in vain. Woon Seong decided that to keep the teachings of his teacher that emphasized harmony as well as taking a new path would be necessary. He had to get stronger than anybody else. Strong enough to decide other's fate. Like the fate of the bastards who caused him ruin.

* * *

"Looks like 900 changed after consuming the poison 6 months ago..."

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Sang In-hyo once again, contemplated his assistant's earlier words.

Sometimes that happened.

After experiencing a life and death crisis, some people take the opportunity to change and challenge their so-called limitations.

But Sang In-hyo knew that pulling that off was not something easy by any means.

Most take that opportunity and their resolve that drove them to grow, but all of them inevitably fizzled out.

'But, this means that no. 900 is still growing at an impossible rate for over 6 months now.'

Sang In-hyo lightly smacked his lips.

Of course, number 900 was not comparable to the top three that were mentioned earlier.

In the case of 'the three', they were still leaps and bounds ahead of everybody else at the Cave of Latent Demons.

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However, the fact remained that no. 900 was growing at a rapid pace beyond belief, and was closing the distance.

‘There’s nothing wrong with watching him a bit more closely.’

Taking that into consideration, Sang In-hyo ordered his subordinates to observe 900 a bit more closely.

It wouldn’t be a bad choice to surprise the ‘brain of the cult’ with this chance of no. 900’s future.

Finally, he gave up his thoughts on no. 900. There were only 600 left in the Cave of Latent Demons and they had been only developing poison resistance and basic body training. Sang In-hyo smiled. It was about *that* time. Within the Cave of Latent Demons, it was time to start ‘The True Program’ which was incomparable to the standard training program the children had been going through.

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Chapter 3: Second Chance (2)

Chapter 3: Second Chance (2)

3 – Second Chance (2)

Crick-Creeaackk-Criiik

From the depths of Woon Seong's new body, there was a fundamental change occurring internally.

His muscles stretched and contracted. His bones started to become reforged and remolded themselves to become more durable. His veins and capillaries pumped and pumped; speeding up his blood circulation. His very body was changing slowly and his mind was clearing up.

Woon Seong practiced the Heavenward Soul Earthen Body Technique diligently and circulated his internal qi throughout every nook and cranny of his body.

It was a different source of energy that affected his soul and was increasing his talent levels. Since the technique was working with the soul, it didn't interfere with his circulation of internal qi. This was because they were fundamentally two different types of energy.

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Slowly but gradually, and meticulously, he was sculpting his body to become an unparalleled retainer for holding internal qi.

How long had it been?

Ba-dump!

Finally the sounds of his bones creaking and blood circulating, finally stopped.

The very quality of his own soul had slightly increased again.

'It's changed again this time.'

Woon Seong opened his eyes, feeling refreshed.

It wasn't very noticeable, but the eyes on the body of No. 900, Woon Seong, were slightly different compared to last night.

Since the change was so miniscule, nobody would be able to notice it unless they tried to dissect him.

However, Woon Seong himself was clearly aware of his own change.

He clenched and unclenched his fist while trying to get adjusted to his new changes.

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Hisss-The candle's flame last night had burned out already and it was early in the morning.

It was a new day of training today.

And it was also the perfect chance for Woon Seong to test his new strength through this training.

Woon Seong nodded to himself with a satisfactory smile.

Looking at the burnt out wick, Woon Seong guessed roughly what time it was.

"Is it almost three o'clock?"

It was probably around the end of night and about to break into the early morning dawn.

It was time for the children who were sleeping in their rooms to start waking up.

Some of the children could not wake up yet due to the injuries they were sustaining. If the children broke one of the '3 nots' they would get a slap with a stick by one of the instructors. Of course this wasn't just some light, little slap. It was bone crushing and bruising. Hence why some of

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them were not waking up. Of course Woon Seong never got beaten, since he did his best to not only survive but grow here. *BONG- BONG- BONG-*

“Everyone, gather around a few minutes!”

Sure enough.

There was a loud shout that could be heard from one of the instructors outside the children’s rooms.

At the sound, Woon Seong opened the door of the stone chamber assigned to him, and went outside.

Thanks to practicing the Heavenward Soul and Earthen Body technique at night, Woon Seong did not need to rest and all of his bodily fatigue had gone away.

For the past year, all the children in the Cave of Latent Demons had been learning how to defend themselves and develop their bodies through endurance and strength training. However, they had many more ordeals and different kinds of training to undertake.

The Cave of Latent Demons was a 10 year-long training program.

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Therefore, it was paramount for the children to develop their bodies before undergoing any of the later tests.

'Hm?'

There were always very small numbers of children who had developed early on and had a better start than others by learning some qi cultivation techniques or body cultivation techniques through their family backgrounds.

They might not have been the types to practice during their sleeping hours, but they must have practiced and developed themselves prior to coming here.

Of course, the original owner of No. 900 was an orphan, so he never had any opportunities to learn any of them.

In other words, his internal qi and body was incredibly weak when he first inherited the body.

Of course, the amount of energy Woon Seong could collect was minimal since his body wasn't that talented yet. But he was able to hide his internal qi due to a special technique.

