

The Tower 175

Chapter 175: Reverse

As midnight approached, dozens of challengers made their way into the Third Auction Hall one by one. Outside, members of the World Challenger Association had encircled the hall, ready for whatever lay ahead.

"Will we be okay?"

"Don't worry. People are waiting outside."

Baek Hyun, Park Hye-Won, and Kim Kang-Chun entered the Third Auction Hall together. For nearly two days since the fifth day of the auction, the Third Auction Hall had remained abandoned, with its power turned off. The moonlight seeped in through the windows, casting a dim glow inside.

The long corridor was immersed in darkness. They were accustomed to walking in darkness, but the atmosphere made them uneasy for some reason.

"Is this the place?"

Challengers began to gather one by one at the central stage where the auction had taken place.

"Joo-Hyuk Hyung!"

"Hey, you're here! Did you hear about them? Don't let your guard down," Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

"Yes, I'll make sure to do that."

Park Joo-Hyuk had entered this place with his Task Force team members, including Baek Hyun-Ah. A curtain covered the stage, but Ethan, who was with the American challengers, rushed to the stage and removed the curtain.

"Are you hiding here!" Ethan shouted.

Ethan forcefully removed the curtain, revealing the stage. Someone stood there wearing a black cloak, a black hat, a black mask, and an eagle-shaped mask.

"Reveal your identity!" Ethan shouted.

Ethan almost instantly transformed into a bear and charged toward that person. He swung his thick claws in the air, but the man became translucent and disappeared.

- Just wait for a second. I will tell you when the time comes.

"Huh? What was that?" Ethan looked around with a puzzled look.

"What was that?"

"It disappeared..."

"What kind of ability is that?"

Anxiety gripped the hearts of the challengers who had witnessed the scene.

‘What could they be thinking?’

Park Joo-Hyuk couldn't fathom why Reverse had chosen such a conspicuous way to gather challengers. It seemed pointless, as the WCA would respond quickly, rendering any contact fruitless. Even those who shared Reverse's ideology wouldn't dare reveal their intentions in such a situation.

‘The Association told us to go in, saying that if we allowed entry to uninvited guests, Reverse might not reveal themselves. But it seems like...’

Park Joo-Hyuk could not get rid of his anxious thoughts. It was difficult for him to read their thoughts. Why did Reverse even kidnap Yu-Min? And why reveal themselves now after so long?

Ding— Ding—

As midnight struck, a bell resonated, heightening the tension in the room. Nervous gulps echoed as Park Joo-Hyuk wondered about Reverse's intentions.

Someone walked out from behind the stage. There was a table in front of the man with a square box on it.

"Nice to meet you all, dear challengers," said the man on the stage.

The person's deep voice seemed modulated. The man, wearing the same eagle mask, then took out a sword from the box on the table.

"Huh...?"

"Wait a second! That is!"

Someone shouted, recognizing the sword, "That's the Xuan-Yuan Sword!"

Park Joo-Hyuk heard it through the in-ear monitor, and his eyes widened. That man had the Xuan-Yuan sword, an artifact people had desperately searched for in China.

'Tsk, it's already a disaster...'

All the noise coming from his earpiece made Park Joo-Hyuk frown. The Chinese challengers also seemed on edge, so it could be inferred that the Chinese Association would feel the same way.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to invite you to our world, the world of Reverse," said the man wearing the eagle mask, introducing the organization called Reverse.

"What nonsense! Stop with this nonsense!"

"Just hand over that sword right now! If you do, then we will kindly go to your world."

The Chinese challengers shouted.

"It seems like you have misunderstood, so let me clarify," said the man.

Although a mask covered the man's mouth, Park Joo-Hyuk felt that the man was smiling behind it.

"First, this sword does not belong to you, and you will never be able to possess it in your lifetime," said the man.

"What did you just say?"

"Who do you think you are...!"

"Second, this sword will cease to exist after today," said the man.

The Xuan-Yuan Sword suddenly began to tremble as if it had difficulty enduring pressure.

"S-stop it already!"

"That's enough! You're going to break it!"

The man in the eagle mask ignored the challenger's words, and the Chinese challengers could not bear it and ran toward it.

"Stop— it—!"

The sword shattered, leaving behind only shards. An unknown mana began to gather in the center of the stage.

