

Chapter 1138

However, what else could be done? (3)

All gathered around Im Sobyong at the center. Im Sobyong displayed a satisfied smile at the sight, and Baek Cheon, too, couldn't help but smile. This sight marked the beginning of Cheonumaeng, which had walked the path of conflict and division, finally coming together as one...

«Why's everyone here? Are you crazy?»

«Yes?»

«All the unnecessary people — scam! Just the leaders! Leaders only!»

Baek Cheon glanced around in surprise. Despite knowing that it was Im Sobyong who spoke, there was an eerie sensation, as if he heard Chung Myung speak.

«First off, you two Young Lords.»

«Yes.»

«Uh-huh.»

«Send one representative each from the Ice Palace and the Beast Palace forward. As for Hwasan... ugh, just bring all five.»

At that moment, Tang Pae raised his hand.

«What is it?»

«Why are there five representatives for Hwasan?»

Im Sobyong's eyes twitched at the question.

«I was going to keep quiet because of the kids around, but then, is the Young Lord of the Tang clan confident he can win against these five one-on-one?»

Tang Pae fell silent.

«Shouldn't those with the most strength be treated differently? Do I have to specify every little detail?»

«Sorry.»

«Tsk.»

Im Sobyong, seeming frustrated, waved his fan in front of his face.

«And, um...»

«Yes?»

«Is the Shaolin's representative coming too?»

Hye Yeon's face turned bright red.

«Well, Nokrim King, it seems there might be a misunderstanding. I am not the representative of Shaolin.»

«Then, join as the sixth member of Hwasan.»

Hye Yeon's face portrayed deep distress. Not only was the notion of being Shaolin's representative nonsensical, but joining as the sixth member of Hwasan seemed incredibly strange. Wasn't he from the Central Plains?

Suppressing various suspicions and distracting thoughts within, Hye Yeon spoke firmly with a resolute expression.

«Siju!»

«Yes?»

«Let's make it the fifth member, at least.»

«Still, being behind that person is a bit...»

«Why.... Why are you doing this to me?»

Hye Yeon's blatant gaze ignited a surge of frustration in Jo Geol, displaying an expression of profound injustice. However, excluding him, everyone else seemed to nod as if they completely understood Hye Yeon's sentiments.

«Let's make it the fifth.»

«Wait, are we deciding it like this? What about my opinion?»

«Geol-ah. Be quiet.»

«... What a harsh world.»

Anyway, everyone gathered around Im Sobyong. He was the only one here with a status worthy of representing a martial arts faction. Informally acknowledged as a military figure within Cheonumaeng, everyone naturally had to pay attention to his words.

However, Im Sobyong's first words after gathering everyone and asking for opinions left them all momentarily bewildered, while they were expecting some strategic advice.

«What should we do?»

Silence prevailed among the gathered. Each person's gaze toward Im Sobyong held different emotions. And he was waving his fan as if to say 'What can I do?'

«Well, um... Nokrim King.»

«Yes?»

«Did you think of any countermeasures...?»

«Countermeasures?»

Im Sobyong snorted.

“Even if I'm being beaten to death, where would I have a plan? If I had a plan, I would have used it already. Do you think I enjoyed being hit and just kept quiet about it?”

“That's true, but...”

When everyone was hesitating, Jo Geol was the one who needed to intervene.

“No, you're smart! You must have had some thoughts!”

“Oh, smart?”

“Yes, smart!”

Im Sobyong laughed while looking at Jo Geol.

“So, you’ve all been getting beaten up all this time, and now, it’s not exactly thrilling to get beaten more. It’s too much trouble to think, so why don’t you smart guys figure it out here? Now, come up with a fantastic plan that we won’t get hit anymore?”

“Not to that extent...”

“Because of people like you, smart people are dying!”

As Im Sobyong was about to lose his temper and rush forward, Yu Iseol and Yoon Jong instinctively grabbed and restrained him. Despite it being their first time doing such a thing, it flowed naturally, as smooth as water.