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If an orphan without any kind of history or prior teaching had somehow cultivated internal qi in the Cave of Latent Demons, anyone would be suspicious of him.

For that reason, it was almost a miracle that Woon Seong had been able to secretly cultivate about 3 years worth of internal qi in only half a year.

It was all due to the knowledge and experience of his previous life.

Although Jwa Do-Gyeul was the bastard who had murdered him and his master, he had developed a technique known as intimidation qi. It was a technique that allowed the user to mask his true levels and hide the amount of internal qi he had cultivated.

Thanks to this, none of the instructors in the Cave of Latent Demons were able to notice any internal qi from Woon Seong.

Of course, he also had to cultivate his body slowly as well.

Many children were eliminated in the early trials of the Cave of Latent Demons due to not having the physical limits to cultivate, but there were still children who were enduring it.

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In addition, most of them, like the previous owner of No. 900, had any knowledge of what internal qi even was.

All of these brutal training were being endured with the small body of a child.

As long as Woon Seong knew that, he couldn't use any of his previous techniques to physically develop his body at an accelerated rate even if he got bruised or broke any bones.

Of course, it was hard enough to not to die but he couldn't die here early.

On the other hand, he felt quite proud when he thought about it.

While practicing this grueling training as a child, it was hard to enjoy life in a cave. But, when Woon Seong thought of the long road ahead of him and how well he was progressing towards it, he felt empowered.

As Woon Seong was lost in thought, the children gathered one by one at the gathering place.

Woon Seong was located in Shiwan Hall.

The Cave of Latent Demons consisted of four halls. Two hundred and fifty children were placed in each hall.

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The number of children who had survived until now, were about 130.

It was cruel but it was a fact that nearly half of the children died after a year of training.

More would die though.

They were still only in the first year of the 10 year training.

On the other hand, he felt compassion for them.

However, Woon Seong had to keep his mind steeled towards his goal.

He didn't have time or feelings to spare for the other children who would die, since he needed to survive as well and get his revenge at all costs.

'If it were my previous life, I would not have hesitated to help these children survive. But I can't. Not in this life.'

He had no intention of walking the path of a demon, but he had to walk the bloody and long road of vengeance.

For that purpose, he had to take advantage of every opportunity he could get.

Woon Seong closed his eyes for a moment, thinking about it.

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His brief look of pity of compassion was erased and only determination could be seen in his eyes.

Then the instructors who ordered the assembly appeared.

'Looks like the morning training is about to begin.'

Morning training in the Cave of Latent Demons was hiking.

It seemed very simple, but that didn't mean it was by any means easy.

No wonder since they were located in the Daecheon Mountains, otherwise famed as 'the ends of the world'.

The reason for such a heavy name, was because the peaks of these mountains were incredibly steep. This made the climb incredibly difficult to grasp your footing, and was by no means easy to traverse 3 miles up a mountain and downwards for any 10 year-old child.

But, the children from the Cave of Latent Demons climbed these peaks every single day when they woke up.

That wasn't all however.

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Originally, no matter how hard it was to climb a mountain as difficult as these, if you kept climbing the same mountain, one was bound to find little areas to rest and certain places that were easier on the body to climb.

In order to prevent that, the instructors changed the order of the mountain peaks the children had to climb every 10 days.

Thanks to this, even simple climbing became very difficult training.

On top of that, today was the designated day that the peak they had to climb would change again.

The children slowly all gathered into the hall, and stood there shaking off their early morning fatigue.

Just then, the last five instructors came into sight.

They were carrying a large sack on their backs, and when they put it down on the floor, a loud thud rang out inside the cave.

At a glance, it was clear that whatever was in the bag weighed a lot.

Though they were young, the children were no fools and also noticed it.

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Due to the harsh training up till now, if the children didn't adapt a fast sense of wits, they would die inevitably.

"What is that?"

At the moment when all the children's attention was focused on the bag, including Woon Seong's, the senior instructor, who was at the forefront, smiled grimly and put his hand in the bag.

He pulled out several iron weight bracers.

"From today onwards, the level of difficulty in your training will increase! All of you will step forward and take these!"

As soon as the senior instructor finished speaking, other instructors turned the sacks over their shoulders and poured the iron bracers on the ground that were inside their respective bags.

'Hm, arm and leg bracers.'

As soon as Woon Seong had seen the weights get pulled out, he immediately realized what they were for, and how he could benefit from this.

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It was one of the most primitive ways to strengthen a martial artist's body and muscles. Yet, surprisingly as countless years and different methods of training were found. This simple weight training was still incredibly effective. He remembered a time when he had tried something similar in his previous life.

'It felt like each of my limbs would fall off.'

Thanks to trying this method in his past life, Woon Seong knew the benefits of this training. He would have incredibly well built muscles in his legs and arms that could be as strong as brick; and his stomach and abdomen area would flow and bend freely like an elastic band.

If the children wore these bracers and climbed up the mountain peaks for their morning training every day, it was inevitable that those who endured would attain incredible benefits for their own bodies.

