

The Tower 166

Chapter 166: The Return

All of a sudden, the challengers of the United Earth arrived on Island 43. There were criminals waiting for them, so they gathered together in one location to confront the criminals. The tension in the air weighed down heavily on the challengers.

"We should also have a trump card to protect ourselves." Sham, a low-ranker on the 10,300th position, stood in front of Vuela and threatened him by brandishing his spear.

"You dare say such things even after seeing Lee Shin's ranking?" Vuela calmly replied to them.

Lee Shin, as a top-ranker at the 999th position, carried more clout than they had anticipated. As a result, those who were ahead of Vuela in terms of combat force could not casually launch an attack on him.

The unease on the enemies' faces was clearly visible, an anxiety that Lee Shin could appear in front of them at any moment and sweep them away. If they were to fail to capture or kill every single one of them in one fell swoop, Lee Shin would come after them for revenge.

While Sham, who was standing at the very front, was deciding what action was best in this situation, someone approached him and whispered. A smile appeared on Sham's face.

"So... you asked if we dare say such things even after seeing Lee Shin's ranking, right? Well, is Lee Shin here with us right now? I don't think so. Also, I've heard that he values Earthlings a whole lot."

With those words, a challenger revealed himself from the back. It was Sisian, who was ranked 4,311th. He was a challenger who had been humiliated by Lee Shin last night during a battle in the Feix.

Crack— Crack—!

Sham cracked his neck and started to warm up. The 4,311th position was a rank that not even Vuela could simply deny.

"Hahaha! You annoying bastards. Do you think you can just barge into someone else's territory like this? Huh?" Sisian laughed at Vuela as he spoke. "I'm not here to seek revenge because of Lee Shin... uh, but still, trying to take someone else's territory by force like this is not my style!"

The challengers, who did not know what had happened to Sisian last night, could not understand why he mentioned Lee Shin's name.

"Huh? What is he even talking about?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"I have no idea," Vuela replied.

"The important thing right now is how we can stop that ranker," Alice pointed out.

Park Joo-Hyuk, Vuela, and Alice whispered to each other while looking at Sisian.

"When will Lee Shin join us?" Vuela asked.

"He said there will be reinforcements to come help us, so we should continue what we are doing," Alice replied.

"What do you mean by reinforcements? What about the Master himself?" Park Joo-Hyuk seemed confused.

Alice decided to launch this attack after receiving a message from Lee Shin last night. Since Lee Shin assured her and said that the reinforcements would soon arrive, it was enough reason for her to carry out the operation.

‘But will reinforcements capable of facing a ranker at a decent position really come to help us?’

Alice's doubt was cleared faster than she expected.

Whoosh— Clang!

Suddenly, something appeared and clashed with Sisian's ax, pushing him back. Alice, who did not even realize that someone else was there, looked ahead in surprise.

There was a woman who was dressed in black and brown clothes that clung tightly to her body. Above the mask that covered her nose and mouth, her eyes shot a sharp look at Sisian.

"So, you must be Sisian... a ranker who is full of bluff," the woman said in a mocking tone.

Her words made Sisian frown.

"Who are you?" Sisian asked.

In response, she twirled the daggers in her hands and crossed them, creating a scratching sound as the sharp metal clashed.

"Me? Let's just say I'm the deputy leader of the Platinum Group. It seems I'm deeply connected to this place," the woman introduced herself.

Alice and Park Joo-Hyuk looked at the woman in astonishment upon hearing her words.

"You're from the Platinum Group? But then why are you helping us?" Alice asked the woman, bewildered, because she could not understand the situation.

"I'm helping you guys because the leader told me to come help you," the woman replied.

Lee Shin and Cain had arrived at an agreement, finally finding common ground in their negotiations the night before. Cain was pleased to repair his antagonistic relationship with Lee Shin and at the same time protect his clone, and Lee Shin was glad to get the ownership of Island 43 through their cooperation.

Originally, Lee Shin's goal was to gain a foothold on an island close to Island 30. His goal was never to start a business to gain points like them. Therefore, Lee Shin decided to allow the Platinum Group to keep their businesses going there, and they would assist him by handling the affairs related to Island 43. This assistance included dealing with the various forces on Island 43.

Although Lee Shin could have done this on his own, involving the Platinum Group, which had been managing the place for a long time, would get things going faster. That was why the deputy leader of the Platinum Group, Pleta, had come here under Cain's command.

"Wait, are you the deputy leader of the Platinum Group? Ha!

So, you must be that Pleta. It is ridiculous for someone with a lower rank than me to blabber such nonsense!" Sisian became red with anger and clenched his ax.

When he lifted up his ax, it created an atmosphere that seemed to reignite the fight and intensified the heat in the space.

