

The Tower 170

Chapter 170: The Performance

In the office of the Korean Challengers Association, Chair Jeon Jae-Yong and several returning challengers gathered for a conversation. Among them were Park Joo-Hyuk, now a low ranker after reaching the 50th floor, and rankers like Baek Kang-Woo and Shin Ji-Won. Kim Kang-Chun and Hwang Kang-Woong had also been invited to join the meeting.

"A great many challengers have returned to Earth through the Dimension Gate this time. Also worth noting is the fact that their achievements this time are on a different level from before," Jeon Jae-Yong said, looking at the five challengers in the office.

The five challengers nodded in response.

"While the public is delighted that a new era has begun, the reality is not so great. As you might already know, an organization called 'Reverse' is secretly wreaking havoc," Jeon Jae-Yong continued.

Reverse was an organization driven by a misguided belief, aiming to create a world exclusively for challengers. They saw challengers as the ultimate rulers, with the ordinary people meant to follow their lead. The problem was that more people, including non-challengers, had joined Reverse than anticipated, causing headaches for a number of countries.

"Besides, it has been three years since Cha Yu-Min's disappearance. Most people probably think he's dead by now," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

Baek Kang-Woo and Shin Ji-Won's expressions stiffened.

"However, Cha Yu-Min's case is not a simple disappearance. Reverse kidnapped him," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

Park Joo-Hyuk, affiliated with the government, was familiar with this information as he had heard it several times before.

"Even with the help of various countries and the deployment of rankers, we still could not find him," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

Kim Kang-Chun and Hwang Kang-Woong were shocked, as they were hearing about this for the first time.

"Mr. Cha Yu-Min, the ranker, was kidnapped...? He was kidnapped on Earth?" Kim Kang-Chun could not believe what Jeon Jae-Yong had just said.

That was because Cha Yu-Min was considered one of the strongest challengers on Earth. Since it had been three years since his disappearance, it might have changed, but it was undoubtedly true at the time of his disappearance.

"That's right. I witnessed it myself," replied Baek Kang-Woo somberly, standing next to Kang-Chun. "At that time, we discovered a location we presumed to be Reverse's headquarters. So, several countries made an agreement to secretly form special teams to launch an assault. While Cha Yu-Min was trying to rescue one such special team, something like a black hole engulfed him."

"A black hole?" Kim Kang-Chun asked.

"Yes. I'm pretty sure it was an ability used by one of the challengers from Reverse. A black hole suddenly appeared in the air and swallowed Yu-Min and other challengers before vanishing," Baek Kang-Woo explained.

As Baek Kang-Woo explained, the others fell into silence. There was nothing to say.

Hwang Kang-Woong broke the brief silence.

"Then, what happened to that Reverse headquarters afterward?"

"It is currently being managed by the World Challenger Association," Jeon Jae-Yong stepped forward and explained.

After the Cha Yu-Min incident, thirty-four countries had joined the World Challenger Association (WCA) and remained actively involved. Following the Isocia incident, Korea's influence within the WCA had grown significantly, and it had strengthened its position.

"May I go and take a look at it once?" Hwang Kang-Woong asked because he wanted to see the structure of that facility.

He was curious to see the facility with such a high level of technology that it could evade the surveillance networks of numerous countries.

"Yes, for sure. We can recruit other people who want to visit and go together next time as a group," Jeon Jae-Yong replied.

"Anyway, we need Mr. Lee Shin's help to find Yu-Min," Shin Ji-Won said.

Shin Ji-Won was Cha Yu-Min's colleague. She had climbed the Tower together with Lee Shin in the past.

"We need you guys' help. So, where is Lee Shin right now, and what is he doing?" Jeon Jae-Yong asked.

Jeon Jae-Yong knew that Lee Shin had also reached the 50th floor this time. However, he still had not come out of the Dimension Gate. Since he had climbed the Tower alongside other Koreans and his rankings had appeared among Koreans, people were expecting Lee Shin to come to Earth through the gate. Besides, everyone was eagerly waiting for that moment.

"Well, Master said that he has to finish some tasks. It seems he won't come through the Dimension Gate until they are done," Park Joo-Hyuk said what he had heard from Lee Shin earlier.

