

Chapter 1070

Kill me, you say? (5)

Para-ra-ra-rak!

Crimson flower petals fluttered in all directions.

At first glance, it might just seem like a beautiful spectacle. The crimson petals soaring into the sky and drifting with the wind looked warm, reminiscent of a heavenly peach garden [도원(桃園) — down].

But for those who knew the truth, there was no more menacing sight than this.

Anyone with even a slight understanding of martial arts would be terrified to learn that each of those countless fluttering petals contained deadly sword energy.

But for those who had a deeper understanding of martial arts, it was clear that there was something more significant to focus on.

Mangeum Daebu's gaze grew colder.

'Hwasan...'

Scattering sword energy of this magnitude was already far from ordinary. But what made it even more extraordinary was the ability to control it precisely according to one's will.

Think about it.

There were as many as five swordsmen releasing this sword energy simultaneously.

These five were spreading their unpredictable and bizarre sword energy like madmen, yet there was no collision or interference between them.

Common sense would dictate that when sword energy is released, they should collide and create conflicts. However, the sword energy of Hwasan's disciples worked in perfect harmony, as if it was all released by a single person.

It was a spectacle that perfectly displayed how harmoniously they had synchronized their movements.

However, those facing this sword energy were no pushovers either.

«Huaaaah!»

The elite warriors of the Black Ghost roared and threw themselves without hesitation into the waves of petals rushing towards them.

Kagagang!

Squelch! Squelch!

The sounds of sword energy and blades clashing mixed with the chilling sounds of flesh being cut. They had decided that it was impossible to block all the sword energy, so they focused on protecting their heads and upper bodies while disregarding the rest.

It was a ruthless decision to expose their flesh to the enemy in order to get closer.

In a regular battlefield, it would be considered a foolish act. However, in a situation where they held overwhelming superiority in numbers and could end everything with a single battle, this foolish decision turned into a perfect one.

«Kuuuh!»

In agony as the sword energy pierced their limbs, they gritted their teeth.

«Tahat!»

But in the end, they succeeded in breaking through the torrent of sword energy with this simple tactic. Hwasan's swordsmanship may be flashy and captivating, but its power, when focused on a single point, was weak. They had accurately targeted this vulnerability.

Baek Cheon's face grew stern.

‘No hesitation at all?’

It's not unusual for one or two people to make such a choice. There may be individuals with the ability to instinctively or rationally identify a weakness in their opponent's swordsmanship in a split second.

But the fact that everyone who rushed into the battlefield responded in the same way without exchanging a single glance meant only one thing.

They had clearly prepared to study and counter Hwasan's swordsmanship.

For Baek Cheon and Hwasan's disciples, this was undoubtedly an unprecedented experience.

Hwasan's swordsmanship was distinct from the orthodox schools of swordsmanship. In Hwasan, they emphasized the use of illusionary [환(幻)] sword principles [검리(劍理) — geomli] that were rarely employed elsewhere. As a result, those encountering Hwasan's sword energy for the first time often felt profound confusion.

However, the disciples of Hwasan had now clearly understood this moment.

In Gangho, Hwasan was no longer an unfamiliar and unimportant faction. Instead, it was a faction that everyone in Gangho regarded with caution and attention.

Everyone within Hwasan had collectively worked to elevate their status significantly. And as is the case with everything in the world, an elevated position naturally comes with its own set of risks. Now, the factions keeping an eye on Hwasan had actively started to analyze their swordsmanship and find ways to counter it.

This meant that Hwasan had been acknowledged as a «strong» faction in Gangho, but it also indicated that they would face more significant challenges in the future.

«Kraaaaah!»

The elite Black Ghost's warriors, who had pierced through the forest of sword energy, rushed toward the disciples of Hwasan. Despite their bodies being cut and spilling blood, their momentum showed no signs of diminishing.

«Die!»

Kwaaaaah!

Regardless of their powerful momentum, their attacks were characterized more by their speed than raw power.

Baek Cheon, leading the charge, swiftly blocked a flying strike with his sword.

‘Fast!’

This wasn’t about using force to parry the strike. It was an attack meant to quickly continue the exchange and keep the opponent on the defensive. Their every move reflected a thorough understanding of Hwasan’s swordsmanship, and their intention to not give Hwasan’s flashy sword techniques an opportunity to threaten them was evident in their strikes.

In each of their attacks, it was clear that they had diligently studied Hwasan and were well-prepared.

Amidst the heavy force bearing down on him, Baek Cheon bit his lip.

‘I was too complacent.’

Hwasan is the greatest enemy of Sapaeryeon.

Baek Cheon was fully aware of this fact and sometimes even took pride in it. However, he never expected that this stark reality would come back to haunt him in this moment, under these circumstances.

Realizing his complacency, Baek Cheon took action.

«Tataat!»

He swung his sword forcefully, deflecting the strike.

Simultaneously, a powerful punch with overwhelming energy grazed past his ear.

Kwaang!

Hye Yeon’s fist penetrated into the enemy’s chest, whose upper body was wide open. The opponent, bleeding profusely, fell to the ground as Baek Cheon momentarily stopped, standing in place to release a powerful stance.

‘Protect!’

Their immediate goal wasn’t to finish off their enemies as they would in regular combat. Even if there were enemies left unharmed, their priority now was to withstand the attacks.

