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Chapter 21: Sword of Men (1)

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“Oh no! Please help me!”

Mae Hong-sung looked at the woman with derision, loosening his pants as he did so. “Two years! Who would even care if I killed you right now?”

There was a strong lust that could not be hidden in the voice of the man. Could the woman foresee her fate from his voice? She only had one wish at this moment, as only death would free her from the phantom before her.

“Huh. You have a nice look there.”

A woman’s voice could be heard, crying for mercy. However, the man attacked her, and she could not bear the strength of a man who had learned to use inner strength. At this time, you could hear the screams of the woman and the lustful noises of the man. After he finished, he struck the woman and left the alley alone. Inside the alley, there was only the dead body of the woman, which had cooled with her eyes still open.

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“How long do I have to live like this?” Mae Hong-sung, clicking his tongue, looked around. A small lake in a deserted desert. There was quite a large village nearby. Of course, that was in comparison to its surroundings – it was it was more dead as a city prefecture less its size. This was a remote place, and nothing could deny that fact.

It had been five years since he had come here under the direction of his master. Three Swords of Qingcheng, this name was well known in Murim. But for five years, he had played and ate as a bandit in this peripheral corner of the world. He felt insulted, humiliated by his master. When he had left, he received only two orders from his master: (1) stay in the area until we call for you and (2) find the Sandstorm of Death, teach them martial arts, and train them to be great guerilla fighters.

He had wanted to protest. However, his master promised to teach him the final lines of the ‘Sword of Blue Clouds and Red Sunset’ if he quietly completed what he was tasked with. Within a few years, Mae Hong-sung believed that his master would call on him and he would be able to receive the last verse.

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Mae Hong-sung started straight for Xinjiang, following his master's command. He met the Sandstorm of Death and raised them. He stalwartly believed that someday his master would call, but it had now been five years. His patience was running out. In addition, almost a year ago, he began to believe that his master had abandoned him.

It was then that Mae Hong-sung started wandering. His hidden, dirty desires began to sprout now that there were no eyes that judged him. It had led to his acts of raping and killing women in the nearby villages, ruining any servants around the area.

How much longer do I have to stay with these dirty thieves?

Mae Hong-sung's head was full of complex thoughts as he walked. Suddenly he stopped. Although he had rolled for a few years among the low-lives, his instincts had not died yet. A slight smell of blood was mixed with the sandy breeze. However, he shook his head and kept walking. Soon, his face hardened. The direction which this bloody breeze was coming from was the place where he was headed. At first, he had thought it was the smell of a pig, but it was definitely human blood.

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What happened?

He had raised those guys for the past five years. It was annoying and dirty, but when his master called, they were what he could show as his results. What happened to those guys? Mae Hong-sung was a bit anxious.

“It’s been a long time, Master Chuk.”

A young man was smiling brightly among his underlings, who had turned into a pile of corpses.

This young man was Woon-seong, who flashed his pearly whites and straightened his body. He seemed to be liberated from something and was simmering with life, staring intently at the other.

Mixed with hot desert winds, the boy’s qi had spread everywhere. He had become a Demonic General and was again cherished, how unusual. This was the first meeting after ten years. This was not how Woon-seong had ever imagined it, so he did not jump out at once and run over to slice the other’s neck. Despite the fact that one of his enemies stood in front of him, the boy’s head was clear.

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This was the effect of the marriage of his techniques. His soul and body were strengthened, helping maintain a calm judgement even before his sworn enemy.

His lips still curled up though.

Mae Hong-sung stared at himself, reflected in the young man's dark eyes. He was actually embarrassed and found the situation ridiculous. After five years of training, the Sandstorm of Death had fallen to just one guy. Absolute trash.

The person had also greeted him as if they were familiar, but Mae Hong-sung had never met this person before.

The young man before him was about twenty, his body felt sharp like a blade. His skin tingled even when he stood still. By contrast, the man's eyes were clear and calm.

"Who are you?"

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At that question, Woon-seong grabbed his spear instead of answering. He had no intention of telling Mae Hong-sung who he was. It's not like the other would have believed him, so it was better not to say it at all.

I only need information from him.

Of course, the story related to his identity may come out in the interrogation process.

'Intimidation qi' rose from the body of the boy. This dark qi spread around, like a fog, surrounding Mae Hong-sung. This outstretched energy stimulated the human instinct of fear, causing the whole body to shudder, violently and fearfully.

Subconsciously, Mae Hong-sung had drawn his sword. He was confused at first, but it was soon clear that he had to first fight against this dark stream of qi. He relaxed and the profound energy of the Qingcheng Sect spread across his body.

Looking at that, Woon-seong ridiculed him inwardly. "Taoist qi, being a monk doesn't suit you."

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It seemed that Mae Hong-sung's skills had also not taken a major step forward. Of course, decades could pass without much development.

It won't be such a difficult fight.

Woon-seong was quite confident, he didn't even need to take off any of his metal bracers. The ability of himself with the bracers on and the Sword of Men didn't differ much.

"What are you muttering?"

At that time, Mae Hong-sung jumped out and wielded his sword. This sword containing history fell down in an arc, scattering light and energy. Its appearance was like a blue cloud! This was the swordsmanship of Qingcheng.

This move corresponded with Woon-seong's own. With six revolutions of his spear, he used the 'Art of Six Seals and Destruction'. At the same time, he pushed more 'intimidation qi' out. Even if you were an apex predator, you could only instinctively crouch!

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With the energy wrapped around his body, Mae Hong-sung flinched for a second. But it was only a momentary pause. The Taoist qi interrupted the 'intimidation qi'. Woon-seong smiled bitterly when he saw this and promised to review this problem after the fight was settled.

