

Chapter 1256

He will take care of that, won't he? (1)

Boom! Boom!

One after another, anchors the size of a person fell into the water, their collision with the surface sending echoes along the coast like cannon fire. Even for those who didn't understand the significance of this sight, it was enough to make their bodies tremble involuntarily.

«Commander! Anchoring is complete.»

The person who hurried into the cabin reported breathlessly. But the gaze of Ho Gamyong, who was inspecting the ledger, showed no sign of movement.

«Hmm.»

After a moment, Ho Gamyong swiftly closed the ledger.

Thunk.

Without delay, he rose from his seat and walked out of the cabin. Passing through the narrow door, he was greeted by the vast scenery of the green island.

It was significantly different from the central plains. However, Ho Gamyong stepped forward with an expression devoid of any particular excitement.

Creak.

With each step he took, the deck of the ship creaked, protesting under his weight. As he walked to the bow, he quickly surveyed the coast with indifferent eyes.

Then, he asked.

«Where are the fishermen?»

«They seem to be too busy running away, so it looks like there's no one left on the coast.»

«But those who were on the coast must have seen us.»

Ho Gamyong glanced briefly at the ships anchored on the coast before speaking.

«The members of Haenam sect will soon find out as well. There's nothing good about being overly cautious. Disembark.»

«Yes, commander!»

The person who respectfully bowed swiftly turned and shouted loudly,

«Disembaaaaaark!»

«Yes!»

As each ship's crew swiftly leaped out, splashing into the water one by one, the azure sea surface was quickly blanketed with white foam. They descended smoothly and dashed forward, gathering on the pristine white sandy beach.

Observing this scene with a composed gaze, Ho Gamyong stepped lightly onto the bow of the ship, then gracefully leaped down onto the white beach below.

Straightening his posture and casting his gaze around, Ho Gamyong observed the warriors of Maninbang standing in formation. He narrowed his eyes slightly.

A person who joined a bit later bowed his head.

«Commander!»

«Late.»

«I-I apologize.»

Ho Gamyong nodded briefly, as if dissatisfied.

If any another sect had seen the scene unfolding on this coast, they would have been not just startled but speechless. In fact, the current appearance of these individuals was more akin to soldiers than a Sapa sect, so meticulously organized in their formation. Among all the evil sects of Gangho, only Maninbang could present such a sight.

Yet even this sight didn't quite satisfy Ho Gamyong.

«Commander! Preparations are complete! Your command!»

«Hmm.»

Ho Gamyong nodded.

In truth, anyone in his position, with so many people awaiting his command, would feel a flutter in their chest.

However, there was not a hint of excitement in Ho Gamyong's eyes. He simply assessed the situation with his usual calm demeanor.

«Shall we advance?»

asked one of the warriors.

«Wait,»

replied Ho Gamyong.

He lightly touched his left sleeve with his right hand, as if lost in deep thought. After a while, he spoke in a composed voice.

«This is strange.»

«What do you mean?»

Mun Bang asked, looking puzzled.

«It's too calm,»

Ho Gamyong continued.

«They weren't prepared for our arrival. It's natural that they couldn't anticipate it or prepare for it. Even if the fishermen spotted us, it's unlikely that news would have reached Haenam...»

But Ho Gamyong interrupted him with a cold tone, shaking his head.

«There are no footprints.»

«Um... what do you mean?»

Ho Gamyong's aide, Mun Bang, looked once again at the pristine white beach upon hearing those words. Certainly, there were no footprints to be seen, confirming Ho Gamyong's suspicions.

But why was that considered strange?

«Commander, isn't it actually a good thing that there are no footprints?»

Mun Bang turned to Ho Gamyong, seeking confirmation.

«A good thing?»

«Yes. The absence of footprints on this shore indicates that no one was here to witness our movements, doesn't it?»

Ho Gamyong furrowed his brows slightly in response.

«Despite the presence of anchored ships, isn't it odd that there are no footprints?»

«Oh!»

Mun Bang finally realized, turning back to look at the shoreline. Besides their own ship, other boats were also anchored there. The fact that ships were anchored implied that people had disembarked. Yet, there were no traces of human presence on the beach.

Indeed, it was a peculiar situation.

«...Could it have been erased by a typhoon?»

«The sailors would naturally repair their ships after the typhoon passes. If those repairing the ships had seen us, they would have quickly fled, leaving footprints on the shore.»

«...»

«It's unnatural.»

Ho Gamyong lifted his head to gaze at the island before him.

«If they knew we were coming and set a trap in advance... Would those island country bumpkins be capable of such cunning things?»

Ho Gamyong turned his slow gaze towards Mun Bang. The chill in his eyes seemed to drain the color from Mun Bang's face.

«The most dangerous moment for a person is when they think they have obtained something by luck and attribute it to their own skill.»

Mun Bang remained silent, as if unable to find words even if he opened his mouth. Ho Gamyong spoke in a chilling tone.

«If it weren't for the grace of Ryeonju, those worthless brats from a Guangdong would have ended up as nothing more than trash, yet they have the audacity to act as if they are something.»

Mun Bang quickly bowed his head.

Ho Gamyong rarely got angry over trivial matters. Even if a subordinate openly showed disrespect, he would just sigh and let it slide. It wasn't because he was lenient, but rather because he believed that having such people around was better than having none at all.

However, there was one exception.

The moment someone tarnished the authority of Jang Ilso, Ho Gamyong transformed from a rational military leader into an unforgiving demon.

Knowing this fact, Mun Bang couldn't help but panic.

