

## Chapter 1157

An Orthodox Sect abandoned by all Great Sects. (2)

A strange atmosphere settled in the room. Chung Myung stared intently at Hainan circled on the map.

‘Did I overlook it?’

No, that wasn’t it. Even if in his time Haenam Sect was not part of Gupailbang, he couldn’t overlook the fact that Haenam was now part of Gupailbang and is in Hainan Island.

However, the reason this fact didn’t linger in Chung Myung’s mind was that, in the first place, Gupailbang wasn’t the subject he needed to keep in mind and coordinate with.

‘That’s the realm of the Grand Baldie.’

Handling even the affairs of one Cheonumaeng was challenging, let alone dealing with the circumstances of Gupailbang. Besides, wasn’t it baldie’s responsibility?

But now, unmistakably, Im Sobyong pointed out that part. It was indeed a challenging aspect for Chung Myung to contemplate.

Others, realizing that the situation was more serious than they initially thought, stopped criticizing Im Sobyong and fell into serious thoughts.

Tang Gunak cleared his throat and spoke.

«So, does that mean... Haenam is currently in a precarious situation?»

«That’s right.»

«But there’s an aspect that I don’t understand. Even so, shouldn’t those who resolve this situation be Gupailbang, not us?»

Everyone nodded in agreement with his statement. However, Im Sobyong, with a meaningful smile, spoke up.

«Let’s look at this from a different perspective.»

«Hmm?»

«Put yourself in the shoes of Haenam Sect. Those prestigious martial artists were living well in Hainan one day. But next day, without any warning, Gupailbang, including Shaolin and Namgung, or well, the Five Great Families....»

Im Sobyong glanced at Namgung Dowi and continued with a humble expression.

«While trying to conquer the waterways of the Yangtze River, they got hit by Sapaeryeon and hastily made a non-aggression pact in Gangnam. Now, how do you think Haenam felt?»

«Like being struck by lightning, I suppose.»

«Must have felt cornered.»

«If it were me, I’d probably go set his bald head on fire.»

It was an event that didn’t require much deep thought. The Gangnam Non-Aggression Treaty was a disgraceful treaty that prevented Gupailbang and Five Great Families from setting foot in Gangnam. However, conversely, it meant humiliation and wasn’t a real threat.

But what about Haenam's perspective?

With just this Treaty, Haenam found itself isolated and surrounded by Sapaeryeon in no time.

«Wait a moment. Wasn't that the case even before this?»

«No, it's different.»

In response to Jo Geol's question, Im Sobyong spoke decisively.

«Of course, Gangnam was already a territory dominated by Sapa in the past. However, the difference between the era of Shinjuopae and Sapaeryeon is... whether they perceive each other as enemies or colleagues.»

«Ah...»

«Even in the era of Shinjuopae, Sapa was strong. But it was challenging to exert that strength. They saw each other as enemies from the start. Didn't Nokrim, too, get into a fight with those rotten Maninbang bastards?»

In response to that statement, Tang Gunak nodded heavily.

«That's right.»

«So, even if Haenam is geographically isolated, they didn't feel as threatened, because Sapa wouldn't unite. And if, by any chance, Sapa attacked, wouldn't Namgung Clan in the Yangtze River basin, Wudang, and Tangga in Sichuan that are geographically closer come to support them?»

«That makes sense.»

There was no need for Tang Gunak to think further. If such a situation had occurred, Tangga would have headed to Gangnam, putting everything else aside. Moreover, even if they hadn't personally gone, the same situation would have happened with the factions and the pact between Gupailbang and Five Great Families, it was natural.

«But the moment the Gangnam Treaty was signed!»

Shaaaak!

Im Sobyong's brush once again crossed the map along the Yangtze River.

Only then did everyone understand the pressure that Haenam must have felt.

«So, for three years...»

«Yes, that's right. Haenam endured for a whole three years, feeling as if their blood was drying up. They lived under the anxiety of not knowing when Sapaeryeon would target them. And finally! After that long and exhausting three years...»

«Maewhado exploded.»

«Yes. It burst open with a bang.»

All eyes were momentarily focused on one side. Namgung Dowi lowered his head with a deeply red face.

'I didn't expect this at all.'

Of course, even if they had thought ahead, it couldn't have stopped Namgung Hwang, but in any case, they didn't consider what position Haenam would be in when they attacked Sapaeryeon.

«The conclusion of the Maehwado incident is one thing. The Gangnam Treaty will likely end now... and that's it. Now, anyway, they can't set foot on each other's land. Didn't Shaolin already prove that during the Hangzhou incident?»

«That's right.»

Baek Cheon nodded vigorously.

Even without considering the treaty issue, Shaolin publicly proclaimed that during the massacre in Hangzhou, they felt reluctant to step into the land controlled by Sapaeryeon.

«Now, what will Haenam's position be?»

Baek Cheon looked at the map with a stern expression. What position? Well...

«They must be thinking they've been abandoned.»

«Exactly.»

Im Sobyong clapped his hands sharply.

«If Wudang and Shaolin had considered Haenam's position even a little, they shouldn't have allowed events like the Yangtze Treaty. And if Shaolin had considered Haenam's position even a little, during appearance of the Demonic Cult, they should have found a way to step on the land of Gangnam, signaling that in times of danger, either commoners or allies, Gupailbang might head to Gangnam.»