In the meantime, the clash continued. Sparks glittered through the fog and mist. The walls continued to collapse. Any bandits who were still alive but unable to move due to serious injuries were buried there as they screamed.

Mae Hong-sung could no longer suppress his anger, his energy bursting out. Woon-seong stepped on the falling debris and snorted coldly.

At this time, Woon-seong changed his spear arts. 'Sword of Blue Clouds and Red Sunset' was hard to fight against with his unfinished combinatory martial arts.

'Divine Spear of the Ending Night'!

Woon-seong grabbed his spear. His opponent would probably recognize this move, so the moment it was unleashed, the fight had to be finished at once.

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“Where are you running?” Mae Hong-sung chased Woon-seong into the air, sword sprinkling more than a dozen cuts.

A misty qi had risen like a fog and wrapped around the boy. In the eyes of the boy, his opponent seemed very slow. He smiled faintly. With the spear in his hands, like a carp in water, he fell towards the sword.

Chapter 22: Sword of Men (2)

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Blood burst into the air. Mae Hong-sung quickly bowed over. As he looked down, he saw a spear in between his legs. He had been attacked, his legs cut right off under his knees. His upper body, having lost its momentum, was slowly leaning forward. It was a situation where it would have been acceptable to curse the Heavens, but he didn't. Even before he could overcome his shock, his suffered from pain so great it left him speechless.

“Oahhhhh!”

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Searing pain ran through his body, as if it were a fire ant gnawing at his bones. It was a rough and crude pain that could not be expressed as anything but blistering. Mae Hong-sung wanted to get up and protest. But his two legs were cut off, so he could only scream and roll around.

Looking at him, Woon-seong laughed, revealing his white teeth. Of course, he had a cold smile.

“God, you brat! How dare you!” Mae Hong-sung screamed like the devil.

Woon-seong was indifferent. “What do you mean?” The boy slowly approached him, spear grasped in one hand.

Mae Hong-sung’s heart pounded with each step Woon-seong took towards him, each thump louder and louder. In near disbelief, he realized he was trembling. He was afraid of this body, a fear that ran down to the bone. At this moment, he was a lamb at the mercy of a tiger.

“Damn you!”

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Mae Hong-sung tried to crawl away with his arms, but the boy was faster. Woon-seong lifted his feet and stepped on the shoulders of the Sword of Men, squishing him in place without a fuss.

“We fought and I won. Isn’t one arm and one leg usually cut off in fights like these in the martial world? Did you think we were going to just laugh and shrug it off after a fight to the death?” From the body of the boy, a dark qi was flowing out. Thanks to it, Mae Hong-sung’s anger melted back into dread. “I am the winner, you are the loser. And from now on, I will exercise my rights as the winner.” Woon-seong flipped the man over, feet now planted on Mae Hong-sung’s chest. “Between you and me, there’s no way we could ever just laugh it off.”

Mae Hong-sung once again questioned how he knew this boy. From the first moment, the boy had talked as if they had known each other. Weirdly, he could not erase the feeling of déjà vu either.

Woon-seong patiently waited for the other to recognize him, he had already thrown the bait.

“You, are you...Are you the successor of the Spear Master Sect?!”

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“Yes, I am the successor of the Spear Master Sect!” Woon-seong chuckled darkly.

“That’s impossible! The Spear Master Sect is a sole apprentice sect!”

Woon-seong laughed at his cry. “If that’s what you think, that’s good. As I said before, I intend to exercise my rights as the victor.”

Mae Hong-sung trembled at the coldness of the iron felt under his chin. He could not think properly because of induced fear from the ‘intimidation qi’ and the presence of death. In his mind, there was only fear. Thanks to that, the pain was reduced – funny how true fear dulls all the senses.

“Let me ask, why did you attack the Spear Master Sect at that time?”

“What are you talking about?” Now Mae Hong-sung was confused. Everyone knew the answer to that question. “They practiced a vile demonic art that even the lowest and filthiest of the demonic people refuse to touch!”

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Obviously, that was not the answer Woon-seong wanted to hear. For such a dumb answer, Woon-seong cut Mae Hong-sung's left arm off. The severed limb was thrown into the air, tumbling several times before it fell to the floor.

The boy stood above with a sinister smile. "Do not lie. I know we were framed. Tell me what you know."

The 'intimidation qi' stimulated fear. And fear stimulated the brain. Even if you didn't think, you could throw out the facts just by being horrified.

With his eyes flashing like a gold mine, the boy faced him once again. "If you tell the truth, I will at least kill you without pain," Woon-seong promised.

With his legs cut off and arms cut off, Mae Hong-sung feared this pain more than his inevitable death. In the end, he had no choice but to spit out all that he knew. "I don't know, I don't know anything! That's all I heard!" He shouted as if he was warding off evil spirits. "I just followed my master's orders! Our only order that day was to surround the

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mountain so the master and apprentice of the Spear Master Sect, who learned the 'Silent Ten Skills of the Demon', could not run away!"

Woon-seong stared at his eyes and judged. There were no lies in his eyes. This was a man who knew he was already dead, but was afraid of suffering. These eyes could not lie.

Thus, the boy judged his words as the truth and continued to the next question.

"Then let me ask something else, why are you here?" Woon-seong increased the pressure of his foot on Mae Hong-sung's chest, who choked for air. "Why are you fucking around and teaching petty thieves martial arts?"