«Commander, I absolutely did not have such intentions.»

«Is that so?»

«I was merely being foolish and mocking without thinking. How could I ever consider the authority of Maninbang to be something I obtained? It's absolutely unthinkable.»

Ho Gamyong silently gazed at the prostrated Mun Bang.

Despite the scorching sun overhead, Mun Bang felt a chill running down his spine.

«Get up.»

«Yes, commander!»

Mun Bang promptly rose to his feet.

«This is the last warning.»

«T-Thank you, commander!»

Mun Bang broke out in a cold sweat as he quickly bowed his head.

While it might have seemed like a mere light scolding, Mun Bang knew all too well. Just moments ago, he had teetered on the gates of hell and narrowly escaped.

«W-What should we do next?»

He swiftly changed the subject. There was nothing good to dwell on regarding his recent mistake in Ho Gamyong's mind.

«There must be traps.»

Ho Gamyong said quietly, gazing at the dense bushes.

The coastline was dazzlingly bright, and the adjacent grassland was lush green. However, the bushes and mountains beyond were even denser and darker than those in the Central Plains.

«If there's an ambush, it must be over there.»

«Should we take a detour?»

«No.»

There was a strange twist in Ho Gamyong's words.

«Then we go straight ahead if there are traps.»

Mun Bang observed Ho Gamyong without saying a word. He had questions, of course, but now wasn't the time to press Ho Gamyong for answers.

«Don't misconstrue your mission, Mun Bang. Our orders aren't simply to remove the plaque of Haenam. It's to annihilate every last one of those who bear the name of Haenam.»

«Oh...»

«If we bypass the traps, those who set them will scatter in all directions like a swarm of insects. Dealing with them afterward will be troublesome.»

Ho Gamyong gazed at the dense forest of Haenam with eyes devoid of emotion.

«It would be better if the targets we need to eliminate are gathered in one place. It speeds up the process.»

«Yes!»

«We move forward as planned. But!»

Ho Gamyong glanced back at the ship he had arrived on, his expression portrayed no emotion as if he was contemplating in silence. Then, he spoke again.

«Leave Changgwi Unit* behind to guard the ship.»

His expression remained indifferent.

«Cutting off the retreat is the most obvious move for those who boast of their military strategies. Losing the ship won't be a problem, but it'll become a nuisance.»

«As you command!»

«Move out.»

«Yes!»

Mun Bang sprinted towards Changgwi Unit with all his might. Despite surviving his mistake, a sense of relief and another chill swept over him.

‘Just facing Haenam alone...’

As Ho Gamyong had said, Mun Bang might not have the qualification to boast of the might of Maninbang. However, it was an objective fact that the power of Maninbang overwhelmed Haenam.

Yet, now Ho Gamyong was strategizing as if he was crossing a suspended bridge while facing Haenam.

Because a tiger tries its best to catch a rabbit?

No, it's not that. That's why he's scary.

Right now, Ho Gamyong's mind was likely consumed with thoughts of how to execute Jang Ilso's orders perfectly. Venturing into the enemy's traps wasn't an expression of confidence that they could overcome the enemy without harm, even if they jumped into the trap.

Ho Gamyong had chosen a direction that involved accepting some degree of risk to swiftly deal with the enemy, all in order to fulfill Jang Ilso's command to handle Haenam quickly.

For Ho Gamyong, nothing mattered more than Jang Ilso's orders.

This fact sent a chill down Mun Bang's spine.

‘I absolutely cannot afford to make any mistakes this time.’

With that resolve, Mun Bang shouted towards Changgwi Unit.

«They are on the move!»

«Alright. Then... huh?»

Yoon Jong, who had been observing the situation on the coast, suddenly turned to Baek Cheon with widened eyes.

«Are the troops dividing?»

Baek Cheon blinked as he surveyed the situation on the coast. Indeed, some of the enemy forces seemed to remain, guarding the anchored ships.

«Nokrim King?»

«Hmm.»

Im Sobyong scratched his head with the tip of his fan and chuckled.

«It seems Ho Gamyong is playing his hand higher in Haenam than expected. Well, that's just who he is. Certainly a formidable schemer. Excellent.»

«But our plans have been disrupted, and now you're calmly praising him?»

«What else can we do?»

Complaints erupted from all around.

«Ugh, seriously.»

Im Sobyong grimaced, his face contorted with annoyance.

«Have these nobles become too accustomed to peace? In real warfare, do they think everything will smoothly unfold as planned? Adjusting tactics on the fly is the essence of war, constantly changing strategies in response to the situation!»

«So, does this mean you took a hit from Ho Gamyong?»

«Does it mean you got screwed?»

«Does it mean you lost?»

«...Those bastards.»

Im Sobyong gritted his teeth with frustration. Then Baek Cheon asked again.

«So, what do we do now?»

«Nothing much different.»

Im Sobyong shrugged.

«We wait until the enemy is far enough according to the plan... and then we seize the ships!»

«What about those guarding them?»

«Well, um...»

Im Sobyong glanced at a person who tilted his head.

«The Central Plains' finest Sapa Grinder will take care of that, won't he?»

Chung Myung, who had already drawn his sword, was staring intently at Changgwi Unit encamped on the coast.

Seeing this, everyone involuntarily shuddered. Chung Myung's grin was truly eerie.

* 창귀대(偃鬼臺) — Chang ghost unit. Chang is a monster from Chinese mythology. A spirit of someone, who was eaten by a tiger, and became a ghost. This evil entity lures people into their death. Very poetic name ngl.