Although some of them might die at a faster rate, it was also a high risk high reward type of training.

'As simple as it is, this is actually something amazing for me.'

Thinking so, Woon Seong received his bracers from one of the instructors handing them out and attached one to each of his limbs.

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The weight of each iron bracer that he received was about 7.5 kg.

Wearing one on each forearm and ankle, Woon Seong placed them in the places that would help distribute the amount of strain evenly throughout his body and keep his strength balanced.

Among the children, there were some children who could not stand from the sudden increase of weight applied to them.

In order to adapt properly and climb the mountain, the children would need some time to adapt to the sudden increase of weight applied to them

But the instructors were harsh.

There was no time to adapt, since in reality this was not just a simple training session. They needed to nurture the strong ones that would bring a bright future to the Cult.

“I’ll give you 4 hours. Climb the mountain, take a flag and bring it back here. There are only 100 flags. Those who do not bring one down, will not receive breakfast.”

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The meals that were served to the children in the Cave of Latent Demons, were incredibly nourishing and well balanced. However, they were small in portion and that meant every meal of the day was crucial. Missing a meal, would mean even more pain and possibly death by starvation.

When the words hit the children's ears, their eyes turned fierce and determined.

Since there were only 100 flags, around 30 of them would not have breakfast.

Some of the children had already bolted out of the hall and started climbing the mountain.

On the other hand, the children, who were a bit more calculative with their actions, did not immediately climb the mountain but rather, seemed lost in thought.

Seeing the scene unfold in front of him, Woon Seong clicked his tongue.

'The ones waiting, will strike the weakened ones and take their flags.'

He knew what they were thinking.

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As it was such a steep and arduous mountain to climb, adding weights on top of the already exhausted kids was bound to make them incredibly tired and exhausted.

These calculating kids who were lost in thought, were most definitely going to attack these weakened kids.

‘He must be thinking the same thing.’

Woon Seong glanced at a boy across from him on the other side of the hall.

He was one of the larger boys who had pretty good talent, he was known as No. 185. Though not exactly on the same level as No. 17, 1 and 109, he was definitely one of the strongest kids in the hall.

Most of the children, if attacked by him as they descended down the hill would lose their flag.

‘What’s disappointing is that he doesn’t even know the value of hard work, and wants to take the shortcuts to power.’

Woon Seong clicked his tongue in disgust and turned away.

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Of course, it wasn't like Woon Seong was an upright and moral person either, he even thought about it for a brief moment as well.

He would be able to definitely eat his breakfast easily without much trouble.

But eventually, the star began to move.

This was an opportunity to train and get stronger. With his goal in mind, he would do anything to achieve it. That being said, to achieve his goal, he needed to climb this mountain without complaints.

'No. 17 just started to move.'

Woon Seong saw that No. 17 had started to move. He wasn't sure why she was ranked 17th, because as far as he could tell with the experience of two lives, she was definitely the most monstrous talent in this entire Cave of Latent Demons.

Woon Seong closed his eyes and took a deep breath in.

"Whooh."

And then he shot forwards towards the peak.—

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Chapter 4: The Cave (1)

Chapter 4: The Cave (1)

Of all the types of training that had happened so far, none were quite as cruel as this one. It was precisely because of the mental and physical fatigue piled on with wariness amongst the other children. It was the first time they had been pitted against each other in anything like a competition. Among all the peaks in the Cult of the Heavenly Demon, the mountain that was selected this time, was one of the steepest in the entire domain.

It was so high up, that it seemed like the very peak of the mountain was about to pierce the heavens themselves.

Not only that, but the road was one of the most dangerous ones for the children to climb. The rocks were hard to grip and had no real solid footholds.

“Hoot. hoot.”

For any 10-11 year old climbing this mountain with lumps of metal on their limbs and not using any internal qi, this was a nigh impossible task.

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But, not everybody here was average.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

A boy next to Woon Seong had just lost his hold and rolled off the slope and landed on a patch of ground a few feet below.

“Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Although he was not seriously injured, his wound looked serious.

Woon Seong looked back and silently started to climb the mountain again.

In fact, he felt like he was about to die, too.

He refused to use his internal qi as a shortcut, and the body of No.900 was still incredibly lacking despite the small changes he had undergone through the Heavenward Soul Earthen Body technique.

“Hoo- hah, hoo- hah.”

His hands and fingers were bleeding a bit, as the blisters on them popped. His lungs felt like they were burning.

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The hem of Woon Seong's clothes was drenched with sweat, which only restricted his movement even more.

He really wanted to take a break right now.

'No, I can't rest right now.'

Woon Seong knew that if he rested here, his mind and body would get so relaxed, that he wouldn't even continue to climb after he stopped.

Therefore, he steeled his mind and decided he would allow himself some rest once he reached the top and got a flag first.

Woon Seong just kept the image of his master in his head fresh every time he took a step up the mountain, and gritted his teeth with determination.

However, being strong-willed and suffering from physical exhaustion were slightly different issues.

Woon Seong climbed the mountain, biting his lips to the point of bleeding. As he was getting close to the top of the mountain he was almost crawling on all fours.