"Fuck if I know!" Mae Hong-sung shook his limbs, as if in exasperation. Except for one arm, the only things left were up to his elbows and knees, it was a ridiculous sight. Except, Woon-seong was not amused. "I just did as my master told me. I was only told to go and raise them as guerilla forces."

At that, Woon-seong gave an even colder look.

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What are you thinking about? What kind of work was the Sword of Heaven planning in such a remote place? The boy really could not understand.

In the end, he had obtained no useful information. He had only got revenge on one of his enemies. *Am I allowed to be satisfied with this?*

Woon-seong stared up at the Heavens, hoping that counting the stars in the sky would help answer his questions.

As he did so, Mae Hong-sung desperately grabbed at his leg. "Oh please, if the questions are over, kill me as promised!"

"Why should I?"

"What? You promised! You promised a merciful death!"

Woon-seong nodded in agreement, he certainly had. However, "You aren't a man worthy of a death like that."

The boy extended his hand in place of a spear and pierced the man's body.

"Ohhhh!" The man screamed, freakishly twisting his whole body.

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Woon-seong then pressed some other points, forcefully shutting the man up.

Left to convulse on the floor, silent screams continued to pour from the mouth of Mae Hong-sung.

What Woon-seong used was a technique known as 'Crushed Bones and Squeezed Muscles'. It was a bizarre and quite awful sort of torture that had been collected by the Spear Master Sect. Once used, the victim would feel extreme pain up until their death, wishing that they would die already. The one that Woon-seong used at this point was a bit more special. The victim would continuously feel pain and be unable to faint for at least two hours before dying.

Suitable for the death of an enemy.

Woon-seong watched the scene of Mae Hong-sung pitifully twitching, then turned his back and descended down the hill.

Sitting before a fire, he brought out a blank book and a brush with ink.

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Although his revenge had just begun, everything was already so frustrating.

Of course, it could have been worse. With a little less determination, Woon-seong could have died in the Cave of Latent Demons. Even worse, the grudge could have melted away over the years.

Woon-seong closed his eyes and blew out a breath.

He had failed to get any information about the others from Mae Hong-sung. *What a useless guy.*

Woon-seong wrote the names of all his enemies one by one on this empty book. No, it was not just a book anymore — this was a promise. He vowed to never forget these names and not miss a single one. He would move forward with firm steps. If anything stood between him and his revenge, it would be obliterated.

With such a pledge written into the book, Woon-seong lifted the brush and drew a line across a name.

Mae Hong-sung (Sword of Men).

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That one was dead already. The boy was now – officially – a murderer.

At some point in time, he would draw a line over every single name in his book. His revenge was just beginning.

TN: The LN adds another sentence: “In the future, this book would be called “Chronicles of the Heavenly Demon”.

Chapter 23: The Five Evils (1)

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After spending a day there, the boy moved on towards his next place. His destination was where he was to meet the other trainees for the group mission: Kashgur.

Whee! Whee!

The wind that came from nowhere swept the boy roughly, swirling up the sand and stinging his eyes. The boy used his qi to shake off the sand, causing his clothes to flutter gently in the wind. Sighting to himself, he then started moving again.

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The boy trudged through the desert, albeit a bit dejected.

I wish I had some more time to visit the safehouse. It's a real pity.

The time given for personal missions was one full month. Now, there was only about one day left in that time. As he had originally planned, the mission should have taken less than a month.

The problem was that due to the climate of the desert, Woon-seong had to spend more time traveling than he had expected.

Woon-seong was only able to travel during the day because at night, he was forced to huddle around a fire to stay warm. However, he couldn't move at top speed since the scorching sun meant that he had to conserve water. Unless he was someone who had reached the level of 'impenetrable to cold and heat', limitations to his traveling were inevitable.

I'll have another chance to visit the Spear Master Sect's safehouse,
Woon-seong comforted himself.

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In addition to being located deep in the mountains, the warehouse was protected by genuine laws. Those who did not know the way would never find it. Of those currently alive, Woon-seong was positive no one else could touch the stuff in there but him.

The wind howled and sound whistled past his ear.

First, I should go to the promised location.

Although it was a pity, he should focus on what was at hand. Either way, completing the missions assigned by the Cult of the Heavenly Demon was beneficial towards his path for revenge. So he would go meet the others for his group mission.

His target was in the southernmost region of the Cult of Heavenly Demon, adjacent to the realm of the Martial Alliance and Empire. In addition to the Cult in this area, there were a large number of smaller forces that were not tied with the Martial Alliance. Only, they had acknowledged that they were inferior to the Cult and had signed numerous treaties of nonviolence, so they were left as is.

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Sometimes, however, there were some people who were not in their right minds.

There was only one group mission and the details given to the trainees by the Cult were sparse. It was said they were criminals who committed crimes at the Potala Palace and fled, blood lamas called the 'Five Evils'.

These bastards were vandalizing the territory of the Cult, not caring about where they were. In his heart, Woon-seong considered them idiots who thought too highly of themselves.

Even the demonic cultivators who swore obeisance to the Cult were angered. The Cult could not ignore their duties to their followers. *It is our duty to protect the commoners.*

Woon-seong walked as he recalled more details about the mission. The mission was a kill order: get rid of all five of them.

At this time, Woon-seong had long left the desert behind him and reached the branch of the Cult in Kashgur. Unlike Lop Nor, Kashgur did not try to hide its true nature — it was definitely a branch of the Demonic Cult.

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There were two guards at the gate to the town, who noticed the boy as soon as he got close. Maybe it was the weather, or maybe it was their occupation, but they were aggressive.

As soon as the guards had seen him, their hands were on the hilts of their swords.

“Who goes there!”