«Khuuuugh!»

One wave after another.

Their relentless charge seemed more driven by a sense of urgency to stay close rather than the exhilaration of defeating the enemy. The determination to ensure that Hwasan’s disciples couldn’t find an opportunity to release their sword energy was evident in their ferocious attacks.

Ongoing assault had a clear purpose. They weren’t just trying to defeat Baek Cheon in a single strike. Their aim was to accumulate even the smallest of injuries on his lower body, like piling up small chips on the board, planning to slowly weaken him.

Even if it meant their own bodies getting injured, they were determined to inflict and exploit each minor injury on Baek Cheon. It was a cunning strategy.

This was the same way that Hwasan’s disciples had faced formidable opponents. Baek Cheon reacted quickly, swinging his sword and issuing three strikes in rapid succession against the charging attackers.

«Parrah!»

Before their headlong strikes could reach him, Baek Cheon's precise sword energy penetrated through the approaching attackers.

Kwaddug!

However, one of the strikes hadn't lost all its power and grazed Baek Cheon's cheek, causing a long slash and a burning sensation.

«Stay focused! The way these people fight is different from any opponents we've faced so far!»

Baek Cheon shouted.

Other disciples of Hwasan, seemingly realizing this fact, responded with tension in their voices.

It was a first for them, to be in the position of not challenging as the weaker side, but rather to be challenged by a weaker opponent with advantage in numbers. The battle dynamics had taken an unexpected turn, with Hwasan's disciples slowly pushing the opponents back.

«Hwasan...»

A low voice escaped Mangeum Daebu as he watched the situation unfold.

«They truly are dangerous.»

It was completely different from any orthodox faction he knew.

The young novices who barely have a hint of facial hair have been showing exceptionally high level of swordsmanship, not befitting their age, and they were showing no fear in real combat.

And that is evident even now.

The strategy employed by the elite warriors of the Black Ghost is based on information gathered through the analysis of the recent actions of Hwasan on Maehwado, in addition to their knowledge of Hwasan's past movements. Originally, this plan was devised with the assumption of a larger force to encircle the entirety of Hwasan, but it is a strategy capable of confronting even a smaller group effectively.

To the onlookers, it might seem as though their strategy is perfectly suited to capture Hwasan. However, in reality, Hwasan's disciples have shown an unexpected level of adaptability. They quickly caught onto their attackers' intent and modified their tactics accordingly. These young rascals.

‘Unlike those orthodox factions who wither away when exposed to the cold wind after growing in a warm greenhouse, they don't seem to have such limitations.’

It's not just the personal opinion and observation of Mangeum Daebu. Hwasan has already proven itself numerous times. There are no any further explanations needed after the events on Maehwado.

If these youngsters continue to grow without any hindrance, it's likely that no one in the world will be able to stop Hwasan.

That's why they must be killed. This place is not only where he has the opportunity to remove the sword named Jang Ilso that is right at his neck, but it is also where he will break the arrow that will pierce his heart in the future, the arrow known as Hwasaan.

‘But... I still don't understand it at all.’

How on earth did such people appear?

Mastery of sophisticated swordsmanship and abundant practical experience cannot coexist in reality.

To gain as much experience as possible, one must experience real-life combat where their life is at stake. But those who engage in such experiences often lose their lives young. Yet avoiding practical experience until one's swordsmanship matures will result in a martial artist who doesn't even understand what real-life combat is later.

Gangho has always chosen one of two paths. The Sapa [sa — evil] side focuses on producing individuals who have experienced real combat to survive, while the Jeongpa [jeong — right/righteous] side focuses on avoiding practical experience and waiting for their swordsmanship to mature.

That's why Jeongpa has a stronger layer of accomplished martial masters who have been disciplined in martial arts for a long time, while Sapa has more disposable lower rank martial artists stronger than average Jeongpa warriors.

But those Hwasan guys are neither of the two.

They simultaneously possess the sophistication of swords that the distinguished sects of Jeongpa have and the practical combat ability of the low-level warriors in Sapa.

The saying “between righteousness and wickedness” originally referred to those who couldn't be connected to either Jeongpa or Sapa. But watching these guys, it seems like they need to rewrite the meaning of that phrase.

‘How on earth did Hwasaan produce swordsmen like that?’

It's almost as if there was an absolute martial god who mastered both righteous and evil arts, using a method that had never existed before to nurture his disciples.

However, there can't be such an absolute master in the world, and there can't be one in the ruined Hwasan.

‘No, there's no reason to think about it.’

After all, those guys are going to die here today.

Mangeum Daebu stared at Jang Ilso, who was surrounded by Red Dogs, with a cold gaze.

‘You don't raise tigers, Jang Ilso.’

In the end, this is another failure of Jang Ilso. He believed that he could handle the unbearable. People who raise tigers and end up being killed by those tigers, still think they are different, like foolish people who pick up tiger cubs.

“Don't rush and take your time. It's fine no matter how much blood is spilled. But don't let a single one of them live.”

“Yes!”

Mangeum Daebu, who furrowed his brow slightly, slowly approached the battlefield. For a moment he placed his unfamiliar left hand on the handle of the sword hanging on his right side. But he soon lowered his hand again.