"We surrender! We give up. We don't want to be part of this anymore," said a man.

All of a sudden, the leader of the criminals who intended to protect this place raised both hands.

"What did you just say? What the hell do you think you're doing right now!" Sisian, who was about to charge toward Pleta and fight, spoke in a bewildered tone.

"Stop all this nonsense! What do you expect us to do in a situation like this? It's all meaningless if we can't subdue them right now, especially with the involvement of the Platinum Group!" the leader of the criminals shouted at Sisian.

Engaging in further combat was futile when the opposing side had a top-ranker in their team. The plan to quickly subdue the people of the United Earth using Sisian and meet again at the negotiating table had become meaningless at this point.

They had no choice but to give up their position. At that declaration, a smirk appeared on Pleta's face. Sisian once again found himself unable to hide his frustration.

While waiting for the appointment with Genia, Lee Shin reviewed the proposals that he would present to her.

Squeak—!

The door slowly opened, and Genia entered the room, her pure white hair fluttering behind her.

"Oh, you are already here, Mr. Lee Shin," Genia greeted Lee Shin, bowing her head.

"Yes," Lee Shin replied.

After a brief greeting, a staff member brought in coffee and placed it on the table before leaving. Lee Shin and Genia were at a cafe within the Feix facility that was designed to ensure absolute secrecy. Many people utilized this place for such a purpose.

Besides, Lee Shin had covered the area with his mana in advance to prevent any unexpected situations. Genia slowly sipped her coffee, before starting to talk.

"I didn't expect that you would meet me so easily," said Genia, looking at Lee Shin.

"Just because I disregarded Versia, doesn't mean I'm disregarding you," Lee Shin replied.

Her expression subtly stiffened upon hearing Lee Shin's words. Perhaps she sensed that Lee Shin saw through the internal situation.

"It seems your information network is better than I thought," Genia said.

"Well..." Lee Shin did not say anything more.

He just took a sip of tea with a relaxed smile on his face. Lee Shin knew that he had the upper hand in this meeting.

"Ahem... Actually, I think it's for the better that you know us well, because then there's no need for me to give unnecessary details," said Genia.

After saying that, Genia took another sip of coffee as if she was worried about being put in a spot.

Lee Shin thought today would be a simple meeting to establish a mutually beneficial relationship, but her reaction was quite different from what he expected.

"Well, as you might already know, Mr. Versia and I oversee different districts. Besides, our values were quite different from each from the beginning," Genia started to explain to Lee Shin.

"Yes, I'm aware of that," Lee Shin replied.

"...There's an official proposal from the Defense Force. It is to enhance our cooperation with you, Mr. Lee Shin," said Genia.

"What is it?" Lee Shin asked.

Before giving her response, Genia gulped as if she was nervous about it.

Genia, being considered second in rank in the Defense Force, was in a position of high power. Even her military power alone was enough to overwhelm most rankers. It was the first time even Lee Shin had seen her so tense, in contrast to her usually cool and composed personality.

"At least while you are staying in Lardel Archipelago, please inform us whenever you have contact with the top-rankers. That's the first proposal," said Genia.

She said those words and stared at Lee Shin with a nervous look on her face. Surely she must have found it absurd. In essence, it was no different from telling Lee Shin to report to the Defense Force. Besides, Lee Shin was not a ranker, but a top-ranker.

‘Well, she is definitely still lacking...’

She had great strength, leadership skills, charisma and judgment, but she was not as good as Versia in negotiating and applying her political power. Lee Shin could already tell what was lacking in her compared to Versia.

Besides, the way she proposed these to Lee Shin would not have worked with other top-rankers who were hot-tempered—they would have left this meeting a long time ago in frustration. Granted, she might have figured out Lee Shin’s personality in advance and decided to go with this way of proposal.

“Well, of course you will be recompensed accordingly. So please listen until the end,” Genia added on quickly.

Lee Shin chuckled at her words and nodded. Perhaps his reaction made her even more nervous, as her tension was clearly visible to Lee Shin.

"The second condition is that we hope you'll help us when the Defense Force clashes with some top rankers. Of course, this is only when you are within Lardel Archipelago," said Genia.

Since it was a condition that Lee Shin had anticipated already, he nodded again.

"What's next?" Lee Shin asked Genia.

"The last condition is to lend us your name. It is for us to announce that the relationship between you, Lee Shin, and the Defense Force is official,” said Genia.

The name ‘Lee Shin’ was very different from that of any other top-ranker who might come at the 999th position. That was because Lee Shin was just a challenger who had only reached the 50th floor. Many

were expecting that if Lee Shin continued to climb the Tower, he would eventually be ranked in a double-digit position.