Woon-seong chuckled at them, not taking offense to their actions. He found their actions amusing, and seemed to understand the instinctive reasoning for the disrespect. After all, he was quite young and had approached without sound.

Even if they *had* acted, the guards wouldn't have stood a chance against Woon-seong anyways.

Woon-seong threw a slate at them, the one that identified him as a Demonic General.

One of the guards caught the slate, using both hands. Looking at it, he began to tremble, possibly in fear or in shock. Despite his age, the young

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man before them was a Demonic General! Like in other places, it was considered a crime to act up against a higher ranked official, a crime that could cost you your life. Would he be unlucky today?

The other guard was put off by the seemingly arrogant boy in front of him and hadn't noticed his partner's change in demeanor. "Hey! You can't just throw your slate like that!"

When the first guard cried out with an "Ah!", the second asked, "What's wrong?", confused by the startled expression of his companion.

The one holding the slate only awkwardly threw it back towards Woon-seong, still a bit shaken.

Woon-seong only smiled as he caught the slate, not unkindly, though it seemed mocking to the guard. "I heard the 1st Latent Demon Squad is supposed to gather here."

The guard who previously held the slate quickly changed his attitude and bowed, welcoming Woon-seong into the branch. "Everyone's here. Follow me."

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His companion mirrored his actions, partly out of habit and partly due to the look on the other's face. Still, he could not hold his curiosity in until after Woon-seong had left the hearing range. "Hey. Who is that guy?"

"Shhhh!" His companion nervously put a finger to his mouth, shushing his companion and looking at Woon-seong's retreating figure. "He's just like Mok Dae-young, the Branch Manager of Kashgur, who we serve. A Demonic General, you idiot!" He then hurried to follow Woon-seong and guide him towards the inner branch area.

Woon-seong walked along the streets, admiring the surroundings. While the streets weren't unclean, it was bustling with activity. As he observed the people, he realized that many of them were martial artists, though their levels were too low to be of much use to the Cult.

Unlike in Lop Nor, the Kashgur had a whole division of officers stationed. Thus, there was no need for Woon-seong to hide his identity. In fact, if he were less loyal to the Cult, Woon-seong could use his identity to stage a rebellion and take over the branch.

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Kashgur was territory firmly held by the Cult, so most of the people living in the area were followers of the Cult of the Heavenly Demon. Since this was the case, there was no reason to hide and put up pretenses.

At the same time, Kashgur was a much more militarized branch than Lop Nor. Since Lop Nor was so remote, the branch there was almost solely used for scouting and intel purposes. This could be seen in the way the branch doubled as a bookstore, where the branch manager couldn't even be considered Demonic General level. Here, not only had they outright checked his status in the Cult at the guarded entrance, the branch manager was a relatively famed Demonic General.

The two guards who had been at the entrance brought him to the inner branch area, where they opened a second gate for him. Much of the branch was organized like a fortress, with roofed walls and a few guarded gates.

"This way, sir."

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When Woon-seong walked in, he saw a young man waiting for him by a tall tree. The man had his hair cut short and multiple scars across his face, the most noticeable one a large scar running across his right eye.

“You’ve arrived.” The man appeared happy to see Woon-seong, and lifted his hand awkwardly, as if to wave.

“It’s been a while, Gwan Tae-ryang.” Woon-seong hadn’t been so sure how to interact with this other trainee, who had been under the name Number 1 in the Cave of Latent Demons.

Back then, Woon-seong had beaten Gwan Tae-ryang until he passed out in the ‘Strife of Life and Death’ and lectured him. They hadn’t necessarily parted on bad terms, as everyone in the Cave at that point naturally understood the concept of ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘winner takes all’. Now, six months later, Gwan Tae-ryang was to be Woon-seong’s Lieutenant, his second-in-command.

“It’s good to see you safe, Squad Master!” The young man was almost beaming, as he welcomed Woon-seong.

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Naturally, as the strongest in the Cave of Latent Demons, Woon-seong had been tasked with the leadership position during the group mission, becoming the Squad Master for the 1st Latent Demon Squad. Although Gwan Tae-ryang technically also had the power to lead his own group, it seemed the Cult wished to challenge Woon-seong and raise the difficulty of their group mission.

They smiled at each other as Woon-seong observed the other.

It seems like he's been through a lot ever since then. He's a much more humble man than back at the 'Strife of Life and Death'.

Woon-seong knew that Gwan Tae-ryang appearing here meant that his individual mission had been completed. As he knew the difficulty of the missions assigned and his own strength, he was sure that everyone else would have been given a relatively difficult mission as well. Though it would not be impossible, subjugating a faction by themselves wasn't a walk in the park. As they could be considered friends, partners at worst, Woon-seong was glad to see that Gwan Tae-ryang had earned a lot through his journey to the real world.

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“Oh...It looks like I was the last to arrive.” Waking up from his musings, Woon-seong turned his head to the otherside of the courtyard. There, numerous other trainees were sitting at tables, all gathered together, as if waiting for him.

Once these other trainees saw that he had arrived and acknowledged their presence, they simultaneously stood up and walked in front of the tables. As a group, they lined up in front of him, with Gwan Tae-ryang at the front, leading them. They bowed and greeted him in an orderly fashion.

“1st Latent Demon Squad, reporting for duty, Squad Master!”

Woon-seong chuckled at their actions, understanding that this was a required formality. This too, was a step towards gathering power and authority in the Cult, as well as a step towards revenge.

The 1st Latent Demon Squad was just as the name suggested.

For their training outside, the trainees of the Cave of Latent Demons were divided into three different groups. These were said to be temporary, but received missions much like actual forces of the Cult.

