

Chapter 1088

In my past life, what sin did I commit? (3)

«...Ten times?»

Ogeom's faces became seriously stiff.

Of course, they had already suspected that the ones they saw this time were not the main force of the Demonic Cult. Wasn't it enough to suspect the extent of their power with just the existence of the Heavenly Executioner, without even mentioning the others?

'But...'

Baek Cheon turned to face Chung Myung, a look of dismay evident in his eyes.

With just the presence of one diocese and one Bishop, both the elite of Maninbang and the elite of the Black Ghost were in crisis. However, what if Danjagang waited, instead of confronting them and stepping forward. What if he left everything to the cultists.

Perhaps everyone who entered Hangzhou would have had their bones buried there.

'But ten times the power of that force?'

Truly, it was an absurd statement.

It seemed that Hyun Jong felt the same emotions as Ogeom, as he repeatedly nodded.

«...Beyond expectations. No... honestly, it's almost unbelievable.»

His voice conveyed a sense of bewilderment and frustration.

«Of course, the Demonic Cult... it was a place that led Gangho to the brink of destruction until just before its demise. However... it's been a whole hundred years since then...»

«So that's why.»

A calm response came from Chung Myung. When Hyun Jong looked at him as if asking what he meant, he explained.

«Taking that into account, it's about ten times. If it weren't for that, it wouldn't even end with just ten times.»

Hyun Jong still wore a face that found it hard to believe. However, there was not a single hint of wavering in Chung Myung's eyes. In the moment Hyun Jong saw the confident expression, he couldn't help but believe every word. Whenever that child spoke with such a determined expression, there was always a basis for it.

«Could you explain the reason a bit?»

«It's simple. Because of the Bishop.»

«The Bishop?»

«Yes.»

Chung Myung nodded and continued speaking.

«The Bishop we faced was young. That means the Demonic Cult, driven out from the Central Plains, is currently reinforcing its power in any way possible and creating new forces.»

Chung Myung glanced around at those sitting nearby before speaking again.

«And that means... in the Demonic Cult right now, there could be many more like that young Bishop.»

A stillness settled.

Im Sobyong, who pressed his cheek firmly with the fan, raised one hand.

«No. Wait a moment, Dojang .»

His brows were furrowed.

«Of course, there is a possibility. We've only seen two Bishops, so the possibility of other Bishops existing is quite high. But to simply estimate it like that...»

«The Demonic Cult has a total of seventeen dioceses.»

Im Sobyong tightly closed his mouth.

This was something he had vaguely heard before. In the past, Cheonma invaded the Central Plains with a force consisting of seventeen dioceses.

«And each one is led by a Bishop. In other words, a proper Demonic Cult has seventeen Bishops.»

«Seventeen...»

For a moment, Baek Cheon felt a shiver down his spine.

The image of Danjagang spewing out demonic energy like a storm flashed through his mind.

A terrifying sight that was akin to a manifestation of horror. That formidable figure, who dominated the battle, overwhelmed Mangeum Daebu, Jang Ilso, and even Chung Myung.

‘That guy... seventeen of them?’

His fingertips trembled.

In the stifling silence, Chung Myung's eyes darkened.

Typically, the number of Bishops is known to be around ten. However, that information only reflects a rough estimate, as the Demonic Cult has not been able to replenish the bishops lost in battles where they poured out all their strength and efforts.

If the Demonic Cult has a proper force, the number of Bishops is seventeen. No, if even those who hold the most honorable position among them, serving only the Heavenly Demon without leading a diocese, are collectively called Bishops, then it should be more than that.

«Hmm. But Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

Tang Gunak also expressed disagreement, opening his mouth with a stern expression.

“The current Demonic Cult is different from the past. Weren't they driven out of the Central Plains? To say that they have recovered their strength again...”

«What about before that?»

«...What do you mean?»

«Where was the Demonic Cult before it invaded the Central Plains?»

Tang Gunak fell silent. It was a logical question, but something he had never thought about until now.

Chung Myung said as if pointing out that fact.

«The previous Demonic Cult also strengthened its power in a place other than the Central Plains. Yet, they successfully invaded the Central Plains, fully centered around the Heavenly Demon. Is there any guarantee that it will be different this time?»

«...None.»

Tang Gunak admitted, and Chung Myung nodded in acknowledgment.

«They are strengthening themselves to invade the Central Plains again. In that case, above all, they must be putting all their effort into cultivating proper Bishops. A single bishop can exert more formidable power than haphazardly training a thousand mediocre cultists.»

In the martial arts sect, it's more crucial to secure at least one absolute master rather than simply increasing the number of followers.

«And they had a hundred years to do that.»

Chung Myung's gaze turned slightly chilly.

«While people the Central Plains were forgetting the past and enjoying peace, they were licking their wounds, patiently waiting for the day to claim revenge on the Central Plains. For a whole hundred years.»

«...»

«But really, would they have only cultivated one new bishop during all that time? Surely not?»

Tang Gunak let out a deep sigh.

Cultivating an absolute master is by no means an easy task. Even if all efforts are focused at the faction level, it can be considered a success if they can nurture one in a generation.

But... given a hundred years?

If those who were once defeated in the Central Plains poured all their strength into cultivating successors from that moment until now? If the Demonic Cult, which had pushed the entire Central Plains to the brink of destruction as a single faction, dedicated a century to this endeavor?

«...It's hard to believe it's impossible.»