It wasn't just him though.

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Almost all the children who were near the summit were at the point of climbing on all fours.

It was that difficult to endure.

The one silver lining in all of this, was that Woon Seong had fulfilled his promise to himself and not stopped once for rest until he would reach the top.

“Huhu, Hahaha.”

Woon Seong finally had reached the top, pulled out a flag and laid sprawled out on the floor to rest his body for a bit.

Fortunately, it was a large space at the summit to rest and about 50 other children were sitting or lying down resting their exhausted bodies next to their flags.

‘I definitely feel like I’m dying again ahah.’

Woon Seong started to regulate his breathing and regain his stamina as fast as he could.

As he finally was at the summit, he could feel the cool breeze hit his skin and start to cool down his clothes.

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It was good to rest, but if he stayed too long his clothes drenched in sweat would get cold.

'I have to go down quickly.'

There was even a time limit for this test, so he couldn't afford to rest more than a few minutes.

During the time he gave himself to rest, Woon Seong stretched his limbs that were sore and tried to regain as much stamina as possible before heading back down.

As Woon Seong was examining his body's condition, he darted his eyes to see how many flags were left.

There were about 30 flags left, excluding the one already in his hands.

'If the amount of flags gets thin, the last ones to reach the mountaintop will fight for the flags.'

It was just another reason for Woon Seong to leave and go down the mountain quickly.

If he stayed here, he would get caught up in a fight.

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Sure enough.

The flags quickly ran out, and the children who came up late started to fight the ones with flags in their hands, trying to steal them.

Of course, Woon Seong had just slipped out before that started.

‘Hm...’

Perhaps because Woon Seong took a short break, it felt like his muscles were a little rejuvenated and the way down was much easier.

What was even more interesting to him was the way he was descending down the mountain.

‘Long flags are a problem for other kids to carry, but not for me.’

If the mountain is steep, it was harder to go down than to go up since you could slip and seriously injure yourself with your exhausted muscles.

On top of that, if you had to take a long flag in addition to the iron bracers, it became increasingly difficult to maintain one’s sense of gravity.

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However, this common sense was being broken by Woon Seong. It was quite comical if one looked at him going down the mountain.

He sprinted down the mountain using the flag like a spear, flipping, turning and gliding through the air multiple times as he speedily moved down the mountain with ease.

Tadak-Tadak-Tadak-

Woon Seong maneuvered the flagpole brilliantly and used the swiftness to cut some of the branches and twigs that hindered his view.

Woon Seong cut in from one of the side routes he was taking and went down the open road inbetween.

In a situation where one could have slipped, the only thing that could be seen was circular imprints from Woon Seong's flagpole as he flew down.

Toong-

He used the rebound of the force in the flagpole to propel him even faster.

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It was absolutely incredible just how nimble he was. Anybody watching could tell Woon Seong in the body of No. 900 was incredible with a spear in his hand, just based on how he maneuvered with the long flagpole.

‘It shouldn’t be that hard to get down.’

It was natural for a smile to hang around the mouth of Woon Seong as he felt free like a bird with something resembling a spear in his hand.

However, the smile soon disappeared from Woon Seong’s lips.

It was around the time he was about to arrive at the bottom of the mountain where the instructor was.

“Hey, leave your flag behind and get lost!”

A sudden voice shouted out at him in Woon Seong’s direction.

Woon Seong slowed his movements and gradually came to a stop.

Comparing No.900’s body to the body of the boy who had just shouted at Woon Seong was hilarious to most if they saw this. The boy was a head taller, wider and had a much deeper voice than Woon Seong in No. 900’s body.

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As Woon Seong stopped in place and glanced at him with indifference, No. 185's face contorted in anger and pointed with his two fingers at Woon Seong.

“Didn't you hear me? The flag in your hand, leave it and buzz off you mongrel!”

Woon Seong's look of indifference disappeared and he looked at him, like he was looking at a fool and laughed.

The children gathered in the Cave of Latent Demons were in the ages between 10-15 years old

To Woon Seong, a mere height difference and deeper voice was a complete joke to him.

With a flagpole in his hand that could be used like a spear, it was borderline insanity for No. 185 to try and pick a fight with him.

But, it wasn't like No. 185 could possibly think that the boy in front of him could be the worst choice to try and rob. He, No. 185, who was used to intimidating others with his size and weight thought this would be easy even if things had to get physical.

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In the Cave of Latent Demons, the children brought there didn't have such easy lives before they came there, so it wasn't as if No. 185 didn't know how to fight.

'I bet you've probably grown up thinking size and intimidation is the easiest way to get the things in life that you want.', Woon Seong thought. He wasn't wrong, seeing how No. 185 was acting right now.

"Oh, this is funny to you?"

It seemed No. 185 had his pride hurt, as Woon Seong blatantly laughed at him.

Woon Seong boldly walked right up to No. 185 and sized him up.

Looking at No. 185, Woon Seong spoke with a cold smile.

"What a fucking idiot. You ever heard of picking on somebody your own size?"