That was one of the reasons why there was an obsession over Lee Shin in the Defense Force. Lee Shin looked at Genia, with an expressionless face. She tried not to show her emotions, but it was clear that she was intensely worried and also curious about Lee Shin's response.

Thanks to the Immortal Sphere, Lee Shin never forgot what he had seen once. Just by looking at her, the changes in her were imprinted in Lee Shin's mind. Since all the subtle changes remained in his memory, Lee Shin could not help but notice the difference all the time.

"So, what is the recompense for that?" Lee Shin asked Genia.

"Please tell me what you want. I will give you everything I can," Genia replied with nervousness.

After hearing her response, Lee Shin raised a corner of his mouth and smirked.

"Did you say you can do anything for me? Can you guarantee that?" Lee Shin asked again to confirm.

"Of course. I can give you everything of mine. If you have any requests, please tell me," Genia replied.

Lee Shin stroked his chin. It was amusing for him to see her worry about what he would ask her.

"You," Lee Shin replied.

Hearing this completely unexpected response, Genia looked at Lee Shin with a puzzled expression.

"Sorry? What do you mean by that?" Genia asked, because she did not understand what he wanted from her exactly.

"Didn't you say that I could say whatever I want?" Lee Shin asked.

"Yes, I did say that," Genia replied.

"So I said, you," Lee Shin replied.

"...Huh?" Genia started to panic.

Her carefully maintained poker face crumbled for the first time.

The day of the opening of the Dimension Gate was approaching. It was a festival for all the challengers in Lardel Archipelago, because it was a period when those who had been suffering inside the Tower throughout the year could return to their hometowns.

Depending on the dimensions, the gates were created in different locations. While the vast majority appeared in Islands 1 to 10, a very small number of dimensions had their gates located outside of those islands. Furthermore, since the gates operated based on the origin of the challengers, those who did not come from that dimension could not use them.

At the Eastern Square of Island 3, countless Earthlings had gathered. They were calming their pounding hearts, waiting for the Dimension Gate to open. The Dimension Gate always opened precisely at midnight.

The current time was 11:03 PM, meaning in 57 minutes, they would finally be able to return to Earth. They thought about the transformation of the boss of the first floor named, Lee Shin, and the nearly four years that had passed since then. The remaining four out of the five challengers who had first entered the tower after the upheaval of the first floor was filled with complex emotions.

"Are we finally going back to Earth?" Baek Hyun asked with excitement.

"Oh, Hyun! I'm so excited for us! My heart is pounding so fast."

"Everyone will be amazed when they see my ranking, don't you think?"

"I wish Eun-Ju could have come back with us...." Park Hye-Won muttered.

Upon hearing Hye-Won's sad voice, the three guys fell into silence.

"When we get out, let's inform Eun-Ju's parents and hold a funeral."

"Okay, let's do that."

"Hey, guys! We can live for Eun-Ju as well!" Kang Ji-Hoon tried to comfort others who seemed depressed.

Kang Ji-Hoon cheered them up with his bright voice, so they tried hard to maintain a calm expression.

"By the way, where is Joo-Hyuk?"

"Yeah, also, I haven't seen CEO Hwang either."

As they were looking around for others, they could soon recognize familiar faces among the crowd of Earthlings.

"Joo-Hyuk!"

"Hyun-Ah! We are over here!"

Park Joo-Hyuk's Task Force reunited, and he warmly looked at them, his comrades.

"Contact me when you return to Korea," said Park Joo-Hyuk, looking at his Task Force team members.

Park Joo-Hyuk then wrote down his phone number, which he used to use in Korea, and handed it to them.

"You surely will be really busy once you go back," said Baek Hyun, looking at Park Joo-Hyuk.

In response to Baek Hyun's words, Park Joo-Hyuk chuckled.

"Well, you'll be busier than me, I'm sure," Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

Looking at the rankings of the Korean challengers who had reached the 50th floor, Baek Hyun was in first place and Park Joo-Hyuk was in second, excluding Lee Shin. Although Park Joo-Hyuk did say so, he believed that as a government official, he would be busier than Baek Hyun.

However, in terms of popularity, Baek Hyun would be more popular, so he would live a busy life as a superstar in Korea for the time being. Because he is a government official, Park Joo-Hyuk's news would probably be somewhat more subdued.

"Hey, look over there! CEO Hwang and Mrs. Kang also came too."

While they were having a conversation, other people also started gathering one by one. Just as the sound of conversations among Earthlings were starting to grow louder, a White Elf from the Defense Force stepped forward.

"Please step back, everyone," said the White Elf.

As the White Elf nudged the people out of the way, a massive portal began to appear in the center of the square. The Dimension Gate was opening.