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As Woon-seong was the strongest of the Cave, he was commissioned to command the 1st Latent Demon Squad.

“I’m glad to see that all of you are well.” He waved his hand, motioning for them to stop. “But why are you all here and not waiting inside?”

There were only twenty or so of them; no way the branch was unable to give them a place to stay. If they had been random members of the Cult, it might have been understandable. But they were here with a mission of the Demonic Cult Headquarters.

“I requested everyone to do so,” Gwan Tae-ryang answered. “We’re about to carry out an important mission and we shouldn’t relax too much.”

Woon-seong was surprised at first, but soon let out an amused huff.

“That’s not a bad idea.”

“Right?” Gwan Tae-ryang grinned, obviously quite proud.

Woon-seong only smirked and turned to the rest of his group members.

“However, resting and getting rid of fatigue is also important. Being in

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poor conditions and losing to people weaker than you is a common thing in the martial society.”

The other trainees didn't look scared or worried, but they had awkward looks on their faces as they imagined losing to someone weaker to them.

“You must maintain the best condition to perform at your best. I know you lived most of your lives disciplining yourselves, and resting might feel awkward, but it's about time you learn how to take care of your own bodies.” Woon-seong massaged his own palms, still slightly swollen and bruised from pushing himself during his fight with the Sword of Men. “If you don't, you might just run into big trouble sometime. For today, let's rest well.”

The trainees seemed startled at these words, as if remembering for the first time that they had left the world inside the Cave of Latent Demons. They had spent almost half of their lives sleeping in a rundown cave and learning to torture themselves. They tried too hard to survive, too hard to keep going. It was time to learn how to take care of their condition. Who knows when or where they were going to get attacked next.

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They contemplated his words, schooling their previously excited auras.

“You all must be tired because of your personal missions.”

Woon-seong turned his head to the side, where a building with multiple floors stood. Although no person could be seen on the corridor, which was open to the air, he had felt a powerful presence in that direction.

“Can we get assigned to some resting rooms?”

The person behind the presence was startled that Woon-seong had noticed, as they had obviously been trying to hide. Since they had already been caught, they appeared in a flash, melting from the walls like a shadow.

Gwan Tae-ryang and another trainee who was close by were startled by the sudden movement and unfamiliar presence. With years of battle instincts kicking in, they moved quickly and approached the wall as they drew their weapons.

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They were in a branch of the Cult, whoever was inside and could mask their presence was likely not an enemy but someone relatively high-ranked in the Cult!

Woon-seong quickly restrained the actions of his men.

“Stop!”

“Hahaha. Rumors say that the current Cave of Latent Demons produced the best members in the history of Caves...” The shadow that had flashed into their view stepped into the sunlight. “And it seems true.”

It was a middle-aged man, obviously also from the Cult. There were numerous long, red scars covering both of his arms as well as his neck, which the man didn't try to hide.

Woon-seong's thoughts flashed through his mind as he rapidly tried to place the man's identity based upon his appearance. This man was at least Demonic General level! There was only one person skilled enough in this branch who could hide from the senses of the Cave of Latent Demon trainees.

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When he appeared, the trainees bowed their heads. "Good to see you!"

Woon-seong did not bow, but he quickly greeted the other. "It's an honor to meet you, 'Fire Demon of Scars', Mok Dae-young. I am Hyuk

Woon-seong, Leader of the 1st Latent Demon Squad."

"Kashgur's Branch Manager, Mok Dae-young. The Cult has contacted me in advance about you. I heard you're the strongest amongst the Cave's trainees."

"I'm flattered by the overstatement."

It was true, but Woon-seong hoped to stay in the good graces of this branch manager. As a person, he also wasn't overly self-confident and did not like to brag. He was a bit interested in the way that the Cult spoke of him, but that wasn't something he could ask about.

"Overstatement?" Mok Dae-young leaped from the second floor, where he had been standing, to the floor in front of Woon-seong. "You all are our fellow comrades who will lead the next generation of the Cult. I am excited to work with you." The man had decided that he approved of the young man before him, and stuck out his hand to shake.

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“Me too.”

“Hahahah! Although it’s not like some branch manager in the middle of nowhere can do much!”

“You don’t need to be so modest, ‘Spider of Thousand Ears’.”

Mok Dae-young was startled at being addressed by his lesser known nickname, especially by someone so young. “So you even know about that?”

“Senior Sang told me that you used to work at the ‘Thousand Miles Communication Department’.”

The ‘Senior Sang’ that Woon-seong mentioned was obviously Sang In-hyo, who worked as the General Director of the Cave of Latent Demons. Before Woon-seong had left the Cult, Sang In-hyo had described the branch managers and people that they could encounter if they needed information along their way.

Mok Dae-young smiled slightly, he remembered the guy. “I see...”

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The Thousand Miles Communication Department was an information organization run by the Demonic Cult; it was to be the eyes and ears of the headquarters. General Director Sang had been up there in the past, with a position as a middle-level executive.

The star at the time though, was a 'Spider of Thousand Ears'. That was man whose information channels wouldn't miss facts as thin as spider silk and had the ability to spread it delicately like a web.

Now, because of infighting, few still remembered this man.

However, General Director Sang obviously still remembered him, placing high importance on this man.

"You are the 'Spider of Thousand Ears' who worked as the eyes and ears of the Cult of the Heavenly Demon." Woon-seong clasped his fist in front of him, in a martial bow. "That's why I need help from you for this mission."

