

Chapter 1155

Well, if it's absolutely necessary. (5)

In that atmosphere, even Chung Myung looked at Im Sobyong with a hint of anticipation. The reason he called this meeting wasn't solely because he didn't know what to do from now on. He had, in his own way, finally concluded what should be done.

Nevertheless, there were two reasons he organized the meeting.

First, it was crucial not to stick to the method of thinking and leading everyone alone any longer. As he had mentioned to Baek Cheon a while ago, each person here should be someone capable of making judgments and leading others when war breaks out.

If someone develops a habit of waiting for others to make decisions, they will inevitably fail to make the right judgments when they have to decide for themselves. So, at the very least, they must become individuals who find the best solutions on their own. For that, Chung Myung also needed to slightly reduce his involvement.

Even if the outcome of this meeting contradicted what Chung Myung considered to be the best path, he believed it would ultimately be the best.

The other reason...

'I can't do it alone.'

Chung Myung is not omnipotent. Despite experiencing the horrific war and overcoming countless situations others could never fathom, there were limits to his experience and understanding.

Up until now, his way of thinking seemed to be mostly correct, but to confront formidable adversaries like Jang Ilso and Demonic Cult, his strength alone was insufficient.

So, he was gathering opinions. Everyone here is capable enough for Chung Myung to listen to.

At that moment, Im Sobyong spoke up.

«What's important to win?»

«...Excuse me?»

When Namgung Dowi seemed perplexed, Im Sobyong lightly tapped his head with a folded fan.

«Was the question a bit difficult? If two people fight, who wins?»

«Well... the one who has trained a bit harder, I suppose.»

«No, no. It's the one who understands the opponent better.»

«I think, more than that, the one who clearly knows their own limits has a higher chance of winning.»

Different opinions poured in.

Then, someone spoke out, emphasizing a seemingly obvious point.

«Isn't it just the stronger one who wins?»

There was a moment of silence. As everyone's gaze focused on him, Jo Geol's face turned red.

«Oh, no, I mean...»

«That's right!»

«...Huh?»

Chwaaaack!

Im Sobyong unfolded his fan.

«Trying to spin it with various qualifiers, but there's only one conclusion. The stronger side wins. Isn't that the sole truth in Gangho?»

«See! I was right!»

«Who said otherwise?»

«Why are you getting all worked up by yourself?»

«Oh, well done.»

«These bastards!»

Everyone turned their cool gazes toward Jo Geol. There are always people who don't want to compliment even when someone does well.

«So, how should one win in a war, Young Lord Namgung?»

Under the burden of those uncomfortable looks, Namgung Dowi leaned back slightly.

«Well...»

He never imagined such a ridiculous answer would come out of his mouth, but the current atmosphere demanded only one response from him.

«Well, we just need to be stronger.»

«Oh, now your brain is working.»

«...»

Having given what seemed like the most foolish answer in his life, Namgung Dowi received praise. The fact left him in an inexplicable self-disgust. Of course, amid this, he didn't realize the oddity of secretly being pleased by the praise from Sapa's Im Sobyong.

«Now, what are the ways to become stronger?»

«Well...»

Seemingly not expecting an answer up to this point, Im Sobyong neatly summarized.

«There are only two ways. Strengthen the quality or increase the quantity.»

Baek Cheon reacted angrily to this statement.

«But, what about the small and middle-sized sects we mentioned earlier...»

«Just in case, I'm mentioning this, increasing the quantity means supplementing the forces that will become the main strength. Anyone thinking that gathering mediocre fools will make us stronger is thinking one-dimensional, right?»

«Well, yes.»

«...»

Stinging glares were momentarily directed at Baek Cheon, who had turned his back on his own words. Bowing deeply, he secretly ground his teeth.

«But, um...»

Tang Pae cautiously opened his mouth.

«It's not like those are the only methods, right? There's strategy, tactics, and...»

«Oh, a ruse?»

Im Sobyong smirked.

«Oh, that could be true. Even Young Lord Tang, with a clever strategy, might be able to fight against an opponent twice as strong as himself.»

