

The Tower 161

Chapter 161

After reaching the 50th floor, the challengers had scattered, deciding to work on their stuff until the Dimension Gate opened. Some focused on upgrading their equipment, some on training, and some used this rare free time to rest.

The journey from the 1st to the 50th floor had been long and arduous, but now they could finally return to their home, Earth. While some were satisfied with their lives in the Tower, most challengers yearned to return to Earth. Their days here were filled with tension, the specter of death ever-present. Even outside the stages, safety was not guaranteed for the challengers.

The 50th floor gave the challengers a sense of stability for the first time in the Tower. Thanks to the White Elf tribe that maintained public order on many islands, the challengers who stayed on such islands hardly faced any danger.

The challengers on the 50th floor only had to wait a few more months to return to Earth. They had been happily savoring thoughts of their families, colleagues, lovers, and friends eagerly awaiting their return when something unexpected happened.

Out of nowhere, Lee Shin, Vuela, and Alice found themselves with exorbitant bounties on their heads, and with the Ice Elves' notarization, there was no escaping payment. All eyes in Lardel Archipelago were now fixed on them. Consequently, challengers of all ranks, from the lower to the upper, started to take action.

The ranking system of the floors 50th and above was different. It was a unified ranking tab called the Integrated Ranking, which integrated the ranks of challengers from all dimensions, not just the Earthlings'. In other words, there were two rankings: Earth Ranking and Integrated Ranking. The key difference was that the Integrated Ranking included all the challengers from the 50th to 100th floors.

Furthermore, the high floors, the 50th to the 100th, allowed challenges to move between floors. So, someone on the 100th floor could easily meet a challenger on the 50th floor.

Lee Shin had yet to enter the Integrated Ranking, i.e., he still hadn't reached the 50th floor. Therefore, the bounty seekers only targeted Vuela and Alice, combing the islands.

However, tracking their movements proved incredibly difficult, leaving the bounty hunters no choice but to search for individuals associated with them. Vuela and Alice were Lee Shin's closest confidants, and Lee Shin also had close ties to many Earthlings.

As a result, the hunters started targeting the Earthlings, which unfortunately led to casualties among the innocent.

"Wait, why are you doing this to me?"

"You look like an Earthling, aren't you?"

Five challengers from another dimension surrounded a male challenger from Canada, creating a dangerous atmosphere.

"N-no, I'm not! I'm not an Earthling!" shouted the Canadian.

"Tsk, judging by your appearance... you probably know where Vuela and Alice are. Are you sure you don't know?" accused a challenger.

"What are you talking about? I haven't even seen their faces... Keugh!" The Canadian challenger groaned in pain.

Someone had used their sword to stab him from behind. The challengers from higher floors had vastly superior skills, leaving the Canadian helpless.

"I... I don't know anything..." the Canadian challenger said, terrified.

"Well, if I stab you a few more times, I'll be able to tell if you know it or not," said the challenger from another dimension.

Screams echoed through the dark alley, and on that day, the first Earthling death was recorded on Island 53. Earthlings felt the gravity of the situation and established their own community as a result: United Earth.

While waiting for the Dimension Gate on the 50th floor to open, the challengers on the 50th floor exchanged information, provided support, and responded to the bounty hunters together.

[United Earth]

Shin Yu-Ra - Help is needed on Island 35 at the entrance of Fairy Hill. There are nine hunters; one seems to be Gervan, a low-ranker.

Mark Kelly - I'm on Island 36. I'll be there soon.

Irvin - I'm on the Fairy Hill already. I'll be there soon.

Kim Dong-Wook - I'll be able to help you as well. It will take me about 10 minutes.

John Calvin - Do we have any low-ranker here who can support Shin Yu-Ra? Do we have any low-ranker who can counter Gervan?

Mark Kelly - Gervan is 32,105th on the ranking. With the support of three challengers ranked above the 100,000th place, we should have no problem defeating him.

Shin Yu-Ra - Please hurry up! Anyone would be great!

Shin Yu-Ra, hiding on the rooftop of a building, clenched her teeth as she looked through binoculars at the entrance of Fairy Hill. A blond-haired woman and a brown-haired man were standing there, both wielding swords with tense expressions.

Shin Yu-Ra had arranged to meet those two Earthlings here. They had decided to meet late at night to avoid encountering the hunters, but they had attracted the attention of the hunters in that short time since their arrival.

‘Oh man... What should I do? Even if I go there now to help them, I won’t be able to stop the enemies.’

There were nine enemies, including Gervan, a challenger with a long horn protruding from his nose. He was considered a low-ranker, currently occupying the 32,105th position in the overall rankings.

Unless another challenger with a similar rank arrived, there would be casualties. Seven United Earth individuals had said they would come to support Shin Yu-Ra. It would take at least ten minutes for them to arrive here. Some would likely arrive before ten minutes, but the situation would remain unfavorable because the enemy had a low-ranker.

