

Chapter 1261

Don't let them live. (1)

Thud!

With every step on the ground, a shock traveled from the legs to his chest.

Perhaps that's why. The reason why it feels like his chest is about to burst.

'Faster!'

Though his feet pounded the ground like mad, strangely, his body felt infinitely slower than usual.

The distance to the battlefield wasn't far. Normally, he would have arrived in a short stride, but now, no matter how much he ran, the distance seemed to never shorten.

Was he weakening? No, that couldn't be.

Gwak Hwanso knew. It wasn't that he was slow, but rather, they were fast. Despite concentrating harder and running faster than usual, it was just that their abilities were so superior that they couldn't even be compared to Gwak Hwanso.

'Damn it!'

In his desperation, Gwak Hwanso pounded the ground even harder.

«S-Sahyeong!»

A scream, as if from someone suffocating, echoed from behind, but he didn't slow down one bit.

'Here!'

Thud!

Gwak Hwanso's body shot forward even faster.

'This is Haenam!'

Hwasan might be stronger than them. It might even be natural for Namgung or Tang to be stronger than them.

But this is a war to defend Haenam itself.

Even if Haenam sect is weaker than them, they cannot let Cheonumaeng take the lead, leaving everything to them.

However, the beast-like warriors of Cheonumaeng, who entered into battle with the enemy first, seemed completely unaware of Gwak Hwanso's sentiments, continuing to charge fiercely at Maninbang with tremendous momentum, as if they had resolved to turn Haenam into scarecrows.

«Aaaargh!»

Gwak Hwanso screamed as if his chest would burst, rushing forward. The elders, including Geum Yangbaek, seemed to share the same sentiment, swiftly shooting towards the enemy like arrows released in a protest.

'Faster!'

Gwak Hwanso, rushing forward like a leopard targeting its prey, swiftly leaped into the bewildered ranks of Changgwi's members.

«This is Haenam! You bastards!»

Roar!

The fierce waves of Haenam's unique martial arts, the Blasting Wind and Waves Swordsmanship [장풍파랑검법 — jangpungpalang geombeop], unfolded. Waves of sword energy, akin to rough waves of the sea, burst forth from Gwak Hwanso's sword, engulfing Changgwi's members in an instant.

«What, what's happening!»

Whether it was due to the sudden influx of opponents or because the members of Changgwi had not yet recovered from the aftermath of the attack, who seemed to be attempting to fight back, were effortlessly swept away by Gwak Hwanso's sword.

«Aaaargh!»

Blood gushed from the deep wound on the enemy's chest. At the same time, a surge of heat rushed through Gwak Hwanso's heart.

Blood!

As a disciple of Haenam, he dared not speak of it, but how long had he yearned for the blood of those villains? How much had he longed for this moment, to cut them down with his sword?

Thud!

With determination surging through him, Gwak Hwanso kicked the ground beneath him and let out a thunderous roar.

«Defeat all the invaders who dare to trespass on Hainan! Do not fall behind Cheonumaeng!»

«Yes, Sahyeong!»

Gwak Hwanso too charged straight ahead. He could now clearly understand the sensation of blood boiling within him.

‘This is real combat!’

In that moment, he realized anew. Never before had he truly taken a life.

As a lifelong practitioner of Haenam's prestigious martial arts, he had never engaged in combat where lives were at stake. Conflict within Hainan itself was rare, and the nature of the island meant that mercenary expeditions were uncommon.

Yet here he was, facing off against none other than the notorious Maninbang in his first real battle! It was an exhilarating prospect.

Gwak Hwanso gripped his sword tightly.

Echoes of the legends about Hwasan reached even this distant corner of Hainan. How could Gwak Hwanso not know of their illustrious history and achievements?

With each piece of news he encountered, the heart of the swordsman Gwak Hwanso fluttered. His martial spirit boiled within him. He had repeatedly vowed to himself that someday he too would confront Sapaeryeon like those of Hwasan.

Today, in this very place, he would fulfill that long-standing aspiration.

‘I can do it too!’

Gwak Hwanso charged forward like a bolt of lightning, his sword swinging fiercely.

«Aaaah!»

His sword struck with ferocity.

The sensation of the ground beneath his feet.

The surging power coursing through his entire body.

The texture of the sword handle in his palm.

And above all, the overwhelming sense of accomplishment!

To become one with the sword is to experience such moments.

His sword descended fiercely in a straight line towards the still bewildered enemy.

Kaaaang!

And in that moment, Gwak Hwanso involuntarily gasped as excruciating pain shot through his wrist. His sword was blocked by a gleaming large blade, despite his full force strike. The enemy’s blade, like a solid rock, perfectly intercepted his own.

‘No...’

Bewildered Gwak Hwanso looked into the eyes of the enemy. Through the gap where their swords crossed, he saw crimson bloodshot eyes and in that instant, the boiling blood in Gwak Hwanso’s veins began to cool.

Changgwi’s member muttered with disdain,

«This greenhorn...»

Boom!

With a deafening roar, Gwak Hwanso staggered backwards, his hand dripping with blood where it had met the sword handle. But he had no time to feel the pain. The enraged enemy charged straight at him.

«Nooooo!»

Quaaang!