"My help huh...Since you mentioned 'Spider of Thousand Ears', I assume you want the information that only I could have." Mok Dae-young was silent for a moment, as the trainees waited apprehensively. "Alright! Let's

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talk about it over a cup of tea. I'll tell my men to assign new accommodations for your squad."

"You heard him." Woon-seong turned to the others as he followed Mok Dae-young into the building. "Start resting well until we start the next mission. Of course this doesn't mean to become lazy. Maintain your condition while resting and keep yourself prepared so you can fight at your best at any time."

"Yes, sir!"

Chapter 24: The Five Evils (2)

Chapter 24: The Five Evils (2)

The gentle scent of tigerwood spread out into the office room like a whisper. Mok Dae-young moved the pot of tea onto the table and stared at the young man before him. *Indeed, Demonic General*. He could see the iron bracers that Woon-seong wore on his arms and legs, covered by baggy clothing. *Definitely stronger than me*. Mok Dae-young was

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convinced of his defeat. Although he was considered a Demonic General, his abilities were only enough for him to be the Kashgur branch manager.

However, the young man named Hyuk Woon-seong seemed like he could do great things. Not only did he rank first in the Cave of Latent Demons, but his attitude was excellent.

For sure, he isn't just some ordinary kid.

From there, Mok Dae-young stopped thinking. A man with that ability would someday become a central figure of the Cult, but that would be distant from him, who was out in the middle of nowhere. How long had it been since he left that all behind?

Mok Dae-young took two cups of moderately warmed tea and placed a cup in front of Woon-seong. The boy glanced at the cup in front of him.

Baihao Yinzhen ('White Hair Silver Needle')

He hadn't noticed it because of the smell of incense, but this was his master's favorite tea too. Of course, the taste was slightly different from which his master boiled it. The master's tea had a deeper bitterness and

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would often leave a bitter taste in his mouth. But the fragrance of the tea was enough to remind him of his master.

“So, what information do you need?”

Mok Dae-young’s question woke the boy up from his memories. “Oh...it’s about the ‘Five Evils’.”

“Ouch...That is a difficult task.”

Mok Dae-young’s expression became a bit awkward at these words. If he were in charge of this mission, he would have suffered a bit. In addition, from the standpoint of the branch office, these targets were difficult to deal with.

Despite being only five, the members of the ‘Five Evils’ were all top class martial artists. In addition, the leader, the ‘Black Evil’ was a peak level martial artist who was able to use sword aura. Many people could use sword aura in practice, but few could put it to use in a practical situation. In that sense, only those who belonged to the upper echelon of the Demonic General class could fight him. Compared to Mok Dae-young, it was definitely one step above.

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Mok Dae-young looked at the young man before his eyes with a cautious expression. Could this young man deal with 'Black Evil'? No, if it was just 'Black Evil' alone, the branch itself could deal with it. However, the opponent was not a single member, but all of the 'Evils': Black, Blue, Red, White, and Yellow. Honestly, it would be difficult for the 1st Latent Group to deal with them. Perhaps it was possible, but about ten people would have to die in the best case scenario. Nevertheless, this was a mission from the Cult.

Mok Dae-young smiled bitterly. *Is there any chance that the Cult is trying to weed out even more trainees?*

"I need information because the mission is difficult." Woon-seong's eyes were deep, incomparably so.

Mok Dae-young felt cold flames from within his gaze. Thoughtful, but determined to act, eyes that only those who had ambition and drive could have. The eyes of those who have faith to walk their own path, those who didn't hesitate to devote themselves for what they decided to do.

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And Mok Dae-young had met people with those same eyes when he had been at the headquarters of the Cult, ten years ago. At that time, most of them had died due to their ambition. But some survived the difficulties, and became stronger than everyone else. The 'Ten Demonic Masters', they were 'under one person, above all others', the strongest in the Cult of the Heavenly Demon.

And now the eyes of this boy were enough to remind Mok Dae-young of those days.

So you're a man of that caliber.

Whatever Woon-seong hid behind that gaze, if the boy succeeded in his mission, it would be good to keep an eye on such a young man. It would surely be a big windfall for the Cult. So Mok Dae-young made a decision. "Okay. I will give you the information."

The order from the Cult was to destroy the 'Five Evils'. The information collected about them could not be given away so easily, but Woon-seong had passed the unspoken test.

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Woon-seong, who had received the information, headed for the branch's resting areas.

The branch had given generous lodging and care for the members of the 1st Latent Demon Squad. Thanks to this, the trainees were taking a rest they had never enjoyed before. The food brought by the maids was also organized. They had a chance to taste the Holy Communion before they headed out for a fight, but the atmosphere was different. Comfortable and cozy. Not only that, they could wash off the dirt and fatigue with warm water.

Except, the situation was a bit uncomfortable.

"Hmm."

Looking at the feast on the table in front of them, all the members of the squad had awkward looks plastered upon their faces.

At that time, Woon-seong arrived. "You're all making some interesting faces there."

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Gwan Tae-ryang stared at him, as if scared. "This is...I think it's too much."

At his words, Woon-seong looked around. Not only were they in a state of distress, but everyone was looking uncomfortable. No matter how you give a meal, it's useless if you cannot eat properly. He made a decision. "I'll ask the servants to leave."

"But..." The maid opened her mouth to speak, but shut her mouth just as fast.

"Just put down the food and get out. I will speak with the branch manager about it later."

With that said, the maids bowed and left the room. After they went out, the members of the squad looked more relaxed.

Woon-seong smiled and sat down next to Gwan Tae-ryang. "I've gathered information about the 'Five Evils'."