He thought that Lee Shin would not come out to Earth before he finished those tasks. Moreover, since Lee Shin had once been the boss of the Tower's first floor, it remained uncertain if he could access Earth using the Dimension Gate. This matter had captured everyone's attention, but as Lee Shin hadn't shown signs of entering the Dimension Gate, it frustrated everyone.

"Our Master will come because he told us so. He will definitely come!" Kim Kang-Chun added.

Kim Kang-Chun believed in Lee Shin's words, and Hwang Kang-Woong and Park Joo-Hyuk nodded at Kim Kang-Chun's statement. Observing their unwavering trust, Jeon Jae-Yong couldn't help but feel confident that, if these challengers believed in him so strongly, Lee Shin would undoubtedly find a way to return to Earth.

"I wonder what he's up to," Shin Ji-Won muttered.

"Yeah, same. You talk about him so often; it seems like you really want to see him."

"If he comes out, I would indeed like to meet him," Shin Ji-Won replied.

Lee Shin had warned Shin Ji-Won against ascending to the 80th floor. She used to think he was crazy, but now, after hearing Cha Yu-Min's story, it all made sense. She would have died if she had gone to the 80th floor. Therefore, she wanted to ask Lee Shin how he knew about her.

"On the 15th, an auction will be hosted by the WCA. I think all of you will participate, am I right?" Jeon Jae-Yong asked.

Everyone nodded at Jeon Jae-Yong's words. The auction house created by the WCA was designed to facilitate appropriate and efficient transactions while the Dimension Gate was open. Participants could choose to participate anonymously or with their real names.

Since the gate would only be open for 30 days, all the necessary trades had to happen swiftly. Challengers could then use the items to ascend the Tower. This auction, which was conducted globally, lasted for a week. And all challengers who had returned to Earth would definitely visit it.

"In addition to the three individuals nominated as their potential rankers—Baek Hyun, Park Joo-Hyuk, and Park Hye-Won, I'm sure the other challengers who could not make it as a low-ranker this time will also participate in this auction. Am I right?" Jeon Jae-Yong asked.

Kim Kang-Chun and Hwang Kang-Woong nodded, being part of the mentioned group.

"And Reverse will probably attempt to approach all of you guys," Jeon Jae-Yong continued.

Reverse sought to recruit exceptional challengers who aligned with their ideology. If they didn't initially align, Reverse believed these challengers would eventually come around to their way of thinking and join their cause. Jeon Jae-Yong was certain that Reverse, with their radical mindset, would try to approach Korean challengers to persuade them.

"Normally, Reverse does not act much during the opening of the Dimension Gate. However, this time, they would not want to miss the chance to meet all of you," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

"What should we do then?"

"Please act like you want to join Reverse. We are determined to uproot them this time," Jeon Jae-Yong replied.

Swoosh— Thud! Clank!

Laurent checked his ammunition and finished loading the weapon while looking anxiously at the headquarters of the Defense Force in the distance. His small telescope—Vian's work—allowed him to see the interior of the Defense Force headquarters, even from several kilometers away.

"Is this really going to work?" Even as he was setting up a large cannon, Laurent wondered if he was doing the right thing.

Squeak—

Laurent finished his preparations by adjusting the cannon's angle and loading the shells. He then sat down on a tree stump and lit a cigarette.

"Ha..." Laurent puffed his cigarette.

Laurent thought the conversation with Lee Shin had gone well. Vian and Lee Shin negotiated a bit before agreeing on some terms.

Vian had agreed to help Lee Shin establish a connection with the Dimension Gate. The sole remaining challenge was obtaining the materials for the connection, which required a daring move like attacking the Defense Force. However, Laurent was confident in his ability to carry out the attack without being detected.

However, Laurent had strict orders: only attack three times, show that the attacker was a top ranker, make the attacks flashy, and then run away. He couldn't kill the Elves of the Defense Force. Lee Shin had told Laurent that would be enough.

With the demonbreaker attribute, Laurent was certain he could severely hurt Versia in an instant, maybe even kill him with a single strike. But he also knew the risks. Using the attribute would leave him vulnerable, increasing the chances of being captured and killed by the Defense Force.

"It's been a while since I had this much fun," Laurent muttered.