It was such a cold laugh that Woon Seong's canine teeth were revealed.

Woon Seong glared at No. 185.

He already knew why No. 185 chose to try and rob him.

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The ones who came down earlier than him were the ones who had continuously proved themselves to be elites among the elites here, and he didn't want to fight them.

After those elites had passed, No. 185 was just waiting for the next person with a flag to show up since he was confident in beating them as long as they weren't at the level who had shown up earlier.

No. 185 didn't want to try his luck fighting against the other elite talents, even though he was technically an elite himself. He was just looking for an easy person to beat up, rob and get his breakfast.

And it just so happened the next one to come down the mountain was No.900.

To No. 185, No. 900 seemed to have non-existent talent, physique and strength. He assumed Woon Seong probably got the flag through sheer dumb luck.

'That's why he made a move on me.'

Because Woon Seong knew exactly what this bastard's thought process was, he couldn't just sit still and rather decided to beat him down here and now.

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No. 185's morality and behavior was incredibly hypocritical. Bowing down to the strong and beating up on the weak, just because he could.

For some reason a bitter memory surfaced as Woon Seong thought of this.

"What did you say to me?"

No. 185 approached Woon Seong with an incredibly irritated expression.

From his point of view, meeting No. 900 was an absolute fortune.

Sure, No. 900 was doing alright these past few days, but he used to always beg and grovel like a bug half a year ago.

He was small and rarely talked to other children, so he was clearly an easy prey.

No. 185 didn't know how he came down quickly, but he pretty much knew that he must be exhausted.

So he had thought that if he threatened that bug a little bit, he would put the flag down quietly and obediently.

But what the hell was this?

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Some half-wit who was ranked in the 900's was talking back to him?

Him, who was ranked in the 100's?

Thinking about that fact, No. 185 couldn't hold back his anger and shouted loudly.

"What did you say? AAH!"

Cuckoo-

But he didn't know.

Even before No. 185 could process what was happening, the flagpole in the hands of Woon Seong was swung around.

It was a blow with the might of 7.5 kgs in both of his hands.

The wooden flagpole smacked the temple of No. 185.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

No. 185 was holding his bleeding temple, jumped to his feet.

"You bastard!"

Then he swung his big fist right in front of Woon Seong.

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But there was something that No. 185 couldn't possibly know. Sure the body was that of No. 900. But the soul was from a person that had reached the Transcendence Realm in his past life, using the spear.

Boo-woong-

Woon Seong casually avoided the blows from No. 185 very easily by taking a step back and shifting his center of gravity just a bit.

Boomp! The flagpole had moved so fast No. 185 couldn't even see the movement, and struck No. 185's ribs incredibly hard.

"Uh-Urk!"

No. 185 was beaten down and his ribs were definitely broken as he was forced to kneel on the spot and gasp for air.

But that wasn't even the end of it from Woon Seong.

Puck-

Taking advantage of the fact No. 185 was forced to kneel, Woon Seong mercilessly and brutally crushed No. 185's ankles.

"Ack!"

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Then, he grabbed the flagpole firmly as if he was about to drop it.

“No!! Please!!!”

No. 185 couldn't even move from his position and prayed to Woon Seong to spare him with a trembling voice.

No. 185 was only eleven years old.

It wasn't too young, but it was also not that old.

He wasn't at the age where he could clearly distinguish what it meant to be good or evil. He was old enough to pick on others and feel good about it, but he still had the chance to change his ways.

And trying to take Woon Seong's flag was not a sin worthy of death.

Of course, it was a sin big enough to warrant death if this was in another place and he was of a different age.

“I'll let you live. But..”

That didn't mean Woon Seong would just let him go though.

Furthermore, Woon Seong was not a just man either. At least not in this life, he couldn't be. Not only that, but if it were the other way around, he

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might have been killed without being able to fulfill his revenge for his master.

“You have to be punished.”

Woon Seong lifted the flagpole in his hand high.

“So far, You’ve done nothing but pretend to be strong and do what you want to do to those who are weaker than you. You were probably sure that you would steal a flag off somebody weaker than you today as well. But now, maybe you’ll be able to know what it’s like to be the one on the receiving end of being weak.”

“Come on, come on!”

No. 185 cried and pleaded with Woon Seong, but there was no mercy in the hands of Woon Seong whatsoever.

Qua-ric!

With the powerful impact of hitting his forearm, No. 185 lost consciousness.

But before No. 185 had lost consciousness, Woon Seong leaned in close and whispered to him some parting words.

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“There won’t be a second time.”

At that voice, No. 185 trembled in utmost fear before losing consciousness.

Chapter 5: The Cave (1)

Chapter 5: The Cave (1)

‘He won’t die.’

Woon Seong glanced back towards the path near the mountain.

In the direction of his gaze, No. 185 laid sprawled out, unconscious.

It looked like No. 185 passed out from the pain that Woon Seong inflicted upon him. Woon Seong scoffed and turned around.

He proceeded to leave and grabbed the flagpole.

Thanks to the annoying presence of No. 185, he was a little tighter on time. Nonetheless, Woon Seong was confident to get to the bottom in time.