Was it because of the mention of their mission? The momentum of the squad seemed to have changed from when they looked relaxed. Now,

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their auras were sharp as a knife and their eyes were crackling with gunpowder.

“I’ll talk after we eat.”

However, Woon-seong raised his hand, restrained them, and lifted his spoon first. Looking at that, the squad members looked awkward again and lifted their own spoons. Soon, only the sound of cutlery could be heard.

After the meal, the members gathered in one place. The purpose was to hear the intel brought by Woon-seong. He was sitting in front of them, with Gwan Tae-ryang sitting next to him.

“As you all are aware, the group mission is about the ‘Five Evils’.”

Strictly speaking, they were a group of blood lamas. A group of five Tibetan blood lamas who were practicing asceticism in the Tibetan Potala Palace before fleeing after committing crimes.

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“All of them are known to be top notched martial artists. For a better understanding, the youngest ‘Yellow Evil’ is said to be around the level of our Senior Instructor.”

The Senior Instructor and ‘Yellow Evil’ were both considered to be first class martial artists. But if they had to fight, the one who won in the end would be their Senior Instructor. As there is a big difference between those at the top, there is also a difference among the first class.

Nevertheless, Woon-seong’s comparison meant that he was nervous. The skills of the trainees were first class. But except for him, there was no one who could win a one-on-one melee against a top class master.

“Of course, Blue Evil, Red Evil, and White Evil aren’t much stronger than Yellow Evil.”

With that, the faces of the trainees relaxed once more. Four of them were on the same level, to be precise.

Of the four Evils, they would have to fight against them using a wheel formation and clinging to the advantage of the majority. That was the initial plan, but Woon-seong also had another thought.

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“You deal with Blue Evil alone, Gwan Tae-ryang.”

Among them, only Gwan Tae-ryang could compete against the Senior Instructor. Seven times out of ten, the Senior Instructor would win. But according to his condition that day, the Senior Instructor could not guarantee victory either. Gwan Tae-ryang was a talented person and at least this would be a good fight for him, even if it only ended up as him stalling for time. In addition, like this, more trainees could face Yellow, White, and Red Evils.

Gwan Tae-ryang bowed his head. That solved four of the Evils.

But there was a bigger problem.

“The problem is Black Evil.”

Woon-seong had explained it to them, he was the strongest of the five and could use sword aura. Except for himself, it would be impossible for the others to hold on for more than a few moves. Even if they tried to push with numbers, they would only get beaten back.

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Only one man was able to deal with Black Evil in the 1st Latent Demon Squad. And that one man said, "Let me deal with Black Evil."

Woon-seong played with the bracers on his arm.

Chapter 25: The Five Evils (3)

Chapter 25: The Five Evils (3)

However, Woon-seong had discovered a disadvantage of the 'intimidation qi' when he fought with the Sword of Men. In addition to the rapid consumption of energy required, the qi did not seem to be as reliable as predicted against Orthodox cultivators. This had to be supplemented as soon as possible. In order to do so, he could either increase the fearful strength or fix the weaknesses.

Woon-seong chose to do the latter.

Although increasing the power of 'intimidation qi' could compensate for its shortcomings, the fundamental problem would still remain. In order to

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cripple opponents with mind-clearing martial arts, he had to find a way so that the qi was universally effective.

Woon-seong randomly recalled all the Dao and Orthodox methods he knew. Dozens of different verses repeated and then scattered in his mindspace. It had been a few days already that Woon-seong had been trying to find a solution.

That wasn't his only problem, of course. He had gone over his battle with the Sword of Men numerous times. Considering that he had not released the iron bracers on his limbs, Woon-seong lagged behind his opponent by about 30 seconds. He hoped to narrow this number down to around 10 seconds.

If Woon-seong wanted each to be perfect, it was impossible for his mind to focus on multiple things at once. Then, it would be better to focus on what he had to do right away.

The thoughts in his head disappeared like mist underneath the morning sun, until only one remained: How could he prepare to fight the Five Evils?

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Step by step, slowly. It would be hard to become a true expert if you expected rapid progress or sudden enlightenments. It was important to prepare one by one, as if you were building a solid tower brick by brick. Although it may take time, this tower would be fundamentally strong. A tower that could withstand storm and fire, Woon-seong wanted such a tower.

I'm not in a hurry.

Thinking like this, Woon-seong's consciousness slowly subsided to the inner depths of his mind. Needless to say, his 'intimidation qi' fluttered in response.

From some meters away, Gwan Tae-ryang clicked his tongue while watching the rhythm of practice. At first he had believed that Woon-seong was a monster, but now he realized the squad master was a *hard-working* monster. With his talent and effort, it was only natural to defeat others. Woon-seong had started as Number 900, meaning that he worked *that* much harder to reach the top.

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Compared to Woon-seong, Gwan Tae-ryang suddenly felt like he had made very little effort. This was the real world, he realized. Unsure of what kind of threats were waiting for him, Gwan Tae-ryang was not confident enough to go around boldly like Number 1. Increasingly, he realized Woon-seong's words back then had been correct — he was frog in a well.

It was known to the people of the Cave that Woon-seong's boldness originated from the character of his inner qi. The instructors had all been quite surprised by the nature of his qi and many wondered what the hell this boy had gotten from the Divine Vault of Demonic Sea.

Of course, it was natural that even the instructors were intrigued. Woon-seong's qi was produced through evolutionary fortifications from the two cultivation methods he merged. Despite living two lifetimes, even Woon-seong was amazed.

Gwan Tae-ryang knew that soon he would have to fight against the 'Five Evils', where he could only rely on his own strength. He gripped the blade in his hands. *He's really an incredible person, I must work harder too.*

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Scree—!