In the Integrated Ranking system, the 1st to 1,000th-place challengers were considered top rankers. Challengers ranked from 1,001st place to 10,000th place were considered rankers, while those from 10,001st to 50,000th were labeled low-rankers.

Upon reaching the 50th floor, each challenger's achievements were automatically aggregated and registered in the Integrated Ranking. Once a challenger was registered, they would not disappear from the Ranking even if they died. Therefore, becoming a ranker or a low-ranker was a challenging task.

Over 100 million challengers from all dimensions had reached the 50th floor. Most of them were either dead or outside the tower, so to be in the top 50,000, one had to be incredibly skilled.

‘For now, I should look for an opportunity to take them by surprise and buy time.’?

Shin Yu-Ra thought that the enemy was still unaware of her presence. In that case, she felt observing the situation and looking for a good opportunity was better than immediately joining them. She retrieved an arrow and applied poison to the tip.

‘It would be great if I could get Gervan...’?

She pulled the bowstring tight. On the other side, the brown-haired man swung his sword at Gervan, but Gervan easily caught the man's sword.

'Now!'

Shin Yu-Ra almost simultaneously released the arrow. It pierced through the air, aiming at the back of Gervan's neck. However, as soon as the arrow hit its target, the thick skin on Gervan's neck expanded and seized the arrow.

Crack—!

"This can't be happening!" Shin Yu-Ra felt devastated.

The arrow had accurately hit Gervan. However, the arrow broke and dropped to the ground. And the arrowhead that had pierced the skin was pushed out.

'Still, the poison must have entered...'

Gervan's sinister face turned toward Shin Yu-Ra. The paralyzing poison she had applied to the arrowhead should have stiffened his body, but he was moving perfectly fine, defying its effects.

'For now, I have to run away...'

While Shin Yu-Ra was thinking about her next move, Gervan leaped forward, landing on the rooftop instantly. He had jumped with such force that he had reached the top as if teleported. He blocked Shin Yu-Ra, who was trying to flee.

"There was another bug here," said Gervan.

"Tsk!" Shin Yu-Ra clicked her tongue.

Shin Yu-Ra immediately threw the Smoke Bomb in her arms onto the ground.

Poof!

The spinning cylindrical Smoke Bomb exuded gray smoke. Assuming that it would completely block the enemy's vision, she tried to run away. However, a thick hand emerged from the smoke, grabbed her wrist, and threw her toward Fairy Hill.

"Ahhhh!" Shin Yu-Ra screamed in terror as she flew off.

The man and woman, astonished by her sudden appearance, caught her and were pushed back in the process.

"Ha... Thank you so much." Shin Yu-Ra thanked the challengers who had caught her.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine..." Shin Yu-Ra muttered.

Determined, the three of them looked up at the building. Even if they managed to deal with Gervan, it would be difficult for them to escape considering that eight other hunters were in front of them.

"You guys are—" As the hunters tried to threaten Shin Yu-Ra and other challengers, a loud noise interrupted them.

Woong— Baaam—!

Suddenly, a large hammer fell from the sky. The hunter, barely avoiding the hammer, looked at the humans who appeared from the rising dust.

"You've come!" Shin Yu-Ra finally seemed relieved.

There were six Earthlings in the area now. When the hunters saw that, they frowned and seemed annoyed.

"Where's Gervan?" Mark Kelly, who had the hammer on his shoulder, asked.

"He should be there, on the rooftop. Wait, what's happening?" Shin Yu-Ra looked up and noticed something strange.

When the other challengers looked up at the rooftop, they also noticed something strange. Gervan should have emerged from the smoke long ago, but there was still no sign of him.

"Why is he still not—"

"Hey, look over there! There's Gervan over there!"

Something black flew through the smoke like a cannonball. The black cannonball-like creature crashed into the ground, creating a dust cloud.

"I guess he arrived just in time," said a challenger, looking at the scene.

"What do you mean?" Shin Yu-Ra asked, failing to understand the situation.

"He wrote to the community that he would join us immediately," replied the challenger.

Shin Yu-Ra hadn't looked at the community because she was too busy dealing with Gervan.

"Wait... so who just arrived?" Shin Yu-Ra asked again.

A human flew out of the building and landed on the ground. Shin Yu-Ra looked at that person with widened eyes. The person looked very familiar to her.

"Mr. Park Joo-Hyuk?" Shin Yu-Ra was surprised.

Holding a long sword, Park Joo-Hyuk glared at Gervan, now pinned to the ground, with his characteristic cold gaze.

"Keugh... You damn bastard...!" Gervan groaned in pain and glared back at Park Joo-Hyuk.

After thrusting his arms and legs into the ground, Gervan raised his thick horn and aimed it at Park Joo-Hyuk like a cannon. Shin Yu-Ra and the other challengers flinched because Park Joo-Hyuk was too close to react properly to Gervan's sudden attack.