Im Sobyong sneered coldly.

«But they didn't do either of those things.»

People's shoulders shivered slightly. Looking at it from the other side, the despair that Haenam must have endured was keenly felt.

«Haenam Sect was probably already feeling a sense of unease given they were the last faction to join Gupailbang. In such a situation, being cleanly treated as a non-existent faction must have been another blow. In this situation, can they still believe that just maintaining the position in Gupailbang is enough? Do they have faith that Shaolin or Wudang will come running to save them? Unless they are complete idiots...»

«Well, they won't.»

«Exactly. Unless they are fools, they won't. In a situation where there's internal strife, like the current one where there's discord among factions, how many factions would stand up against Sapaeryeon to save Haenam, who is so far away?...»

Im Sobyong's gaze was chilling. There was a cold mockery containing the true state of affairs within the Orthodox factions, always proclaiming righteousness.

«There won't be any.»

No one dared to speak hastily. They all knew that despite wanting to deny it, the reality was as such.

‘Was Gangnam always so vast?’

Suddenly, the map seemed vast, without a top or a bottom. To support Haenam, they would have to cross that wide Gangnam region.

‘Unbelievable.’

Baek Cheon's lips trembled slightly.

In reality, Hangzhou wasn't that deep into Gangnam. The problem was the long journey along the Yangtze river, but it wasn't a place that was far away from the river to begin with. But Hainan was an entirely different story. To support Haenam, they would have to cross Gangnam, almost like throwing themselves into the enemy's stronghold.

«No, even if you reach the sea...»

«How do you get to the island?»

«... You'd have to find a ship from Gangnam, practically controlled by Sapaeryeon, to go to Hainan Island.»

«If you leave after you hear that there is a war, it will be over before you even arrive. So, it means you have to go in advance, doesn't it?»

Im Sobyong nodded emphatically, summarizing the situation.

“Yes, that's right. So, to help Haenam, these conditions need to be met. Even if Haenam doesn't request salvation, we should be able to head South, pierce through the turbulent Gangnam controlled by Sapaeryeon, and find a way to reach Hainan Island.”

Hyun Jong looked at the map with a thoughtful expression.

‘This is...’

This wasn't just something to criticize Gupailbang for. Realistically, there might not be a way to help Haenam from here.

«Nokrim King, this is...»

«Yes, I understand. But that's why it matters.»

Chwaak!

Im Sobyong unfolded his fan and began to speak.

«Haenam may hope for salvation, but realistically, they might not even imagine that there are those who would come to save them. That's why they are preparing for an imminent siege, sealing themselves off.»

«Um.»

«But, at such a time!»

Im Sobyong drew a line across Gangnam to Haenam with a stroke of his brush.

«What if we could help?»

«...»

«If the power of Gupailbang weakens, and the benefits derived from the name ‘Gupailbang’ become meaningless in the current situation, it's not a dream for Haenam to withdraw from Gupailbang and join Cheonumaeng of their own accord.»

Paaaaang!

Im Sobyong slammed the map. The hit was so powerful that a part of the sturdy map, made of thick fabric, tore with a sharp noise.

«Do you understand?»

«...»

«The departure from Gupailbang. Never in the history of Gangho has it happened before! Ah... Of course, it's the first time for them to leave voluntarily. A kicked-out sect...»

«But, seriously, is that bastard for real?»

«Ch... Chung Myung! I told you to hold it in!»

«It's not the situation right now!»

«Endure, Chung Myung!»

Putting down struggling Chung Myung again, Hyun Jong urged Im Sobyong to continue.

«Please go on.»

«Yes.»

Im Sobyong looked at Chung Myung with sorrowful expression and then spoke.

«Though it's not an easy feat, if we succeed, Haenam Sect would voluntarily leave Gupailbang and join Cheonumaeng. Every faction in the world will witness this.»

«...»

«Do you understand the significance of this? As mentioned earlier, everyone wonders why even smaller factions want to join Gupailbang. It's because they are Gupailbang! The history and reputation they possess are not easy to overcome, even if Cheonumaeng becomes powerful in a short period. However!»

Taaaaaaak!

Im Sobyong folded the fan once and laughed triumphantly.

«It's Haenam. Not just any small sect but one directly affiliated with Gupailbang. Haenam Sect, by abandoning Gupailbang and choosing to join Cheonumaeng, will declare to the world that Cheonumaeng is a more reliable place.»

«...»

«If so, what happens?»

Kkkuuwooooook.

Im Sobyong pressed the tip of the fan firmly onto a specific part of the map. The place where the tip touched was none other than mount Song, where Shaolin was located.

«The balance of power between Gupailbang and Cheonumaeng...»

Jjiiiiik.

The fan moved sideways, almost tearing through the map, capturing everyone's attention.

«Change is possible...»

The fan came to a stop as it moved alongside a long line it had drawn, pointing to none other than Hwasan in Shaanxi.

«I guess?...»

Im Sobyong's eyes emitted a chilling gleam.

«If it's possible, even if it requires sacrifices or paying a heavy price, I believe it's worth trying.»

Thud!

He lightly tapped his palm with the fan and grinned, stepping back.

«That's all.»

As Im Sobyong finished speaking, a strange atmosphere began to pervade the room. A mix of confusion, apprehension, and a peculiar excitement lingered in the air.