A bird's cry suddenly through the morning calm.

Gwan Tae-ryang lifted his head and shouted to alert Woon-seong. Eyes flashing open, Woon-seong reached his arm out to the side. With a flutter, an eagle landed lightly on his arm, presenting the bamboo scroll tied to its leg by a black string. This was one of the Cult's liaisons, likely carrying information about the Five Evils.

As the rest of the squad members were quickly notified to gather in a conference room, Woon-seong read the message.

"Tsk." There went all his hopes of a best-case-scenario.

"What is it?"

After finishing the entire letter, Woon-seong handed it over to Gwan Tae-ryang. Speaking to the others, he answered, "There is good news and bad news. I assume you would like to hear the bad news first."

The others nodded.

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“The bad news is that they have noticed our existence. A surprise ambush is no longer an option.”

The Five Evils had been alerted that the trainees were tracking them. From the standpoint of the trainees, this was indeed bothersome.

A member raised their hand and asked, “What happened?”

How did this occur?

The one who'd asked was Baek Woon-ji, a female member of the 1st Latent Demon Squad that was talented in covert operations. She wore a black cotton bandana to enhance the effect of stealth, covering her pretty face. Beyond the covering, her skin was beautiful like white snow.
[1]

Woon-seong glanced at her, but the one to answer was Gwan Tae-ryang.

“One of the intel agents who was after them got caught. The autopsy reports signs of torture.”

After reading the message, Gwan Tae-ryang's face had hardened. Signs of torture on the spy meant that not only were the Five Evils aware they

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were going to be attacked, they had likely also found some other information about those who were after them. It was safe to assume that the agent had spilled valuable information .

“By the way, Squad Master, where’s the good news in this letter? The only other thing mentioned is that the Evils are openly exposing themselves at some inn in Sici.”

Gwan Tae-ryang didn’t think that this could be considered good news, as Sici was a village about three days away from Kashgur. This was an act of clear provocation – the Five Evils were practically begging the 1st Latent Demon Squad to go there and attack. Openly waiting for the Cult to appear was a show of self-confidence.

“That is the good news,” Woon-seong smiled and said. “Waiting they’ve underestimated us. Hearing about the havoc they wrecked in the Cult’s territory, I thought they were some confident martial artists. But this only proves that they are just some reckless idiots.”

Vigilance in Murim meant life, carelessness equalled death. In addition, it was stupid for the Five Evils to evaluate themselves so highly that they

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proudly loitered in the Demonic's domain . If the Cult so wished, a single high-ranked Demonic cultivator could handle the Five Evils in a clean sweep.

Woon-seong concluded with a snort, "Surely the training of the Cave should be enough to deal with such morons."

Even in the future, the training of the Cave of Latent Demons would probably remain as some of the hardest days in their lives. Those were days where they made friends with Death. Day after day, a struggle against death.

Death was part of daily life, but they'd still come out alive.

A sharp energy rose from the squad, carrying the aura of a knife. Just remembering the Cave of Latent Demons had caused hostility and fighting spirit to pour out.

Woon-seong confirmed the change in atmosphere and laughed, rising from his seat. "We will return the Cult with the five heads of the Evils!"

The others also jumped up from their seats, following him out. "Yes, sir!"

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“Hmm, the dogs of the Cult might show up today. What do you think, Venerable of Great Virtue?” Blue Evil asked to Black Evil, who was eating the leg of a beast leg.

Mouth still full of meat, Black Evil responded, “Well. It’s all about the Will of Buddha. They will come when the time is right.”

The Five Evils giggled and burst into laughter.

The youngest, Yellow Evil, tapped the table with the cup in his palm.

“Haha. There should be women even amongst the dogs of the Cult, right? I wish to build virtue through interaction with the fairer sex.”

It was White Evil who answered his words. “Of course. The intentions of the Venerable of Virtuous Acts are praiseworthy. I’m sure the Buddha will answer your wishes.”

As these men called each themselves the ‘Venerables’ of this or that and praised their supposedly virtuous acts, it was clear they were unrepentant. It was quite ironic, as they were roguishly talking about sexual interactions with women, drinking alcohol, and eating meat, yet dared to call each other as followers of Buddha.

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Yellow Evil laughed violently, nodding at the words of White Evil. "I hope so. Is there more alcohol?"

Next to him, there were five already empty jars of liquor, but he was not drunk. This showed how strong his evil, impure qi was.

The other guests in the vicinity had scampered off, as none of them were brave enough to stand up to these five. Only the owner of the inn was left.

"Here you go, sir."

This was the fifth day they had been waiting, Yellow Evil's mind and body were in need of some excitement. "Is this the only drink?"

"Yes, all of the drinks we had were already consumed..."

"The Buddha shows such praiseworthy intentions, and yet this is the only virtue you can practice. You must be a pawn of the devil."

Yellow Evil clapped his hands together, his next words terrifying the owner.

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“I must ignore the rules against killing to send you, devil’s pawn, to meet the benevolent Buddha.”

Yet, Black Evil restrained such behavior. “That’s enough from the virtuous. We have some guests.”

As he said this, Blue Evil waved his sleeve. A powerful force sprouted from his hand, forcing the door of the courtyard open. Beyond the dust, the men could see the figures of twenty-two people surrounding the area. At the forefront stood a young man with a spear. “The dogs of the Cult have arrived.”

The young man at the front replied as he stepped out from the dust. “No. We’re here to send you bastards to meet the great and benevolent Buddha.”

The members of the 1st Latent Demon group poured into the area.

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