There wasn’t much time till the instructors ended the time for the training.

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As if to prove it, Woon Seong began to see children resting one by one.

Some of them had bruises on their eyes or a lump on their head.

These children were injured in a large scuffle that had erupted at the top of the mountain when all of the flags had been taken.

'I'm glad I came down early.'

Otherwise, Woon Seong would have likely been caught up in a large brawl like the kids resting before him.

Woon Seong smiled faintly and hastened his steps.

Of course, the process of going down the mountain was not so smooth.

As he descended down the path, there were children who rushed to take the flagpole from the hands of Woon Seong, much like what No. 185 tried to do earlier to him.

All of them were children who attacked because they thought with the impression that being No. 900 he would be weak.

Each time, of course, they were severely beaten and left bruised on the side of the path by Woon Seong.

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'Whoa, that's a funny sight.'

When he knocked down the fourth child who attacked him, Woon Seong found out that there were hidden instructors watching him with nervous expressions for some reason.

What were they expecting? Woon Seong had been biding his time and hiding his talent as best he could, but now he could care less for such trivial things. If the instructors wanted to watch, he'd go ahead and give them a show.

Woon Seong eventually made it all the way down the mountain and arrived at the gathering place where the instructors were handing out breakfast to those who brought down a flagpole. There were a little more than 40 children who had brought down a flag before Woon Seong.

Among them, No. 17 was in the crowd too.

"I brought a flag."

"It's within the time limit. Take your meal."

When Woon Seong handed over the flag, the instructor accepted it and handed over a fist-sized dumpling.

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Dumplings were a nutritious and tasty prize with a balanced use of meat and vegetables for the children that they rarely got to eat in their time spent at the Cave of Latent Demons.

'It's a little small, but there's no nutritional problems at least.'

This was just a typical meal in the Cave of Latent Demons. The sense of satiety applied the logic of making a warrior lazy and never gave the children enough food to be full.

Woon Seong accepted the dumplings and joined the other children that were sitting down and found a spot. Getting comfortable on a patch of dirt he slowly began to eat his dumpling.

To increase the amount of nutritional value he could get from the dumpling, it was important to chew it little by little, slowly, and for a long time.

That way, even a small amount of it could actually fill your stomach appropriately, instead of just wolfing it down in one bite and staying hungry.

When Woon Seong almost finished eating his dumpling, most of the other children returned.

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Like Woon Seong, the children who brought a flag received dumplings, and those who did not were forced to look at the other children with envious or resentful eyes.

No. 185 was the latter.

Woon Seong turned his head and looked at him.

No. 185 was escorted to the infirmary and had gotten his broken arm bandaged up. The interesting thing was that he was grinding his teeth with a resentful look at Woon Seong.

Nevertheless, he did not dare to make eye contact with Woon Seong.

It was because he knew well that he could do nothing about it.

Woon Seong stared at him for a while and eventually turned his head.

Now that he had breakfast, it was time to start a new type of training.

“You will learn martial arts in earnest from now on.”

After breakfast, the children of Shiwan Hall were greatly shaken by the words of the senior instructor.

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Some children were learning martial arts because they had some background up till now, and the unfortunate ones with poor backgrounds did not have anything.

However, just because they weren't learning any martial arts, didn't mean they didn't know what it meant.

They could grow stronger and hold enough power to break free of the shackles known as poverty.

According to the stories told to most children when they were young, the best martial artists in legends could fly in the sky and split rocks with just one finger.

That was what learning martial arts meant to these kids.

It was natural for children to be shocked when they learnt that they would start learning what they wanted for so long.

The entire hall was chattering and got noisy quickly.

Boom!

"Be quiet!"

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The senior instructor stomped his foot loudly.

Shockwaves emitted from the instructor's foot spread throughout the cave, leaving a clear footprint on the floor.

The ground around the footprint was left with cracks of earthen rock all around it.

Woon Seong's eyebrows trembled slightly when he saw it.

'First-rate?'

Those who were considered first-rate martial artists were able to exert quite a bit of force from their bodies since to get to that level, one had to be able to accumulate quite a few years worth of qi. Not many people in the world of Murim could honestly call themselves first-rate martial artists. But with one glance, Woon Seong knew that he had clearly underestimated these instructors. Once somebody was skilled enough to be called a first-rate, they were strong enough to level their surroundings when fighting. It was the very definition of breaking through human limits.

The senior instructor in front of him was a powerful man who could easily join small and medium sized clans as a major fighting force.

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As Woon Seong was evaluating the senior instructor, the senior instructor looked at the quiet children and smiled with satisfaction.

“Just because you’ll be learning martial arts, does not mean you will be stronger right away. You can’t build a castle out of sand and expect it to be majestic. Just like you’ve been training yourself for the past year with preparation, you first will learn how to cultivate.”

He took a little booklet out of his robes.

“This is the Dark Flower and Red Spirit Method.”

Woon Seong nodded lightly as he heard the name.

The Dark Flower

Called the Dark Flower technique, it was one of the best foundational unorthodox techniques for building an incredibly solid foundation of pure demonic qi.