“Strategy? Do you think strategies are made instantly like that? Am I the kind of person who stores strategies in a pocket and takes them out when needed? Hey, you people! If strategies are that omnipotent, then why not prioritize the strategists! You ignore us because we can’t use swords and rely on our minds, and then suddenly, what? If we can’t come up with a plan on time, we’re useless?”

“Oh, nobody said...”

“Do you know what sort of life these scholars live? So, did Zhuge Liang succeed in his northern campaign? That strategist couldn’t do it either, so why are you fussing at me!”

“Nobody’s fussing...”

“You filthy swordsmen!”

As they looked at Im Sobyong with a sense of futility, inadvertently, they turned their heads towards Nokrim. Unlike the others who seemed lost for words, the members of Nokrim were yawning, as if such situation was familiar to them, with expressions that said, ‘That person’s throwing a fit again.’

«Well... it happens sometimes, just don’t pay attention to it.»

“...”

Everyone was momentarily intrigued. What kind of lives had these people lived?

“Ahem.”

Baek Cheon cleared his throat to break the tension.

«So, the conclusion is... you’re saying there’s currently no plan in place?»

«If there was a plan?»

«Yes?»

Im Sobyong said with a sullen face,

«If there was a plan, could you follow it as I instruct?»

«Well, of course...»

Im Sobyong turned to look at the representatives of the Beast Palace.

«Since you’re physically strong, so you can hinder Hwasan Geomhyeop while grabbing onto his arms and legs, while being beaten roughly. Of course, during the process, your heads might get banged up, your arms and legs might get broken, but you’ll win.»

His words had barely finished when the warriors from the Beast Palace erupted in a roar.

«Why should we do that!»

In response, Im Sobyеong turned to Baek Cheon with a sullen face.

«Did you hear that?»

Baek Cheon lowered his head, wearing a desolate expression.

Thinking about it, even if they didn't understand the relationship between Hwasan and Im Sobyеong, other factions had no reason to fully trust him. No, even if they did trust him, they had no reason to endure greater losses to achieve their goals.

'It's really difficult.'

Baek Cheon realized anew. It's incredibly challenging to reconcile the interests and justifications of each faction and unite them as one. The more one experiences it, the more doubt arises about whether this is truly possible.

People don't just sacrifice themselves for lofty ideals or follow paths deemed right by everyone. If that were possible in reality, why would the world be filled with conflicts?

«Tsk, tsk.»

Im Sobyеong glanced at Baek Cheon and clicked his tongue. Just as Baek Cheon was about to tilt his head in confusion, Im Sobyеong casually threw out a question.

“Isn't the answer already there?”

«Yes?»

«What has Dojang accomplished so far?»

«What have we done?...»

Well, they've... struck, kicked, pulled...

«...All we did was fight...»

Suddenly, a sense of guilt surged within.

«Ugh... Why does Dojang always act halfway?»

«Yes?»

«Was that what Dojang wanted? Who's the devil behind all of this?»

«Well...»

Clear as day. Without even needing to prefix it with 'the devil behind all', isn't Chung Myung the only one within Cheonumaeng who could be labeled as such?

«Then why do you think this guy instigated this situation?»

An immediate answer sprang not from Baek Cheon but from Ogeom gathered around him.

«Because of his filthy personality.»

«To watch us suffer.»

«To torment.»

«That's just how he is.»

Im Sobyеong seemingly taken aback, about to say something, when Tang Pae and Namgung Dowi subtly intervened.

«It seems correct.»

«Actually, there's no need for reasoning with that person.»

Im Sobyong fell silent, at a loss for words. In a situation that needed logic and rhetoric to be overturned, no compelling argument came to mind.

«True... but well, yeah... that could be... No, it's natural. He was always like that.»

To say it wasn't so, he had suffered too much. Too much.

«Anyway, that can't be the whole reason, can it?»

«If we force ourselves to think positively, perhaps.»

«Then why did that devil... no, why did Chung Myung Dojang instigate all this! Think! Think!»

«Well...»

