

## **The Tower 168**

### Chapter 168: The Encounter

On December 1st, the Dimension Gate opened, marking the beginning of a new era. Earth welcomed challengers from various countries adorned with honors and glory from their conquests.

The chatter about the upper floor challengers' progress gradually subsided, and new stories about the Korean challengers who reached the 50th floor recently spread throughout the world.

[The Miracle of Undermost: Korean Challengers Achieve top rankings on the 50th floor.]

[Baek Hyun, Park Joo-Hyuk, Park Hye-Won. The trio of top rankers. Who are they?]

[They have surpassed Cha Yu-Min! Who are they really?]

[The thirteen Koreans who could not step foot in the top rankings yet.]

[World records achieved! The astonishing survival rate of the Korean challengers!]

[Baek Hyun: Get lost. The controversy over his personality.]

[Is Park Joo-Hyuk a secret agent trained by the Korean government?]

[Park Hye-Won—the only female challenger among the three to become a top ranker. Love calls are pouring in from all over the world.]

Articles and comments poured in like raindrops in a storm. Most Korean challengers who entered the Tower after the upheaval on the first floor and recently reached the 50th floor received some attention, but only a select few garnered overwhelming interest.

As for the people from the other floors, they were met with indifference and dismissive reactions from others. A challenger, who had managed to reach the 70th floor and pridefully exited the Dimension Gate, found his pride hurt by the people's reaction.

"Ummm... Excuse me, Sir?"

The man grabbed a journalist who was passing by.

"Yes? Who are you...?" The journalist asked the man, unaware of his identity.

"Oh, my name is Park Yoon-Ki, the one who reached the 70th floor this time," The man named Park Yoon-Ki introduced himself to the journalist with a disappointed voice.

"Ah! Are you Mr. Park Yoon-Ki? Didn't you say you were going to the 65th floor last year?" the journalist asked Park Yoon-Ki.

When the journalist recognized him, Park Yoon-Ki grinned and nodded vigorously.

"You remember me, right? I knew it!" Park Yoon-Ki seemed excited.

"You managed to break through the 70th floor already? Wow... that is quite impressive!" The journalist showed interest in Park Yoon-Ki.

The journalist's admiration was enough to pump Park Yoon-Ki's chest full of pride.

"Hahaha, it's not that big of a deal, really..." Park Yoon-Ki tried to talk to the journalist.

However, a shout echoed from a distance.

"Park Joo-Hyuk has stepped out of his car!"

The journalist's eyes widened, and he quickly turned away from Park Yoon-Ki.

"What? Really? Is he out of it already?" the journalist asked.

The journalist immediately left Yoon-Ki, soon disappearing in that direction.

"Hey, wait up! Where are you going?" Park Yoon-Ki yelled at the journalist.

He could not catch the journalist getting farther away from him. Clearly, most journalists were more interested in Park Joo-Hyuk than in him.

"Still... I can't believe they are treating me like this. Reaching the 70th floor is a big deal, right? Yes..." Park Yoon-Ki muttered.

Tears welled in his eyes, an emotion he didn't experience even when the boss of that stage had beaten him like a drum.

"Ms. Park Hye-Won, please give me your autograph!" On the other side, a woman shouted, looking at Park Hye-Won. She had recently become Park Hye-Won's fan.

"Did she seriously ask for an autograph? This place is packed with people, so why would Park Hye-Won do that for you..." Park Yoon-Ki mumbled, sounding depressed.

"I will do it for you, so everyone, please calm down! It would be appreciated if you guys could start lining up here..." Park Hye-Won said, looking at the crowd asking for her autograph.

"What did I just hear? Did she just tell them to line up?" Park Yoon-Ki could not believe her influence.

Park Hye-Won was standing quite far from Park Yoon-Ki and hadn't shouted despite her noisy surroundings. However, every word that came out of her mouth clearly reached Park Yoon-Ki's ears.

For Park Yoon-Ki, who had honed his hearing as he climbed up to the 70th floor, hearing that volume of sound was nothing special. And despite feeling upset by Park Hye-Won's words, he still turned around and ran toward her.

However, ahead of Park Yoon-Ki, too many people were moving busily to get closer to Park Hye-Won to get her autograph.

"Hey! Don't push me! I'm going to get in here too...!" Park Yoon-Ki shouted.

