

The Tower 43

Chapter 43

"[Moving Flame]!" Inyuu Kogo shouted.

The place was up in flames all over. The flames moved to the mana of Inyuu Kogo. His specialty was to manipulate the situation on the battlefield with his flames. Before anyone could realize, the battlefield was changing as he had intended.

"Keugh! Stay together!"

"Ahhh!" Eun-Ju screamed.

"Eun-Ju! Damn it!"

As if conducting an orchestra, the flames stirred according to the direction of Inyuu Kogo's wand. While trying to avoid the flames, the challengers split into three pairs. Due to the wall of fire that rose nearly three meters high, the Korean challengers could not easily reassemble.

"Everyone, be careful! Remember, Inyuu Kogo is not the only opponent!" Park Joo-Hyuk shouted.

"Watch out for the assassins!" Kim Kang-Chun shouted as well.

At the cries of Park Joo-Hyuk and Kim Kang-Chun, the others also began to watch out for the assassins.

"It will be difficult for them to move through the fire, too."

"Well, it's harder to figure out because of Inyuu Kogo's mana."

Park Joo-Hyuk clenched his teeth and looked beyond the flames. He could not see anything, but he was sure that Inyuu Kogo was controlling the flames with his wand over there.

"I'm just worried about Eun-Ju," Park Joo-Hyuk muttered.

"What should we do?" Park Hye-Won asked.

"It's too late to go help. We're going to focus on catching Inyuu Kogo," Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

While Park Joo-Hyuk and Park Hye-Won searched for Inyuu Kogo in the flames, Ji Eun-Ju and Hwang Kang-Woong were dealing with three other assassins.

Swoosh— Chang!

"Eun-Ju! Try to read their mana wave!" Hwang Kang-Woong shouted.

"I can't do it, Mr. Hwang!" Ji Eun-Ju cried in fear.

"You can do it! Just stay calm. I'll protect you," Hwang Kang-Woong tried to encourage her.

After hearing his words, Ji Eun-Ju closed her eyes and tried to calm down as she activated her mana.

‘Master has told me many times that I practiced enough and that I can do it.’

- Don't feel the mana wave; read it. Try to think of its characteristics.

‘What are the characteristics of assassins...’

- The assassin's innate mana wave is very different from that of their stealth skill. Unlike the usual sharp and sensitive wave of the assassins, the mana wave for stealth is very static.

Mana power could be felt from the bright flames. There was one exceptionally slow mana wave that ran along the intense flow of mana. When Ji Eun-Ju sensed a strange wave that was close to her, she pulled up her mana power.

Swoosh— Gagagak!

A rock that protruded from the ground blocked the assassin's sword.

"Mr. Hwang!" Ji Eun-Ju shouted.

Hwang Kang-Woong had been watching the situation even before Ji Eun-Ju called him. He had already taken out his weapon.

Puck!

His pickaxe struck and pierced through the assassin's chest, and the assassin was thrown over the shroud of fire.

"Nice... Argh!" Ji Eun-Ju gasped.

Right at the moment when Ji Eun-Ju exclaimed in delight, the assassin's dagger struck her arm. If her reaction had been a little slower, her arm would have been broken.

"Hmmm... I see that you have a good reflex." An assassin who had appeared in the air laughed at her and pulled out a dagger that was stuck in the ground.

"You annoying bitch, die first," the assassin muttered.

* * *

"Keugh!"

Chaeng! Chaaaeng—! Chaeng!

Kang Ji-Hoon withstood the assassins' attacks. Kim Kang-Chun was still fighting fiercely with the assassin who blocked his attack earlier.

Chang—!?

The assassin sent Kim Kang-Chun flying all the way to the other side as he tried holding his ground with the greatsword,

Kim Kang-Chun, gritting his teeth and keeping his eyes wide open, dug into the ground with the greatsword as he was driven back all the way to the other side. An assassin strong enough to push Kim Kang-Chun with his greatsword was not any normal guy.

'What the hell? My strength is not enough to deal with the assassin? But my strength is over 200 though...'

Kim Kang-Chun tried to look calm, but he was very embarrassed. Up until this point, he had accumulated his stats by accomplishing the highest level of achievements in most of the stages.