Baek Cheon slightly furrowed his brow. The reason they pushed each other into this conflict? Honestly, he wasn't quite sure. Was it about understanding the buildup of emotions between them?

«Let's turn it around.»

«Yes?»

«Think about these fights, what did you come to learn?»

As Baek Cheon searched for an answer, Jo Geol, standing nearby, spoke up angrily.

«What did I learn? I've learned how filthy those people's characters are, and how I can handle those people more efficiently.»

«That's it.»

«Yes?»

Expecting another reprimand, Jo Geol was taken aback, looking at Im Sobyong in surprise. In an absurd twist, Im Sobyong seemed to nod approvingly, as if he had given the right answer.

«That's it, exactly!»

«... What?»

«How can we help each other more effectively?»

«...»

«That's no different from saying, you came to understand the weaknesses of other factions and your own strengths. It's fundamental to leverage your strengths against the enemy's weaknesses — that's the basics of strategy.»

Those who thought it made sense nodded in agreement.

«What? Don't you think I did well just now?»

Jo Geol's desperate exclamation fell on deaf ears.

«And that means understanding what I can do. Haven't you felt it all this time, being hit and hitting back?»

«...»

«When someone like Hwasan Geomhyeop comes charging, what can you all do? What will you do?»

The expressions of those listening turned serious.

«Well...»

Seeing them lost in contemplation, Im Sobyong subtly smiled behind his fan, 'Think.' Simply following someone else's instructions isn't enough.

No one can issue immediate commands on the battlefield. To survive, it's crucial for everyone to fully understand the abilities of those around them within that situation and quickly assess what needs to be done.

It's about thinking and acting independently rather than following orders. Before understanding the enemy, one must first know oneself, one's faction, and the capabilities and characteristics of those fighting alongside.

«As for us...»

Before Tang Pae could say anything, a beast warrior blurted out,

«We might not be confident in charging in and taking someone down, but we're pretty good at buying some time.»

«Oh?»

Im Sobyong's fan shook contentedly.

As attention focused, the Beast Palace's warrior scratched his head with a touch of pride.

«We may seem bulky and sturdy, but truthfully, our martial arts, mimicking the movements of beasts, are quite efficient in evading attacks. It's all part of nature.»

«Come to think of it...»

The Ice Palace, who had faced the Beast Palace the most, nodded in understanding.

«Good!»

Im Sobyong snapped the fan shut with a crisp sound.

It was a positive development that the Beast Palace spoke up first. Their previous stance of consistently stepping back, observing with an attitude of 'let's see how much you acknowledge us,' made it significant that they were the first to speak now.

It meant that they had understood what had been said.

«Tang clan can assist too. Holding off those charging in is something we're best at. While it might be tricky to attack when the Beast Palace is in the front... considering we've had some interactions with them, understanding won't be too difficult.»

«But won't you become vulnerable when you approach? Getting too close...»

«The Ice Palace can handle that. We have expertise in defense too!»

«Using the Ice Palace for defense seems like a waste. Wouldn't your sword be more suited for offense? It'd be better if we, Namgung clan, took that role...»

«Rather than the Ice Palace, Hwasan should focus on attacks...»

Once discussions began, a torrent of various opinions erupted from everywhere. Not only those gathered at the center but also those standing behind each added their own thoughts. Amidst the deluge of words, sometimes intense and at other times soft, Im Sobyong subtly covered his mouth with the fan.

'How simple could it be.'

Once a single goal is set, aren't people supposed to unite around it?

With a subtle smile, Im Sobyong folded his fan and spoke up,

«Even if things turn out this way with them...»

«Then let's use Nokrim as the shield!»

«But it's actually useless! Meat shields are the best!»

«Exactly! Isn't Nokrim better at withstanding an impact than the Beast Palace? Just push them in!»

Hearing these words as if struck speechless, Im Sobyong widened his eyes in disbelief.

«What? Are you suggesting using us as meat shields?! You dirty righteous scoundrels!»

And so, the heated debate among the factions of Cheonumaeng continued to rage, filled with arguments, fights, and shouting, lasting until the early hours of the next day.