Having grasped the situation, Tang Gunak looked at Chung Myung with a stern expression.

«Do you then... believe that the Demonic Cult has fully recovered its strength?»

«To be honest...»

Chung Myung paused, closed his mouth, and then reopened it after a moment of contemplation.

«In terms of numbers, I don't think they've reached the level of the past. There are probably no more than around ten Bishops. Optimistically speaking.»

Everyone nodded in agreement.

The idea of ten people like Danjagang existing was chilling, but compared to the number seventeen, it was a more realistic figure.

«The problem lies in the quality of the Bishops.»

«Hmm?»

«The Bishops who survived when the Heavenly Demon fell in the past are still in the Demonic Cult. Do you understand what that means?»

«...The Bishops from back then are still alive? Then how old are they now?»

Tang Gunak's eyes revealed an unmistakable astonishment.

«That's not the important part. What matters is that they have become stronger than they were in the past.»

While the body inevitably ages and weakens.

Even for formidable individuals challenging the heavens with martial arts, this was an unavoidable truth. However, inner strength continues to accumulate with the passage of time.

If those who had brought the powerful factions of the past to the brink of destruction had continued their training for a century, it was impossible to gauge what level they had reached.

«The young Bishop referred to him as the Second Bishop.»

«...And there's also an Archbishop above that. So, are you saying that there have been at least two surviving bishops from the past until now?»

«Yes. At the very least.»

Chung Myung bit his lip slightly.

«Just their presence alone makes it reasonable to think that the total power of the Bishops, including those from the past, has become much stronger than before.»

Everyone fell silent, and Chung Myung understood this silence.

Who would have imagined that someone would survive over such a long period?

When Chung Myung died, Tang Jopyeong was just a child, and now he had become the oldest Elder in the Tang clan with only a short time left to live.

But even then, Bishops who were not young at the time... Could they still be alive?

Of course, it couldn't be ruled out as entirely impossible. Chung Myung had already seen with his own eyes the surviving Bishop from the past war in the Northern Sea.

However, this was a different case. The Northern Sea's Bishop was merely a hastily inserted figure to fill the serious void left by the battles at the time. In normal circumstances, whether in terms of age or authority, he couldn't dare to claim the title of a Bishop.

But...

'Heavenly Executioner.'

Even though the cases are different, he is on another level all together.

He was one of the most terrifying Bishops from the past, known for his notoriety. Such a person still lived, and yet, he hadn't ascended to the position of the Archbishop.

The implications of that fact were monumental.

«Without a doubt.»

The moment those words left Chung Myung's mouth, everyone looked at him with tense expressions.

«If the Demonic Cult invades the Central Plains again this time, their power will undoubtedly surpass that of the past.»

A sharp sensation tingled on the tip of his tongue as he spoke. Even for Chung Myung, uttering these words was not an easy task. No, just a short while ago, he wouldn't have mustered the courage to say these words before them.

While a moderate enemy could stir up a competitive spirit, an overwhelmingly strong enemy could even cut off the remaining vigor.

Chung Myung had avoided mentioning the Demonic Cult not just to conceal his identity, but also because they weren't ready to accept the reality of Cult's existence.

But now, avoidance was no longer an option.

Seeing and feeling the truth, and given the dwindling time until their decisive clash, they had to acknowledge the reality.

How gigantic and powerful the adversary they were to face really was.

'If there is hope....'

It was precisely at that moment.

«I have something I want to confirm.»

Chung Myung's gaze shifted to the side, piercing through the heavy atmosphere, and the one who opened his mouth was none other than Baek Cheon.

Having met Chung Myung's gaze directly, he bit his lip slightly before speaking.

«If what you say is true, and as they mentioned... Wasn't more than half of the past Demonic Cult's power the existence of the Heavenly Demon?»

«...That's right.»

Baek Cheon asked with a furrowed brow.

«So, your statement that the Demonic Cult will be no less than in the past implies that, the Demonic Cult is returning with the Heavenly Demon having the same power as in the past. Right?»

Chung Myung nodded slowly.

«Are you sure?»

«...»

«If Heavenly Demon simply resurrects, does that mean he will come back with the same power as in the past? Well... the concept of resurrection is already absurd, but coming back with that power intact is even more bizarre, isn't it?»

In response to Baek Cheon's question, everyone nodded with a realization on their faces.

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this discussion was the Heavenly Demon. Paradoxically, it was their lack of knowledge about the Heavenly Demon that had caused them to overlook something important in this debate.

However, Chung Myung's response was slightly different from what they expected.

«I don't know.»

«...What?»

«I don't know either.»

Chung Myung stated firmly with a composed expression.

«I don't know how that bastard resurrects. So, I can't predict. Whether he needs time to regain his power after resurrection, or if, right after resurrection, he instantly becomes a being befitting the name 'Heavenly Demon.'»

«...»

«One thing is certain. Regardless of how he resurrects... if he's given time, the outcome will ultimately be the same.»

Hwasan Geomhyeop Chung Myung. Simultaneously, Maehwa Geomjon Chung Myung. From someone who held two identities and lived two lives, words flowed out like an inevitable fate.

«If we can't stop the Heavenly Demon and the Demonic Cult, what we witnessed in Hangzhou will be repeated throughout the entire Central Plains. No, perhaps even beyond the Central Plains...»

It could be a prophecy. Simultaneously, a curse.

«Destruction is imminent.»

The unavoidable reality flowed from Chung Myung's lips.