Among the challengers, he had invested the most time and effort in building up his strength. Therefore, it made no sense for the assassin, his opponent, to be neck and neck with him. Then suddenly, the assassin's dagger began to glow green.

"He is a Qualified of the [Green Pattern]... So was he a challenger, just as I had expected?" Kim Kang-Chun mumbled.

"Well if you figured it out, just give up and die."

As if he was teleporting, the masked challenger continued to attack him, aiming for his vital spots.

‘Damn it. Do you also have high agility?’

He hoped not. Kim Kang-Chun was weaker in both speed and response time. As long as the opponent had a Pattern, it was impossible for him to defeat the opponent by just relying on his stats.

‘It would have been possible if it was Master...’

Suddenly, Kim Kang-Chun felt as if he could hear Lee Shin’s voice ringing in his ears at this moment.

- The two little ones are playing well.

"Haha..." Kim Kang-Chun laughed.

The assassin frowned at Kim Kang-Chun’s sudden outburst of laughter.

"What's so funny?" the assassin asked.

"Oh no, nothing. I just think it was quite intense between the little ones," Kim Kang-Chun explained.

"What?" the assassin asked.

"Well..." Kim Kang-Chun was preparing for the next step.

Kim Kang-Chun’s mana began to envelop his greatsword.

"I should win even among the little ones, so that I won’t be ashamed to see my master’s face," Kim Kang-Chun shouted.

"You arrogant bastard," the assassin muttered.

"Bring it on." Kim Kang-Chun began his strike.

There was a huge clash as Kim Kang-Chun's greatsword and the masked man's dagger collided. Meanwhile, Inyuu Kogo was in a difficult situation as he faced Park Joo-Hyuk and Park Hye-Won's attacks, which were stronger than he had expected.

'How do the ones that don't even have a Pattern... have such a high level of stats?'

When Inyuu Kogo saw that Park Hye-Won was holding out quite well against his flames, he was annoyed. It was proof that their intelligence was comparable to that of his.

'This is actually crazy. He's more problematic than her.'

Kim Kang-Chun used his swords like a ghost. Two of the assassins whom he had hired by paying quite a lot of money were killed in a short period of time. These assassins were capable of killing those who had just come up to the 21st floor in a blink of an eye. However, even though there were five people against one Inyuu Kogo, when faced with his flames, two of them had already collapsed.

"[Exploding Flame]" Inyuu Kogo shouted.

Boom! Pawowow!

Suddenly, the flames that surrounded the challengers exploded as if they were bombs. And Park Hye-Won, who was dealing with the flames, was swept away by an explosion and collapsed.

"Park Hye-Won!" Hwang Kang-Woong shouted.

"Keugh... I'm fine!" Park Hye-Won replied.

Fortunately, Hye-Won noticed the change in the mana wave and escaped death by using her defensive mana. However, she suffered serious injuries.

"Ha... ha..." Park Hye-Won was out of breath.

Park Hye-Won had no idea how much mana power Inyuu Kogo had. Inyuu Kogo stood unscathed even though he was engaging in a mana confrontation with them and at the same time controlling the flames that were spread throughout the battlefield.

The difference in the level of Pattern was too big. No matter how great their achievements were coming up to the 20th floor, their stats were nothing compared to the power of that Pattern. It would not have been a surprise to be killed earlier if they had not learned mana control from Lee Shin. However, although Inyuu Kogo's ability was excellent, he did not seem to know how to handle fundamental mana.

[Quick Gun]

Bang! Pew! Bang!

Park Hye-Won, who had collapsed to the floor, pointed with her index finger in the air and created wind mana. Park Hye-Won sent three bullets of wind near Park Joo-Hyuk. The bullets flew exactly where the three assassins were attacking Park Joo-Hyuk.

They were able to avoid the bullets, but failed to avoid a series of attacks from Park Joo-Hyuk immediately after. Using his sword fight skills, Park Joo-Hyuk attacked their vital points. He did not miss any opportunities to attack them. Within a single breath, the three assassins were killed.

Crunch—

When Inyuu Kogo saw the scene, he frowned and gritted his teeth. The [Exploding Flame] skill that he had used a moment ago was a bit of a gamble. If a single, sudden explosion did not manage to kill the opponent, he would not have been able to continue either. He would not be able to use mana for a while due to the backlash caused by the de-energizing effect of the mana.