He soon found himself squeezed between people, all eagerly waiting to get Park Hye-Won's autograph. Park Yoon-Ki had been her fan ever since he entered the tower.

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Lost in thought about the plan to connect the Dimension Gate, Lee Shin wondered if he could even complete this task. At some point, he wondered if the task was too much for him.

Lee Shin thought about it a hundred—no, thousands of times; each time, he found the task extreme. He wasn't even sure he could finish it successfully. All he knew was that Sayr, with Sevrino's help, had succeeded in making a gate that connected different dimensions.

Thanks to the power of the Immortal Sphere, not a single memory from the past disappeared for Lee Shin, allowing him to gather information effectively and put the pieces together accordingly.

As he climbed the Tower, Lee Shin had to gather the materials to create the Dimension Gate and forcefully open it. Simultaneously, he had to increase his power and strength to rescue Sevrino from the territory of the Great Devil. Furthermore, once he reached the 50th floor, he had to obtain the Seed of Ardelgia that was in the hands of the Defense Force.

Each of these tasks was nearly impossible for ordinary lower-floor challengers. And since he had to succeed in each task, he wasn't sure of this plan's success rate. However, now, he was almost there.

"Phew..." Lee Shin sighed.

The night was deep, and on the tranquil Island 43, Lee Shin leaned against a hill and lit a cigarette for the first time in a long while. As he watched the smoke rise like clouds, it felt like the pent-up frustration in his heart was finally being released.

'Yeah, that's right. I used to smoke for moments like this.'

After Lee Shin had decided to climb the tower, he quit smoking immediately to maintain his physical condition. Perhaps it was because it had been so long since he last smoked, but the cigarette gave Lee Shin a sense of nostalgia.

"Do you want another one?" Cain asked Lee Shin.

Lee Shin did not notice Cain approaching him again. He wondered when Cain had come all the way here. Cain stood beside him and offered him another cigarette.

"No, this will be the last one," Lee Shin replied, looking at the cigarette in his hand.

At this point, even a cigar wouldn't affect his physical condition. However, each challenger had their rhythms and patterns. And he did not want to disrupt the pattern he had maintained until now.

Just this cigarette was enough for Lee Shin. He found it inappropriate to smoke during his free time or while his mind was filled with complex thoughts.

"You're so fussy," said Cain, looking at Lee Shin.

Click, pizz—

Cain took back the cigarette he had offered to Lee Shin and smoked it himself.

"Aren't you the best challenger in the Tower right now? What's troubling you so much?" Cain did not understand what was going through Lee Shin's mind.

Cain had been approaching Lee Shin frequently to either get closer to him or read his thoughts. They had agreed to become coworkers, so there was no need to keep a distance, but Lee Shin believed there was no need to get too close. After all, he didn't fully trust a group solely focused on gaining more points.

"Just mind your own business," Lee Shin replied.

Honestly, explaining this plan to others was impossible. The Dimension Gate was a kind of benefit given to the challengers of all dimensions. Maybe it was what the gods had in mind when they first created the Tower.

However, the Dimension Gate connected to Earth would disappear in the future, replaced by Gates connected to other dimensions. Lee Shin devised this plan to prevent that from happening, to ensure that the gods would no longer treat humans like toys.

Lee Shin could not explain this to Cain. When the Tower first appeared on Earth, all those who entered ended up dying. The casualties were enormous in the early days.

Nowadays, fortunately, someone who had reached the 50th floor was decrypting the information and keeping it updated, which significantly increased the survival rate of people. That wasn't the case initially when the survival rate was almost zero.

Of course, many challengers settled in the world of the Tower before reaching the 50th floor. However, countless people died during the ascent. Many individuals now exhibited a significantly higher survival rate, up to the 50th floor.

The ones who entered the Tower earlier had paved the way for those after them. Therefore, despite having weak bodies and fewer abilities compared to species from other dimensions, humans achieved successful results quickly.

Besides, it was evident that the gods believed in the potential of humans. The gods had even forcibly put humans into situations that would drive them to ascend to the 100th floor. Lee Shin was determined not to repeat such a past.

Lee Shin was aware that the future was twisted. He did not even know when the gods would make the Dimension Gate disappear. Therefore, he aimed to create another Dimension Gate in secret to prevent such a disaster.