«It won't be easy, but...»

«How about three times?»

«...»

«Five times? Ten times?»

Tang Pae instantly became silent. If using one's head could enable victory against an opponent ten times stronger, why would people fear climbing a mountain at night? They would just roam around, bare-handed, trying to catch tigers.

«Do you understand? In front of a significant power difference, strategy and tactics are meaningless. If you can win without using your head, it's insane to waste your brainpower thinking about how to win. The body suffers because the mind is weak.»

«Oh, no... But Gaozu defeated Xiang Yu just by fighting him.»

«If they fought one-on-one, he would've been beaten to death! Didn't he gather both the forces with power and those without to defeat him?»

«...»

Listening, it did make sense.

«Now, between Sapaeryeon and us, who is stronger?»

«Well...»

Even without thinking, one could answer.

«Sapaeryeon.»

«Yes. That's right.»

With the current strength of Cheonumaeng, facing Sapaeryeon alone is not an easy task. Of course, depending on how well the assembled forces coordinate, the situation could change. However, based on the revealed strength alone, Sapaeryeon has a clear advantage.

«If you're someone who thinks ahead, you won't waste time devising plans to overcome stronger forces with insufficient strength. Find ways to increase your power in the meantime.»

Everyone began to be captivated by Im Sobyong's words.

«But the quality of the troops!»

Im Sobyong turned his head and looked at Chung Myung.

«We have someone here who handles that. Even if that person has a foul temperament and is practically useless elsewhere, they have this one skill, equivalent to a top scholar... Ahehe, ahehe! Put that down. If you hit me with that ink stone, I'll really die. I'll die!»

Chung Myung lowered the ink stone reluctantly. Im Sobyong wiped cold sweat with his sleeve and continued.

«So, the only thing left is to increase the quantity.»

«But...»

Upon hearing that, Tang Pae wore an ambiguous expression.

«If the middle-sized sects aren't helpful, we have no choice but to bring in the large forces. However, in the current situation, there's no way they will join us, right?»

«We don't have any remaining forces. Besides, everyone already united under one banner.»

«Hmm.»

As everyone spoke with puzzled expressions, Im Sobyong gave a meaningful smile.

«So, everyone agrees that we need the large force join us?»

«...If it's possible.»

«Of course, if it's possible. But realistically, isn't it challenging?»

Im Sobyong's observation precisely pierced their sore spot.

The reasons Cheonumaeng was initially working to increase understanding and strengthen coordination among them were two. One was to reduce casualties, and the other was...

'Because if we don't do that, we really won't be able to win.'

Baek Cheon looked at Im Sobyong with a serious expression. Among the words Im Sobyong had spoken so far, the most painful ones for Baek Cheon were, 'Once people decide to do something, they feel relieved.'

It resonated perfectly with Baek Cheon. Despite recognizing the clear gap between Cheonumaeng and Sapaeryeon, he had focused all his energy on daily training, choosing to do what he could rather than addressing the fundamental problem.

'Is this a difference in perspective?'

Perhaps this was the difference between Im Sobyong, who actively thinks and solves problems, and Baek Cheon, who might still be waiting for someone to provide a solution.

Baek Cheon engraved this moment deep in his heart.

Im Sobyong folded his fan with a loud snap and spoke.

«Alright. Beon Chung!»

«Yes, Nokrim King!»

«Unfold the map!»

«Yes!»

Beon Chung raised the large map he held in his hands. Due to his substantial size, he could easily unfold the map on his own which would usually require two people.

'He had this prepared in advance?'

Tang Gunak looked at Im Sobyong with a bewildered expression. Now he realized that Nokrim King had already anticipated that such a conversation would take place here.

«All the factions currently not clearly affiliated with the Central Plains are these four.»

«Four?»

«Yes. Two of them you are familiar with: Southern Sea Sun Palace [남해태양궁(南海太陽宮) — namhaetaeyang-gung] and Potala Palace [포달랍궁(布達拉宮) — podallabgung].»

«Ah...»