Gwak Hwanso instinctively blocked the flying blade, his body recoiling from the impact. It felt like his shoulder was being crushed under the weight of the sword. Blood welled up in his throat, indicating internal injury from the clash of inner strength.

‘They’re strong...’

Unbelievably strong, to the point of absurdity. Just moments ago, they seemed powerless and helpless.

‘Why?’

In that moment, Gwak Hwanso realized his mistake. They appeared weak because they were being overwhelmed by the fierce fighters of Cheonumaeng. In truth, no matter what anyone says, Maninbang were formidable martial artists who made the world tremble with fear.

Thus, Gwak Hwanso understood that he couldn’t face them alone.

His initial success was due to their distraction from the relentless attacks from Cheonumaeng. In a direct confrontation, relying solely on skill, he stood no chance against them.

Rushed by the adrenaline coursing through him and the confidence from his initial successful strike, Gwak Hwanso momentarily overlooked this fact. However, as always, regret comes too late.

«Die!»

Before he could properly regret his mistake, the blade from Changgwi's warrior was already flying towards his chest.

«Urgh!»

With all his might, Gwak Hwanso managed to twist his sword, deflecting the blade.

Fortunately, he was able to divert the trajectory of the flying blade. However, his own sword has bounced off in the process.

In that split second, as his throat was open, Chaengwi warrior's blade came back even faster than before.

«Sahyeong! Nooo...»

Time seemed to slow down.

Startled, Lee Jayang's scream stretched out as if heard from underwater. The sword, which had been flying like a flash, seemed to approach in slow motion.

However, Gwak Hwanso felt time slow down just like in that other world. No matter how he twisted his body to avoid it, there was no way to escape the blade heading for his throat.

As he sensed impending death and attempted to tightly shut his eyes, something unexpectedly intervened in his field of vision.

'A sword?'

A white-gleaming sword swiftly flew in, blocking the path of the blade aimed at Gwak Hwanso's throat. Yet, to him, it seemed like a feeble resistance. In a clash of power against power, it was common sense that a broadsword like that would prevail over a slender sword, wasn't it?

However, what unfolded before his eyes shattered that notion completely.

With a resounding clash, the swords collided. As the light sword slightly twisted, it redirected all the force contained in the broadsword. Simultaneously, the force emitted from the light sword pushed back the heavy blade like a piece of paper.

'What?'

Gwak Hwanso could see the distortion on the face of Changgwi's warrior. Judging from the trembling of his wrist, it seemed that he was experiencing the same pain Gwak Hwanso felt just moments ago.

The white gleaming sword didn't stop after deflecting the blade.

Paah!

The white blade moved, creating a fantasy-like trajectory in the air. It was both straight and curved, sharp yet smooth.

Seeing the blade aimed at his throat, the enemy panicked and instinctively dodged by jerking his neck.

Shiiiiing.

The sharp edge of the sword grazed past Changgwi's warrior's neck.

In the slowed-down world, Gwak Hwanso observed everything clearly. He saw the enemy's skin splitting open and a few drops of blood spraying from the torn wound.

'He dodged it...'

Gwak Hwanso's eyes widened.

The sword that had grazed past Changgwi's members neck paused in mid-air for a moment before swiftly retracting even faster than it had initially struck.

In that moment, Gwak Hwanso witnessed it all.

The sword, with a trajectory different from its initial thrust, swiftly swung back and severed the enemy's neck.

Slash!

A look of astonishment gradually replaced the relief on Changgwi's members's face, then turned into despair, and finally into sheer terror.

Thud.

As he collapsed, blood spurted from his severed neck, seeping into the white sand.

Gwak Hwanso couldn't utter a word. Goosebumps ran down his spine, not because he narrowly escaped death, but for another reason entirely.

'This... this is their skill.'

He observed and felt it keenly — the immense gap between the members of the Cheonumaeng and everyone else present. How many among those here would realize that the fallen warrior had not succumbed to just any sword, but to this particular one?

If, by chance, they were to inspect the body later, they would find not just one, but two slashes on the neck, which might puzzle them.

He realized that true skill doesn't always reveal itself blatantly but lurks in the brief moments unnoticed by ordinary observers.

«Are you alright?»

«Huh? Oh... yes! Yes.»

Gwak Hwanso raised his gaze absentmindedly to see a handsome man clad in a pristine white robe.

«Oh...»

«You're not fighting alone! You're fighting alongside your Sahyeongs and Sajils. Remember, this isn't just a fight for Gwak Sohyeop — it's the war of Haenam sect.»

Gwak Hwanso nodded in a daze, and the man responded with a nod of reassurance.

«Well then...»

Baek Cheon turned around. He casually flicked the blood off his sword before saying,
«Let's seize the ships.»

«Yes!»

Watching Baek Cheon dash ahead, Gwak Hwanso clenched his fists and shouted,

«Follow Vice Sect Leader!»

«Yes, Sahyeong!»

The disciples of Haenam, dressed in blue robes, surged forward like rough waves crashing onto the shore, overwhelming the members of the Changgwi Unit.

Amidst the azure waves and the scattering white gleam of swords, it was a moment where crimson blossoms bloomed brilliantly atop the landscape of the Southern Sea.