'But... I'm not sure what kind of side effects may occur.'

Lee Shin's plan was an act that infringed on the authority of the gods. Therefore, the gods would undoubtedly retaliate in some way. As long as he was within the fence called the Tower, the gods couldn't directly harm him. It was the same for the apostles as well.

Those who reached the 100th floor could not re-enter the Tower. Lee Shin knew this because he had already reached the 100th floor. Then, one had to leave the Tower.

On the contrary, if one decided to remain inside the Tower, they had no choice but to deal with challengers selected by the gods. These challengers with powers from the gods themselves were titled apostles.

The gods usually recruited top-rankers as apostles and used them to intervene and increase the stage's difficulty. Well, all that didn't really matter much to Lee Shin.

If someone with power from a god approached him, he would kill them and make the god lose their divine power. If the gods decided to interfere in the stages and raise their difficulty, he could just break through them and receive better rewards.

[The Path to Become an Adversary]

# Kill someone with a Divinity Class of 30 or higher (0/1).

# Kill someone with a Divinity Class of 20 or higher (0/3).

# Kill someone with a Divinity Class of 10 or higher (0/10).

# Kill someone with a Divinity Class of 5 or higher (0/20).

\* If all conditions are met, you will become an Adversary.

It was rather good for Lee Shin if the gods decided to send their apostles. They would serve as a stepping stone for him to become an Adversary with true transcendence. To capture a god with a divinity class of 20 or higher, he would probably have to fight a demigod or reach at least the 90th floor.

"Oh, we have started disposing of illegal things this time. We are trying to convert them into legitimate businesses as much as possible, so keep that in mind," Cain said to Lee Shin, exhaling the smoke while expressing regret.

"Yes, that's a good idea. From now on, you won't be able to operate in the dark world alone, so it would be best to switch quickly. We need to ensure we don't get caught by the Defense Force," Lee Shin said.

"The Defense Force... Do you really think they will expand the defense zone from Islands 31 to 43?" Cain asked Lee Shin.

"Yeah, I think so. All illegal businesses in the fourth district would be wiped out in the future. So we need to dispose of them before that happens," Lee Shin replied.

In a month from now, many things will change, including the Dimension Gate and the situation in the Lardel Archipelago.

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On Island 156, there was no bustling city like the Square; instead, it offered a serene landscape of untouched nature with mountains, trees, and water. Lee Shin relocated to Island 156, which stood among the dozens of small islands on the outskirts.



The dense forest obscured the island's interior, making it barely visible even as Lee Shin rode on Veck Jack. He quickly unleashed his mana in all directions, causing mana waves to extend hundreds of kilometers, sweeping through the island.

'I can't detect it at all.'

As the waves of mana spread, some creatures were clearly detected, while others remained unnoticed. Lee Shin was here to find Vian Stiger—the top hextech mage of Lardel Archipelago. Vian Stiger was a crucial piece needed for the completion of the Dimension Gate, along with the Seed of Ardelgia.

If it had not been for Alice's Eyes of the Wise Man, finding him would have taken a lot of time and effort. Such was the level of perfection with which Vian had concealed himself.

'The more I think about it, the more amazing his abilities are.'

Lee Shin found someone evading his mana detection with just one hextech skill quite impressive. There was simply no trace of him.

'What should I do...?'

Unleashing the Undead to search the entire island would not be a bad option, but there was no need for that when there was a faster way. Lee Shin activated his mana, creating a massive mana sphere in the air. Then, he unleashed a powerful stream of his mana, spreading in all directions.

"If you don't come out now, you'll be swept away by it," Lee Shin said.

To be more accurate, it was a murmur as if he was whispering. However, it was a message intended for someone somewhere. The sphere of mana, which was on the verge of exploding, vibrated with intense heat.

"Explode!" Lee Shin ordered.

Lee Shin swiftly extended his index and middle fingers, striking the ground. In response, the mana sphere arose before descending toward the ground.

Whoong—!

The fierce shockwave shook the air.

Boom—!

A light beam pierced Lee Shin's mana sphere and shot into the sky. The mana sphere, unable to withstand the collision with the beam, exploded immediately. Lee Shin shifted his gaze in the direction of the light.

A wild man wearing black sunglasses stood holding a gun to the sky. He blew the smoke from the gun and glared at Lee Shin with a satisfied smile.