"And lastly, my third point. You have no right to refuse my invitation," said the man coldly.

As he spoke, black spheres gathered in mid-air and suddenly expanded.

"Everyone, defend yourselves with all your might...!" Park Joo-Hyuk shouted urgently, but the situation had already spiraled out of control.

Jeon Jae-Yong and Shin Hyun-Woo monitored the situation through Park Joo-Hyuk's bodycam, growing increasingly restless. They had planned to identify Reverse's headquarters and capture them with the help of the challengers. However, the man's unwavering confidence made them uneasy.

They had sealed off several kilometers around the Third Auction Hall with formations, preventing any entry or exit. Except for the unidentified person, the investigation was complete, and no one else was detected.

The WCA members were fed up with China, as the Chinese side had promised to launch their attack immediately after the sword fell into the hands of the Reverse group. However, the problem arose afterward.

- First...

The man's firm voice exuded confidence; although his face was concealed, Jeon Jae-Yong sensed trouble brewing.

"Ugh... I don't think we have any other option. We'll just enter immediately, just like what the Chinese side said," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

Shin Hyun-Woo, Deputy Chairman of the Korean Challengers Association, nodded and relayed the message to the WCA.

'We don't have time to seek the consent of others. Let's move right away.'

Jeon Jae-Yong quickly made a decision.

"Baek Kang-Woo, Shin Ji-Won!" The Chairman, Jeon Jae-Yong, desperately called out.

The two Korean top rankers nodded in response to Jeon Jae-Yong's call and rushed straight to the Auction Hall.

- And lastly, third. You have no right to refuse my invitation.

A black hole began materializing in mid-air as soon as the man finished speaking.

'Could it be... the one who took Cha Yu-Min...!'

However, it surpassed Baek Kang-Woo's description in both scale and power.

'Could it be possible that he broke the Xuan-Yuan Sword to enhance the power using that as a medium?'

If this hypothesis was correct, the situation made sense. However, was such a thing really possible? The screen went blank; the camera seemed dead. They also soon lost their audio.

"Damn it!" Jeon Jae-Yong shouted.

"Other countries have also started to enter," said Shin Hyun-Woo after approaching.

"I think It's already too late," said Jeon Jae-Yong.

"Sorry?" Shin Hyun-Woo asked.

Jeon Jae-Yong blankly showed him the scene just before the screen had gone dark.

"Is this a black hole? I-is it possible to have such a powerful ability?" Shin Hyun-Woo asked, puzzled.

"It must have been possible. Damn it, I should have realized it when that guy arrogantly called out and summoned the challengers!" Jeon Jae-Yong gritted his teeth with a frown.

Baek Kang-Woo and Shin Ji-Won entered the room and froze when they witnessed the chaotic scene in the Auction Hall. Over a hundred challengers had all disappeared from inside the Auction Hall. Even the man with the eagle mask and the shattered Xuan-Yuan Sword were all gone.

"The guy who took Yu-Min Hyung must be behind it all," Baek Kang-Woo muttered.

"But, is it even possible for all those people to disappear simultaneously?" Shin Ji-Won asked with a puzzled look.

"Let's try searching for them elsewhere, just in case," Baek Kang-Woo suggested.

"Okay," Shin Ji-Won replied.

In a secluded mountainous area, home to only trees, grass, and insects, a circular gate with white, blue, and gray hues tore through space. As the surrounding animals fled in fear, Lee Shin emerged. Lost in memories, he took a deep breath and exhaled.

"Have I... really returned?" Lee Shin muttered.

It felt surreal. How long had it been since he returned to Earth? Gazing at the blue sky, the scattered white clouds, and the shining sun, he realized that that was undoubtedly Earth.

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Crackle— Crackle—

Lee Shin heard the grass rustling, so he unconsciously released his mana, only to realize the perpetrator was a squirrel holding a nut.

"Ah... I'm sorry."

Lee Shin let go of the squirrel struggling in mid-air because of his Psychokinesis. Seeing that creature, Lee Shin became more certain that this place was Earth.

‘By the way, where am I right now?’

It was difficult to determine the exact location as there were only mountains around.

[Shadow Space]

From within, Lee Shin summoned a small flying Skeleton and took to the sky. As the ground became more distant and he could see more of the area, Lee Shin slowly flew around to check the surroundings. By flying around slowly, Lee Shin could guess where this place might be.

