

The Tower 162

Chapter 162: The Abandoned Warehouse

Island 113 was a seldom-visited location by challengers. In the past, it had been a hub of factories, drawing in a considerable number of people.

However, it became a ruined island after a fierce battle between two rankers, leaving behind abandoned factories and warehouses scattered throughout the area.

"Put him there."

Ethan's kidnappers threw him into a random abandoned warehouse. He could not resist because he was in mana-blocking shackles, and his vision was also blocked.

Thud!

"Ugh!" Ethan groaned in pain.

A large sack covered his face, and he was surrounded by darkness, failing to see anything. He felt that his back had hit a metal bar because his back ached.

"Remove the sack."

"Yes, Sir."

The long darkness finally ended, and light started to pour in after the sack was lifted, revealing the typical sight of an old abandoned warehouse to Ethan. Boxes with unknown contents were scattered everywhere, and so were some things that looked like containers.

At least ten people were before him, and it was impossible to estimate how many more people might be in this spacious warehouse.

"Hey!" Someone tried to get Ethan's attention.

This person had put Ethan in the large iron cage; he was smiling slyly.

"You won't get out of here alive," the man continued.

Ethan found the threat lame, and he wasn't even afraid.

"Kek." Ethan laughed at the man's pathetic attempt at threatening him.

"Are you laughing at me?" Ethan's mocking laughter enraged the man.

The man opened up the gate of the cage and kicked Ethan several times.

"Keuek!" Ethan groaned.

"You damn bastard! How dare you laugh at me!" The man kicked Ethan to the ground, closed the cage, and left, content.

"If you want to avoid suffering like this, you better listen to us," said the man.

Ethan, his face now bloodied and bruised, gritted his teeth and glared at the man. Satisfied with Ethan's current appearance, the man smiled. Ethan took a deep breath and looked around as the man disappeared from his sight.

"Hmm...?" Ethan looked surprised.

He could recognize the person locked up in the adjacent iron cage.

"It's that Japanese challenger... What was her name again?" Ethan muttered.

He furrowed his eyebrows as he stared at her.

"It's Miura Kanoko," replied the Japanese challenger, having heard his mutter.

"Oh yeah! The Explorer, right?" Ethan asked.

.

"Yes, that's right. And you're Ethan, the werebear, right?" Kanoko asked.

"Hahaha! Yeah, that's right," Ethan replied.

"You seem pretty calm," said Kanoko, looking at Ethan.

"Well, there's no need to worry. Tashi will soon come to rescue me," Ethan replied.

The tale of Ethan and the Cyclops' love had become quite famous among the Earthlings.

"Oh... I see..." Kanoko nodded and leaned her head against the iron bars.

Unlike Ethan, Kanoko was worried. She could not even tell which island this was. Moreover, the enemies seemed highly skilled. She could not tell if her comrades could come and save them.

'I shouldn't have been so greedy.'

Staying safe in Lardel Archipelago was a challenge, and even in Islands 1 to 10, complete safety couldn't be guaranteed. Islands 11 to 30 were relatively safer, but due to their vastness, there were still potential risks. Beyond Island 30, the danger increased significantly.

Nevertheless, not everyone stayed in the inner islands. After all, different classes of challengers had specific needs for items, ingredients, and encounters with particular individuals. Thus, many had no choice but to explore the outer islands.

However, it was absurd that the Earthlings had to experience such hardships just because there were bounties on Lee Shin, Vuela, and Alice. There were no bounties on other Earthlings, yet they all had to be cautious of potential threats.

Kanoko thought this situation was utterly nonsensical. Lee Shin had not shown up, and they had no contact with Vuela and Alice since they climbed to the 50th floor.

"Ha..." Kanoko sighed.

"Hey, I said you don't have to worry about it," said Ethan nonchalantly.

Kanoko was about to say something in response, but she noticed someone approaching and looked to the other side.

"Put them in there."

"Let us go!"

"We don't know anything!"

There came the voice of a woman and a young boy. Their head was also under sacks; not long after, their sacks were also removed.

"Wait, is that Mrs. Kang Jung-Won?" Ethan looked at the woman and said.

"Oh, is she the lady who makes delicious tteokbokki?" Kanoko asked Ethan.

Ever since her time in Undermost, Kang Jung-Won had often been called the tteokbokki lady. Familiar with her other name, she nodded looking at Ethan and Kanoko. Also, the boy who was standing next to her was also Korean and looked like a middle school student.

The boy wasn't talented enough to reach this floor alone; he had received help from many to make it up here.

"How could they kidnap a child? Aren't you guys ashamed?" Ethan muttered.

"Hey, I'm not a kid," the boy replied with a frown.

"If you're not a kid, then what are you?" Ethan said, looking at the kid.