Orthodox cultivation techniques had the emphasis of stability but traded that off for slower growth compared to most unorthodox methods. Unorthodox techniques typically had the polar opposite

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trade-offs. They emphasized fast growth with the risk of instability in the qi. This could lead to problems in later growth as a martial artist.

However, The Dark Flower Red Spirit method was a high level technique among the Unorthodox Methods. It was a rare method that Woon Seong had heard of. It had incredibly explosive growth compared to most Unorthodox Methods, but what was incredible about it, was the fact that it collected incredibly pure demonic qi with even better stability.

“Ones who already know how to read move to the right, and those who don’t, move to the left!”

At the senior instructor’s yell, the children first hesitated and then began to move to the groups they belonged in.

Of course, the group on the right was where Woon Seong was.

The senior instructor first approached the group of children who had learned to write.

“Before lunch, all of you will memorize the first thirty lines of text from the scripture.”

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In other words, it seemed like the children who didn't get meals earlier might not get lunch either based on the manner of speech the senior instructor used.

"Those who don't know how to read will memorize one thousand characters and two hundred words a day. If you can't memorize it, there will be no meal."

The children's eyes glistened with devotion at the words of the senior instructor.

It was not easy to memorize 30 phrases or two hundred words out of one thousand characters for either group.

Simply looking at the speed they were requiring the kids to learn at, it meant the children would be learning all the characters of the alphabet within 5 days. (T/N: in korean, the dialect is known as hangul. There are around 11 thousand possible character variations with it.)

It was important for kids to eat in the prime of their development so this was just another cruel punishment if they didn't meet expectations.

Starvation naturally made one physically weaker over time and the mind fatigued.

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'And this is a place where you die if you get weaker.' It was cruel for sure, but the Cult of the Heavenly Demon only needed strong warriors to lead their cult. Not weaklings.

Woon Seong went up and received a booklet along with the other kids that was being handed out by the instructor.

'The Dark Flower is supposed to be within one's body and is not yet in bloom, so it represents one's potential.'

—

The Red Spirit is one that rages and surges with one's passion.

The Dark Flower as the medium, will neutralize the ferocity of the Red Spirit but still allow it to show its passion.

When the Dark Flower and the Red Spirit meet within one's self, they will come together and fuse with each other.

The act of combining the Dark Flower with the Red Spirit allows one to temper their passion and potential with each other while creating a balance.

This balance represents a heavenly entity in its perfection.

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This Heavenly entity that would reach perfection would become the great Heavenly Demon themself!—

Any warrior seeing this scripture could not help but be tempted with greed looking at such a high-level technique.

However, Woon Seong boldly curbed aside the greed within himself.

‘I am the apprentice of the Spearmaster Sect, and I will not abandon my roots.’

The Spearmaster Sect’s technique that Woon Seong practiced to gather internal qi was called ‘The Completed Method of the Tempered Orthodox Qi’. The Heavenward Soul and Earthen Body was a technique he used to increase the level of his soul; which in result increased his body’s talent and tempered his body to become a retainer. It was fundamentally a different technique that did not gather any internal qi within the body.

Because of his roots and devotion to his goal and master, it was easy for Woon Seong to abandon his greed for this technique.

But.. that didn’t mean he had to completely give up on the technique. With sudden inspiration, Woon Seong suddenly thought of something incredible!

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'The Dark Flower accumulates the purest demonic qi possible with incredibly fast growth, but the Tempered method of Orthodox Qi boasts the greatest stability. Is there a way to possibly combine the two and create a wholly new method?'

The Dark Flower Red Spirit method had stability, but compared to the Tempered Orthodox Qi method it was lacking. Combining the two that had naturally opposing natures, would be incredibly difficult. However, if he somehow succeeded with that slim chance, the new method that resulted from it would be incredibly powerful and stable. If it did fuse correctly as well, then it would also have unparalleled synergy.

Plus, having demonic qi was a must when inside the Cult of the Heavenly Demon. If one didn't have a hint of demonic qi, it would raise suspicion.

Combining the two, would allow Woon Seong to not abandon his roots as an apprentice to the Spearmaster Sect, and also take as much strength that he needed to fulfill his goal of revenge from the Cult.

If he used the same method as before, he would have a very difficult time reaching new heights that were necessary in order to fulfill his goal of revenge. Either technique here on their own would not be sufficient for

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him. But combining the two, could give birth to something incredibly powerful!

Furthermore, his life as the apprentice of the Spearmaster was not his current identity. He right now needed to assume the identity of a member of the Cult.

The Spearmaster Sect was devoted only to developing the pinnacle of Spearmanship.

However, the Spearmaster Sect was known for one other thing. Their library was full of techniques. Unlike other Sects, the Spearmaster Sect did not discriminate in gathering knowledge from all sorts of techniques as their goal was to reach the pinnacle of spearmanship. Cultivation techniques were just a means to growth.

‘Let’s take a chance and try it.’

Both cultivation methods were highly stable, so the possibility of suffering any kind of qi deviation or backlash was negligible.