Inyuu Kogo did not know how Park Hye-Won noticed. Even at the brink of death, having been injured by Inyuu Kogo's mana a while ago, she turned the situation around with her mana. Therefore, it became a fight where someone could win if they endured a little longer than the other person.

"What the... How did you know?" Inyuu Kogo asked.

"It's too obvious."

"Says you who's about to die... That's funny." Inyuu Kogo laughed at the challengers.

"Now it's your turn, Inyuu Kogo," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

Drip—

Park Joo-Hyuk hit his sword once on the floor, shook the blood off, and ran toward Inyuu Kogo.

"Just die! Keugh!" Park Joo-Hyuk gasped.

Just before Park Joo-Hyuk's sword could pierce the neck of Inyuu Kogo, an incoming sword, impossible to avoid due to the incredibly high speed, struck Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Keaugh...." Park Joo-Hyuk gasped.

Park Joo-Hyuk, held tightly onto his side that was bleeding and stared at the opponent who appeared out of nowhere.

"I came here just in case... but there's only six of you here... That's great," a man muttered.

Twenty challengers had surrounded the battlefield. They each had a Pattern that was glowing on their bodies.

"Damn it..." Park Joo-Hyuk muttered.

"Joo-Hyuk oppa!"

"Joo-Hyuk!"

"Hye-Won!"

Park Hye-Won and Park Joo-Hyuk were not the only ones who got injured. The other four were exhausted and injured as well, though not as much as the two.

"Do you think you can beat us? You look very exhausted." The man who fatally wounded Park Joo-Hyuk a moment ago started laughing.

'I should have killed at least Inyuu Kogo.'

Park Joo-Hyuk was thinking about using the [Power of Transformation] just before he suffered that fatal injury, but he ended up not using it. Even if he had reversed the situation, nothing would have changed. This had to be used when he stood a better chance.

"Six people are enough to deal with you guys," Park Joo-Hyuk muttered.

As much as Park Joo-Hyuk put it that way, it was a really bad situation for them, hopeless even. The six were already exhausted and they were injured.

'In the worst case scenario... I will have to sacrifice myself with the Power of Transformation and let these guys run away.'

Park Joo-Hyuk began to postulate various situations.

"I can see that you're trying to figure out a way out of here, but you better not think about running away. More reinforcements are on the way." The man started laughing.

"Aren't you embarrassed, Cui Qian? You're going to attack us by helping the Japanese that you hate so much?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"Wow, you recognize me. Don't worry, after I kill you all, I'm going to kill that guy over there," Cui Qian replied.

Cui Qian pointed to Inyuu Kogo and Kodo Tomotatsu, an assassin who fought with Kim Kang-Chun. They were resting in the back with a smirk on their faces.

"Ugh... Fucking bastard," Park Hye-Won muttered.

Park Hye-Won looked at him contemptuously. However, on the bright side, only Cui Qian had the [Blue Pattern] and the rest had either Orange or Yellow Patterns. Even so, in this kind of situation, it was difficult to deal with Cui Qian alone. The challengers started to think that they might really die here.

"Listen, I'll run to Cui Qian first and take care of him, so you guys go inside the castle and break the Nucleus of Demon Realm. That's the only way we will survive." Park Joo-Hyuk spoke quietly so that others could not hear him.

"Then what about you oppa..."

"No way, I'll deal with Cui Qian—" Kim Kang-Chun was interrupted.

"Kim Kang-Chun. Keep a cool head. If it can't be me, you are the only one who can lead the group. And even looking at his mana characteristics, Cui Qian is the most suitable for me." Park Joo-Hyuk explained.

"But still..." Kim Kang-Chun mumbled.

"Stop trying to come up with some kind of plan. You know it's meaningless," said Cui Qian.

Cui Qian threw his sword fiercely, and it flew in between them.

"Kill them all!" Cui Qian shouted.

As soon as Cui Qian ordered, the twenty challengers began to move.

"Just listen to me everyone!" Park Joo-Hyuk shouted.

With Park Joo-Hyuk's last command, Park Joo-Hyuk went for Cui Qian, and the other four ran in the opposite direction.