It had been four years since Laurent experienced the limits of the Tower and hid himself from others. Therefore, the Defense Force would never suspect that he was the culprit behind this attack.

Pizz—

After flicking the cigarette away, he stepped on it to put it out and erased his traces. He got into his position, ready to shoot on signal. He was also perfectly prepared to run away afterward.

Lee Shin went into the headquarters of the Defense Force along with Genia.

"It's nice to see you again." Versia smiled kindly and extended his hand to Lee Shin.

Lee Shin smiled back and shook his hand.

"Yes, thanks to Genia," Lee Shin replied.

As Lee Shin emphasized that he had come because of Genia, not Versia, a hint of resentment appeared in Versia's smile.

"Please come in," said Versia.

As Lee Shin entered, he noticed the Defense Force officers gathered inside, waiting for him. They were seated in a long row along a large rectangular table, with Versia occupying the seat of honor. Lee Shin sat opposite Versia, another seat of honor, and Genia sat next to him.

Lee Shin immediately sensed the intention behind his placement—it was meant to pressure him. All the White Elves present were officers and they were exerting pressure on him, especially Versia, seated in the seat of honor. However, Lee Shin had no intention of playing along with their petty tricks.

"Well, is this a ceremony of some kind?" Lee Shin smirked and activated his mana.

Lee Shin did not even have to use his Transcendence status. Just activating his mana was enough to push away the pressure from dozens of rankers easily.

‘Hmm... He’s quite impressive.’

However, Versia was different from others. When Lee Shin used his mana to scan Versia, he could sense that Versia was a preeminent top ranker, explaining why he was this organization's leader. Meanwhile, the other Elves in the room felt shocked.

Although the Elves and Versia had been trying to pressure Lee Shin, Lee Shin had effortlessly dealt with the pressure.

'How could a mere challenger who recently climbed up to the 50th floor be like this...?'

Versia did not look so great. He had just realized that he couldn't control Lee Shin as he wanted.

"Hahaha.?What do you mean? What nonsense! We would never do that to you. I hope that we did not make you feel displeased. Welcoming a remarkable figure like yourself has made us all nervous," said Versia.

His face was calm, and his voice nonchalant. Lee Shin thought that arguing with an annoyed Elf would do him no good, so he went straight to the point.

"I heard Genia's proposal. I thought it was absurd when I first heard it, but I decided to accept it after Genia convinced me," Lee Shin said.

"May I please know what persuaded you to change your mind?" Versia asked Lee Shin as if he could not believe Lee Shin's words.

His cold gaze swept over Lee Shin, seeking anything useful in his response. However, Lee Shin's answer surprised them.

"I like Genia, and her earnest arguments moved my heart," Lee Shin replied.

"Sorry...? What did I just hear...?" Versia asked Lee Shin again, furrowing his eyebrows.

Lee Shin's response deviated from their expectations, but he had anticipated their reaction. He intentionally gave that answer because Genia couldn't offer anything beyond the designated proposal. Besides, the Defense Force could not engage in any shady deals with a challenger.

The only way to offer Lee Shin something was through an official Defense Force meeting. Therefore, when Versia heard that Genia had persuaded Lee Shin, he felt confident that she had engaged in some secret shady deal. He would have investigated and expelled Genia if such a deal had occurred, but Lee Shin's reason was unexpected.

"Well, there's nothing more I want to say. I like Genia, so I accepted her proposal," Lee Shin reiterated.

That was a lie, but Lee Shin felt no shame saying it. In addition, Genia couldn't help but blush in embarrassment, which further confused the officers. They wondered if this was the truth.

Crunch—

Versia gritted his teeth, taken aback. He had never expected Lee Shin to give reasons like this. It was an audacious and shameless attitude, but he could say nothing if Lee Shin insisted on it.

Thump!

At that moment, one hot-tempered White Elf officer slammed the table and got up from his seat.

"You're talking nonsense! Do you think we would not know what you and Genia are planning behind our backs?" The White Elf officer shouted.

In an instant, Versia's expression distorted, and Lee Shin tried his best to suppress his laughter.

"Are you insulting my love?" Lee Shin shouted back at the officer.

Lee Shin gritted his teeth, and his face distorted in anger as he seemingly failed to suppress his fury. In the meantime, Genia was so embarrassed that she could not even look up.