"Ugh, you don't even have hair!" the kid shouted, looking at Ethan.

Upon hearing the boy's words, Ethan was shocked and froze.

"Oh my, Sang-Woo! You shouldn't say things like that!" Kang Jung-Won was startled and scolded the boy.

"So your name is Sang-Woo? Hey Sang-Woo, bald people would take umbrage if you keep saying such things," said Ethan, looking at the boy.

"But it's true, isn't it?" Sang-Woo looked at Ethan, unable to see the problem.

"Well, it's possible to be sued for defamation of someone's character..." Ethan tried to explain.

"Just shut up," Kanoko said.

Ethan could only mumble in a sullen voice in response. The man who had kicked him earlier returned.

"Now, let me ask you a simple question. Why isn't Lee Shin coming up?" the man asked.

"Maybe he killed himself," Ethan replied sarcastically.

"Ugh, you must not have gotten beaten enough yet," said the man, glaring at Ethan.

"We said we don't know!" Sang-Woo shouted.

The man, about to open Ethan's cage, hesitated and glared at the defiant boy.

"Hah, you think I'll go easy on you just because you're a kid?" The man laughed at the boy.

Thud!

Slamming the iron cage hard, the man opened the cage with Kang Jung-Won and Yu Sang-Woo. The man grabbed Yu Sang-Woo by his collar and lifted him.

"Ugh... Let me go!" Sang-Woo held onto the man's arm and tried to kick his jaw.

However, the man tilted his head and easily avoided the boy's attack.

"Huh, quite tenacious—" said the man, laughing at Sang-Woo.

Baaam—!

However, a series of consecutive kicks struck the man's ear. Because the shackles blocked mana and reduced one's physical abilities, Sang-Woo's kicks did not cause much pain. However, the man's face contorted rapidly. His pride was hurt.

“Ugh, you son of a bitch!” the man shouted angrily.

Wooong—! Bam!

“Keuaakkk—!” Sang-Woo screamed in pain.

"Ahhhh! Sang-Woo!" Kang Jung-Won started to panic.

The man had slammed the boy into the iron bars of the cage strongly, so Sang-Woo’s head was bleeding. Ethan, Kanoko, and Kang Jung-Won stood up, their faces stiff with shock.

"You idiots seem to be having trouble understanding your situation."

The man glared at them. He gritted his teeth and picked up the handgun placed outside the cage.

Bang!

He quickly aimed the gun at Ethan’s shoulder. The bullet tore through Ethan’s muscles, sending him flying before he crashed onto the other side.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The next three bullets pierced Ethan’s legs and his other shoulder. After the first shot, Ethan had tried to get up, but he could no longer get up.

“Know your place. Got it?” the man said, looking at Ethan, who had collapsed.

“Be prepared... I’m going to get you no matter what,” Ethan glared at the man and gritted his teeth.

The man did not care. Ignoring Ethan, the man stared at Kanoko and Kang Jung-Won and smiled slyly.

"I will forgive you two. Whoever wants these women—" An abrupt noise interrupted the man.

Boom—!

There was an explosion, and the massive door of the abandoned warehouse flew away next. The metal door spun around and flew toward the man holding the shotgun.

Baaam—!

As the man jumped to avoid the metal door, it hit the cage and fell.

"Man... There are so many people here." Baek Hyun, responsible for the gate flying off its hinges, muttered while panting heavily.

He had been running around like crazy searching for this place, so he was out of breath. The man smirked at Baek Hyun and approached him.

"Did you come here alone?" the man asked Baek Hyun.

"Well, I think it will be enough," Baek Hyun replied.

"Tsk, do you really think you can deal with all of us alone? You're, at best, a low-ranker, placed near the bottom of the list." The man laughed at Baek Hyun.

Baek Hyun quickly scanned the inside of the abandoned warehouse, noting the presence of nearly a hundred people, each armed and prepared for combat. Among them, there were at least three who looked like low-rankers. The man standing before him was also a low-ranker with a similar ranking.

"If you're bounty hunters, you should be going after the bounties. Why are you bothering these innocent people?" Baek Hyun asked.

"Then you tell me. Where are Vuela and Alice?" the man asked.

"I am sure you have already heard this many times, but I will repeat: We don't know!" Baek Hyun shouted.

Baek Hyun was really frustrated. Why wouldn't these men believe him and the Earthlings? Had they just not repeated the line enough times?

"Well... We're the best at making people remember what they have forgotten," said the man.

The man raised his hand and pointed his index and middle fingers at Baek Hyun. As the others were about to respond to the man's signal with wicked laughter, a sharp wind rushed into the abandoned warehouse.

"Khaaak!"

"Huh? What's going on?"

"Move aside!"

"Hide behind those covers!"

As the hunters hurriedly hid themselves, Park Hye-Won approached Baek Hyun.