"Mr. Hwang!"

"I'll go with Joo-Hyuk! Go on!" Hwang Kang-Woong shouted.

Then, Hwang Kang-Woong fought the challengers who were blocking Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Mr. Hwang! Why did you—" Park Joo-Hyuk shouted.

"It's too late to go back anyways," Hwang Kang-Woong replied.

Park Joo-Hyuk frowned and then kicked the challenger with the Orange Pattern who blocked him and ran toward Cui Qian. Cui Qian's sword and Park Joo-Hyuk's sword clashed and dozens of fights took place in an instant. Although his body was getting more and more wounded, Park Joo-Hyuk was targeting the most critical moment.

'Damn it, my body won't listen.'

Park Joo-Hyuk's muscles stiffened as their swords clashed aggressively. Cui Qian took advantage of that moment and his sword dug into Park Joo-Hyuk like a snake.

Swoosh—!

"Keuugh..." Park Joo-Hyuk gasped.

At Park Joo-Hyuk's scream, Cui Qian smirked. Cui Qian thought he clearly saw his sword stab Park Joo-Hyuk in the heart. He definitely saw that.

"What the hell...?" Cui Qian was shocked.

Before he even realized it, Park Joo-Hyuk's sword had aimed at his heart and his sword pointed upward. Before he fully grasped the situation, Cui Qian twisted his body to escape fatality and managed to change the position of the sword from the heart to the direction of his right rib.

Kwad-deuk!

"Keuaaah!" Cui Qian screamed.

Cui Qian cried out in the pain of breaking ribs and splitting flesh. When Cui Qian hit Park Joo-Hyuk with his sword while being stabbed, Park Joo-Hyuk loosened his grip and lost his sword. He then collapsed to the floor.

"Ha...Ha... What kind of ability is this?" Cui Qian ground his teeth and exhaled a rough breath.

Park Joo-Hyuk could not easily stand up, perhaps because he had already used up all his strength.

"Ah..." Cui Qian groaned.

Cui Qian had pulled out the sword stuck in his ribs and threw it back. He then approached Park Joo-Hyuk with a frown. He never thought Park Joo-Hyuk would hit him like this just before he was about to die. He found Park Joo-Hyuk to be more dangerous than expected.

Park Joo-Hyuk was a challenger who had only recently come up to the 21st floor. However, he had an instinct for battle, and a cool-headedness that was never discouraged, even if he was close to dying. Also, he had made the greatest achievements as he climbed from the second to the 20th floor.

It was obvious that if Park Joo-Hyuk and his group had obtained the Pattern, not only Cui Qian and his group who turned them into enemies but also other countries would be in danger.

‘I must kill him here.’

Cui Qian did not want to take more time. Park Joo-Hyuk and his group members were too strong. Hwang Kang-Woong, who was dealing with other challengers next to him, was skillful as Park Joo-Hyuk, and so were the four other challengers who ran into the castle.

‘Well, since ‘that guy’ is with the other four... I’ll just deal with these two.’

Cui Qian’s sword started to fill with his mana.

‘Goodbye.’

Whoosh— Pao!

A strong gust of pressure cut through the wind as if there was an explosion, and a powerful blow came and hit Cui Qian. As Cui Qian was pushed back, he clenched his teeth and saw where the attack came from.

"Who are you...?" Cui Qian asked.

He was a challenger with black hair and knuckle dusters. If the challenger who just came up showed this much power, there was only one person to expect.

"What’s going on? You’ve been acting so proud all the time, and what’s up with you now?" the challenger asked.

Park Joo-Hyuk turned his head to the familiar voice. In a blurred vision due to blood loss from his head, Park Joo-Hyuk could still see a familiar figure who stood in front of him, as if protecting him.

"You're a little late." Park Joo-Hyuk smiled.

"What do you mean I'm late. I'm just in time. Isn't this the timing for the main character to appear?" the man replied.

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He had a fit body and his voice was light. Shin Ha-Neul got into his fighting position. He wore a yellowish-brown knuckle duster on each hand and started bumping his fists.

"I have been so stressed these days, so why don't I just beat you up?" Shin Ha-Neul glanced at Cui Qian.

"Here comes a madman." Cui Qian frowned again and grabbed his sword more tightly.