‘Am I in China...?’

If it were China, it would be reassuring for Lee Shin because this place was not too far from Korea.

"Hmm?" Lee Shin looked surprised.

Lee Shin's mana wave detected something flying incredibly fast in the distance. Before long, a fighter jet came into his view.

‘Was there an airbase nearby?’

Lee Shin’s expression stiffened, and he adjusted his direction, trying to move away, but the fighter jet approached him rapidly as if it was targeting him. The jet then abruptly fired missiles at him.

‘They should know that I'm a challenger, yet they are choosing to attack me without confirming my identity?’

If it were in the past when the Gate was open, it would be understandable, but trying to shoot him down without warning was unreasonable. If the challenger were a challenger from their own nation, they would not have attacked recklessly.

"Man... they're causing trouble as soon as I arrive..."

Normally, Lee Shin would have ignored and passed by, but in this situation, he had no choice but to respond. The missiles that flew toward him twisted like snakes as they targeted Lee Shin.

[Shield]

He quickly read the missile’s trajectory and created a shield to intercept it. The missile exploded on contact; undeterred, the fighter jet pilot adjusted their position and fired the machine gun.

Babababam—!

"Damn! I feel like more of them would join in to attack if I spend too much time here!" Lee Shin muttered.

[Stone Edge]

Dozens of spear-shaped stones rose from the ground and charged toward the fighter jet.

Baaam!

Beep— Beep— Beep— Beep—

Startled by the unexpected shower of rocks, the pilot urgently escaped from the fighter jet.

"Shit, what kind of magic is... aah!" The pilot started to panic.

As the pilot was flying through the air, he was suddenly subjected to an invisible force. Therefore, his face quickly turned very pale. The place where he was being pulled toward was where he had just confronted the challenger. Upon facing the challenger, the pilot's eyes widened, as if he had seen that face somewhere before.

"Huh...?" The pilot looked at Lee Shin.

The guy before him had purple hair, pale white skin, and a cold demeanor. The pilot quickly realized the one before him was the wizard who had caused much commotion on Earth.

'But I clearly remember people saying that he did not come out of the Dimension Gate.'

Still confused, the pilot recalled that a ranker from China named Lei was on his way to provide support.

'Is he really Lee Shin? Damn it! If Lei comes here, he will end up dying for no reason! We need to prevent that from happening!'

The pilot clenched his teeth before he urgently shouted something.

"Excuse me, Sir, are you Mr. Lee Shin? I am from the Air Force—" The pilot, floating mid-air, vigorously tried to explain China was behind him.

Unfortunately, communication was impossible because Lee Shin did not know how to speak Chinese. The pilot wasn't making a lick of sense to Lee Shin.

"I don't know what he is saying, but I need to meet the person in charge of this place," Lee Shin muttered.

Lee Shin's mana waves detected another flying object. It was likely a challenger since it was improbable that they would send another fighter jet. He felt that he would no longer have to hold back and decided to wait. Soon, Lei was before him.

'He's not from a Dragon Tribe... So could he be Draylia?'

Draylia, a subspecies of Dragon Tribe, resembled East Asian Dragons. They had long serpent-like bodies and short legs; the differential feature was their enormous wings.

"Ha! You are quite bold and reckless to fly around the People's Republic of China without permission," said Lei in Chinese.

"What is he even saying?" Lee Shin muttered, failing to understand him.

The once-blue sky was now filled with dark clouds, and it became even darker. Lee Shin had no intention of dragging on this pointless conversation.

[Thunderbolt]

In the meantime, Lei's expression stiffened when he noticed the sky darkening. A tremendous amount of lightning energy was flickering above the clouds.

'Shit... What's going on here?'

Bababam—!

Dozens of thick thunderbolts fell from the sky. Startled, Lei desperately maneuvered the Draylia to avoid getting hit, but it was in vain.

"Kraaaaah!" Lei shouted in shock.

Struck by a thunderbolt, the Draylia crashed to the ground helplessly. Lei seemed to have lost his mind after falling and trembled in fear.

- Lei! Lei! Are you okay? Answer me, Lei!

In the situation room, the people monitoring the situation through Lei's camera could not close their mouths at the shocking scene.