"Hey, you found us pretty quickly," said Baek Hyun, smiling at Park Hye-Won.

"Where are the others?" Park Hye-Won asked.

"They're almost here," Baek Hyun replied.

The man heard Baek Hyun and Park Hye-Won's conversation and frowned. The man was unsure if it was a bluff, but more reinforcement could be coming. Seeing how confidently they had rushed in, there had to be a good reason.

The man decided to end this quickly. After looking around for a while, the man moved toward the hostages.

'I'll capture those two at once by using the hostages.'

The man approached the collapsed boy and Kang Jung-Won, but something in the space between blocked his path.

Whoosh—! Swoosh!

'Invisibility...!'

The man had barely evaded the dagger that sprang out of thin air and stepped back.

'Did she break in while I was dealing with Baek Hyun?'

The man thought there was still a chance, as the hostages were still there. He thought he would have a chance if he could block this woman while the others blocked Baek Hyun and Park Hye-Won.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

The abandoned warehouse suddenly started shaking, and light rays poured from the ceiling. When the man looked up, humans descended from the newly formed holes.

"Is this the place?" Park Joo-Hyuk said, holding something resembling a parachute with one hand.

Park Joo-Hyuk then landed on top of a container.

"Damn! I almost threw up!" Inyuu Kogo looked at the parachute in his hand as if he despised it and set it on fire immediately.

"Wow, I never knew there were places like this?"

Other than these people, Shin Yu-Ra, Mark Kelly, Evans, and many other Earthlings came to rescue them.

"At least I don't see any rankers here," Park Joo-Hyuk scanned the hunters and muttered.

It was a show of confidence. He could deal with anyone as long as no rankers were present.

"Well, you know, we have three low-rankers over here... So, who wants to take them?" Park Hye-Won asked.

Park Joo-Hyuk and Baek Hyun exchanged glances, and each rushed toward a low-ranker.

The fight between bounty hunters and Earthlings ended more quickly and easily than expected, with the Earthlings trouncing their enemies. The enemy leader collapsed on the ground, bleeding profusely.

"Who's behind this? You guys wouldn't gather like this without someone behind you." Park Joo-Hyuk shouted at the man.

When Park Joo-Hyuk asked, the man smirked.

"It's the Platinum Group," the man replied.

"Are you sure?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked again to confirm.

Gervan had said the same thing earlier. Were those guys really behind this?

"No matter how good you are as a whole... you guys won't be able to defeat the Platinum Group," said the man.

Those were that man's dying words. Park Joo-Hyuk seemed a bit more serious after talking with the man. The Platinum Group was a challenging organization to handle. Their goals might have been just points, but their combat force was not to be underestimated.

"Well, for now, everyone should stay together. And try to stay within Island 10 and below."

Park Joo-Hyuk warned the challengers. And with that, the kidnapping of Earthlings on Lardel stopped. After experiencing the unbelievable unity of the Earthlings, the bounty hunters rarely bothered them.

The Earthlings, who had become a force of their own, never became targets of criminals and bounty hunters on Lardel Island again. Besides, unlike what the Earthlings had expected, the Platinum Group did not make any special moves.

Park Joo-Hyuk sought advice from Clark, the American challenger, but he suggested that it would be best to stay away from the Platinum Group and watch them for a while and not provoke them if possible. However, Zhuge Yun had a different opinion. In the recent fight at the abandoned warehouse, Zhuge Yun had pinpointed the location of the bounty hunters. This time, Zhuge Yun strongly argued that they should actively seek out the Platinum Group.

Zhuge Yun suggested that potential threats should be eliminated in advance. Therefore, balancing the two opinions, Park Joo-Hyuk ordered the Earthlings to investigate the Platinum Group while staying cautious secretly.

While the Earthlings lived like that, Vuela and Alice, who had gone into hiding, finally revealed themselves. Less than a week remained until the Dimension Gate's opening.

Island 43 was an island that was placed adjacent to Island 30, where a considerable number of criminal groups existed. Shortly after Vuela and Alice appeared there, rumors spread to the inner island that one of the criminal groups on that island had been wiped out.

When the names of Vuela and Alice, who had caused a stir on Lardel Archipelago for a while, resounded again, the dormant bounty hunters made their moves again. While the Earthlings were still contemplating their next steps, Lee Shin finally appeared on the Integrated Ranking. As the news spread, challengers immediately began searching for his name, starting from the low-ranker section.

"Huh...? What's going on?" They could not find Lee Shin's name in the low-rankers section.

The endless scrolling finally stopped after surpassing five-digit numbers, passing through four-digit numbers, and reaching three-digit numbers.

Integrated Ranking 999th place - Lee Shin.

It was the birth of the first top-ranker on the 50th floor.