If it didn’t work, he could just give up on learning the Unorthodox Methods inside the Cult.

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'But in order to do this, I'll have to memorize the passages of the Dark Flower Red Spirit first.'

After closing and opening his eyes, Woon Seong calmly began to memorize the lines within the scripture of the Dark Flower.

It was not too difficult to memorize the lines in the passage.

A total of 30 lines.

To Woon Seong who had loved literature when he was in the Spearmaster Sect, this was a cakewalk.

Plus there were over 100 lines of scripture in the entire Method. Just learning 30 per day was easy enough.

Of course not all the other children would be like that.

More than half of the children did not know how to read, and even if they did, it was not easy for children who knew to memorize all 30 lines of scripture.

What was interesting to Woon Seong is that he could see just how much time and effort the Cult put into developing these talents. Although harsh, they did not hesitate in using as many resources as possible. This

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was why Woon Seong was surprised that the instructors had actually been already teaching some of the kids in their free time over the past year, how to read earlier on.

However, learning and memorizing the techniques was not easy even for these kids, and as a result, only about 20 kids had been able to leave the hall for lunch.

All of these 20 children went and started a new training after lunch.

Woon Seong was just busy experimenting. He could already feel the movement of qi within his body.

'I can already sense how this technique moves.'

To actually cultivate qi, it meant one had to find the pathways of the method, open them up with internal qi and then make the qi flow smoothly and cycle it throughout the body.

In general, it would take about two days for a talented child to truly feel the qi from the method coursing throughout their body.

In the case of those who severely lacked talent, it would take probably around 10 days.

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Of course, there were only a small number of kids who were just starting to get the basics down and feel their own internal qi. This didn't mean they could move it around or find their pathways. But it was incredible to even be able to do that with only a few hours of practice.

In the case of Woon Seong, it was not long after waking up in the body of No. 900 that he had already begun to start cultivating internal qi within the body.

The stages of feeling energy had already passed for him.

"Those who feel something cold, hot, or itchy within their body, raise your hand."

According to the instructor's instructions, Woon Seong should have raised his hand.

But he didn't.

It had only been two hours since he had learned the first 30 lines of the scripture.

However if he said he already felt the energy within his body, it would be absolutely ridiculous and preposterous.

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What was interesting was that the other kids who had started to develop and feel the energy within themselves also did not raise their hands.

‘No. 17 is also playing coy like myself.’

Woon Seong had already mastered feeling his and others qi in his previous life. Thanks to the technique he was calling ‘intimidation qi’ which hid his internal qi completely, nobody would be able to notice that he was proficient with qi already.

Woon Seong decided that he would raise his hand in about 3 days.

‘I can’t raise it too soon nor do I want to raise it too late. I need to pick somewhere in between.’

Thinking so, Woon Seong again focused on his body.

The energy in his body moved according to the direction and in the specific pathways within his body.

At the same time, he began to slowly wash away the fatigue accumulated while climbing the mountain that morning.

By evening, almost all the fatigue accumulated in his body had disappeared.

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After about five days, children who did not know how to read began to learn how to cultivate.

In fact, there were few children who made rapid progression due to their talent, despite not being able to know how to read at first.

In the meantime, time passed slowly.

* * *

Unlike breakfast and lunch, dinner was given fairly without any kinds of condition attached. It was because of the policy that starving from evening to morning could disrupt the next day's training.

Woon Seong ate his dinner that was given to him and went back to his room.

In the evening, time was given for free training or relaxation, but Woon Seong obviously didn't want to socialize with kids.

'What am I supposed to talk about with kids ten years younger than I am?' (T/N : LMAO)

During the time given, it was much more profitable for Woon Seong to go and practice the Heavenward Soul Earthen body technique to cultivate

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his talent in secret, and if he had time left, he decided to start experimenting with the combination of the two qi cultivation methods he was referring to earlier.

'Before completing all the training within the Cave of Latent Demons, I need to be at least first-rate.'

Being able to call one's self first-rate, they had to be able to channel qi into their weapons and limbs. Although they couldn't materialize it outside their body, since that was what those at the Peak Realm and above could only do, they could utilize incredible might behind their attacks.

Woon Seong set his goal to become first-rate by the end of the 10 years here. If he couldn't achieve at least that much, he would never be able to get his revenge.

If he had the power right now, he would go right up to Jwa Do-Gyeul and rip him to pieces after torturing him alive.

As soon as Woon Seong had entered his room and was about to shut his door, someone placed their foot in between the door and the hallway, stopping him from closing the door completely.

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With an irritated and uncomfortable look on his face, Woon Seong opened the door and identified the guest who came to his room.

Long, light brown hair that came down to shoulder-length. Neat and tidy clothes despite being in the Cave of Latent Demons.

Woon Seong was irritated at the fact he let somebody sneak up on him without noticing their presence beforehand, but it was the limitations of his current body and he could do nothing about it yet.

“Hi?”

The guest who came to his room was No. 17, The most talented child in the entire Cave of Latent Demons according to both the director, instructors, and even Woon Seong.

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