Those who heard those words blinked. And when the words ‘Potala Palace’ came out, Chung Myung’s eyes sparkled instantly.

«And another one is... The Demon Blood Palace [마라혈궁(魔羅血宮) — marahyeolgung] included when referring to Outer Palaces.»

«But, The Blood Palace...»

«Yes, yes. I understand. But for now, let’s put aside the issue of feasibility and discuss only the unaffiliated factions.»

«Hmm. In that case...»

Initially, the Blood Palace was a mysterious sect whose origins were not clearly known, and the tendencies of the disciples were so wicked that it didn’t align well with Cheonumaeng.

«They say Outer Palaces and the Central Plains don’t mix, but at least that’s not a rule applicable to Cheonumaeng. Thankfully, leaders from two Outer Palaces are here, and it might be a bit easier to persuade them.»

«Why didn’t I think of that?»

«Yeah...»

Everyone looked at each other in disbelief.

Of course, just because Beast Palace and Ice Palace were part of Cheonumaeng didn’t guarantee their support. Outer Palaces didn’t have a distinct leading faction, and their cohesion was looser than expected.

However, the fact that these two factions had the potential to fill in the gaps in Cheonumaeng’s strength was undeniably clear.

«Among these, the most promising in terms of strength is probably Potala Palace...»

«No.»

Chung Myung decisively interjected.

«Coming from the west, war is going to break out here.»

«Correct.»

Im Sobyong sighed as if disappointed.

«Moreover, Potala Palace is known not to leave its territory easily and rarely intervenes in disputes with other factions unless it’s a significant issue. So, it seems unlikely.»

Ogeom recalled the encounter with Banseon Lama in the past and nodded. No, they probably couldn't even bring themselves to ask that person to fight alongside them. Even that brief meeting revealed that they operated on a different path than ordinary martial artists.

«So, the only place left is here.»

Snap!

When Im Sobyong lightly tapped a spot on the map, everyone's eyes widened.

«...Are we going there?»

«Oh, no. Are there people there too? Is the Central Plains that vast?»

«Nngh.»

As they looked at the spot pointed by Im Sobyong, Maeng So scratched his head awkwardly.

«Southern Sea Sun Palace.»

«Yes, that's correct. It's currently an unaffiliated faction.»

«But... Hah, that won't be easy. Sun Palace is originally in Linyi [임읍(林邑) — imeub — or Lam Ap], right?»

«That's right.»

«From the start, their language and writing are different from ours. It won't be easy to communicate.»

«That's something we have to accept.»

«And... crucially, Sun Palace is not the dominant faction in the Outer Palaces, as you know. It's not a supreme power like you might think.»

«What?»

«They're real royalty. The martial artists of The Sun Palace are of royal descent.»

«...Huh?»

Even Im Sobyong seemed surprised, blinking his eyes.

«Really?»

«...Why would I lie about something like this? So, they... probably never even considered coming to another country to fight. How would it sound to them if we suggested joining forces with Cheonumaeng?»

«Well...»

«From their perspective, how would an offer to participate in a war in another country sound to the royalty?»

«Um...»

«If you're thinking of sending an envoy, count me out. I don't want to be dismembered on the other side of the world.»

Im Sobyong looked at Maeng So with an expression of disbelief.

And then, Chung Myung spoke up.

«You started off so grandly. What's this? In the end, no one is joining us, right?»

«After making a big deal out of it and acting all superior.»

«What? What's the meaning of this?»

As the atmosphere gradually turned ominous, Im Sobyong stepped back hesitantly. Especially the gazes of Namgung Dowi and Baek Cheon were unsettling.

«Now, wait a moment! There's still more!»

«What other nonsense is this?»

«Stop your pointless resistance and just take the hit quietly!»

«No, there is! I mentioned four places from the beginning! This one is certain! Right here!»

Thunk!

When Im Sobyong pointed to another spot on the map, everyone's attention focused on his fingertip.

«...What?»

«Is he out of his mind?»

The simultaneous reactions from everyone expressed their disbelief.