Moreover, even when the horn was mere inches away from stabbing him, he didn't react. Therefore, the challengers could only imagine the horn piercing Park Joo-Hyuk, killing him right before them.

Thunk! Crash!

However, Gervan's horn just passed by Park Joo-Hyuk, and instead, Park Joo-Hyuk pinned Gervan to the ground, his sword firmly lodged in Gervan's heart. Many challengers were there, but not one could understand what their eyes had seen.

"...Keugh!" Gervan spewed blood and writhed.

The remaining challengers stared blankly at the unbelievable sight. The hunters were the same. Since Park Joo-Hyuk had defeated Gervan, these hunters had no reason to attack the remaining Earthlings.

"Damn it!"

"W-we are not involved in this!"

"Let's just run away!"

As soon as they confirmed Gervan's defeat, the hunters fled.

'I've used more of my Power of Transformation than I expected...'

Since climbing up to the 50th floor, this was the first time Park Joo-Hyuk had battled a low-ranker. He had used 500 points of Transformation Energy in a single attack just now. And since he couldn't kill the opponent with a stab to the back, Park Joo-Hyuk had to use an additional 150 Transformation Energy points.

Gervan was a good match for Park Joo-Hyuk, as his opponent specialized in delivering heavy blows. Therefore, as long as Park Joo-Hyuk could block that attack and counter properly, he could win against the opponent fairly easily.

'I will have to refrain from using my unique ability for a while.'

Park Joo-Hyuk exerted more pressure on Gervan, who stubbornly resisted without giving in. He then put the sword against Gervan's face.

"Damn it... How can I lose to a rookie who just got up here..." Gervan muttered and groaned in pain.

"Who ordered you to do this?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked Gervan coldly.

"What... are you saying... Isn't it obvious that I made my move for the bounty?" Gervan replied calmly, but his eyes showed a hint of panic.

"Why would someone like you aim for Vuela and Alice? I thought you knew your limits. But you decided to do this?" Park Joo-Hyuk questioned Gervan.

Park Joo-Hyuk moved his sword a bit closer to Gervan's face, unsatisfied by his answer. Overwhelmed by the piercing pain, Gervan quickly spilled his guts.

"T-the... the Platinum Group! They ordered it! I'm telling the truth! Please trust me!" Terrified, Gervan shouted.

After hearing his response, Park Joo-Hyuk glared at Gervan and pushed in his sword further to determine whether he was telling the truth.

"Keuahhh!?Stop! Please stop!" Gervan shouted in pain.

"Then tell me more," Park Joo-Hyuk asked Gervan coldly.

"The Head of the Platinum Group is looking for Lee Shin! That's why I was going after the Earthlings. I'm pretty sure that the members of this group are trying to get more information on Lee Shin through Vuela and Alice. Trust me, I'm sure!" Gervan explained, frightened.

"Huh? Are you sure they are not after the bounty?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked once again to confirm.

"Y-yes! Yes, I'm sure!" Gervan replied.

After seeing Park Joo-Hyuk's reaction, Gervan internally rejoiced because Park Joo-Hyuk seemed to believe his crude hypothesis.

"I've heard from my people that..." Gervan tried to add facts to fiction, but he could not finish his sentence.

Without even listening to his words, Park Joo-Hyuk slit his throat. He was aware that Gervan's words were lies. The Platinum Group was notorious for targeting bounties. They were mercenaries who only cared about money. There was no need to listen to Gervan's nonsense any further.

"Wow..."

A soft exclamation of awe rippled among the Earthlings. Others, including Shin Yu-Ra, looked at Park Joo-Hyuk with admiration. His ranking was, at best, 43,821st. Although he was also a low-ranker like Gervan, his ranking was much lower.

Simple Ranking was determined based on the total achievements of challengers. Hence, even if their rankings were similar, there could be significant differences in their combat capabilities. Just looking at the rankings, Park Joo-Hyuk's ranking was nearly 10,000 places below Gervan's, but he routed the opponent with superior force.

Shin Yu-Ra, who had seen Park Joo-Hyuk at Undermost before, had some understanding of his combat force, but someone like Mark Kelly or Irvin found it just bizarre. They were aware of the advancement of Koreans, but seeing it firsthand made it even more evident.

It was truly impressive how a challenger from the 50th floor had risen to the status of a low-ranker and managed to overpower someone ranked considerably higher than him.

Challengers like Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, and Park Hye-Won were referred to as the U Generation, the Undermost Generation. Furthermore, the leading challenger of the Undermost Generation was not Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, or Park Hye-Won, but someone else.

Everyone unanimously recognized him as the strongest: Lee Shin. When Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, and Park Hye-Won had reached the 50th floor, their rankings were 43,821st place, 40,399th place, and 48,681st place, respectively.

Watching Park Joo-Hyuk clean Gervan's blood off his sword and sheath it, the Earthlings pondered how high Lee Shin's ranking could be. The current biggest hot topic among Earthlings was when Lee Shin would reach the 50th floor.