

The Tower 74

Chapter 74

Lee Shin felt a strange sensation on his neck.

Swoosh—!

[You had suffered 3,200 in damages.]

The attack would've severed his neck if he had not been on guard. Thankfully, Lee Shin had predicted something similar before entering this room and this stage. To be more honest, he had made the prediction after hearing the gods were after him.

'Lakers was the most likely person out of all the ones who could target me.'

Lee Shin activated his mana. Since the only light source in the room had also disappeared, the room was in complete darkness. He couldn't see anything now, so Lee Shin could only use his senses to locate his enemy.

'I had a feeling that it would be Lakers, so my guess was really correct, huh?'

Lakers was already blind, so the darkness in the room wasn't a big problem for him.

Whoosh—

Lee Shin heard the wind, and it sounded so sketchy that he got goosebumps. In a place where nothing could be seen, Lee Shin had to predict his enemy's movement just by the mana wave. If he waited to feel it first, he would already be late. Although vision was practically useless in such high-speed battles, the lack of it was a bit distracting to Lee Shin. Therefore, he immediately used his magic to illuminate the entire room.

[Light]

As the light sphere rose, the rippling background destroyed the sphere of light.

Bam!

The resultant fire from the explosion engulfed the room. The light was a bait to lure Lakers out of hiding. Besides, Lee Shin did not think the enemy would suffer much damage from such a skill.

[Lightning Charge]

[Steel Hand Grab]

The sparks that spread with the flames tried to block Lakers' movement; next, a steel hand arose from the ground to grab him.

"There seems to be," Lakers muttered.

Creak! Crack!

What the steel hand had caught was only an afterimage of Lakers. Then, he used his sword to slice the steel hand in half.

"Nothing much about you," Lakers muttered again.

Lakers was seemingly trying to stay expressionless; however, his facial expression was subtly distorted. The Lee Shin before him wasn't living up to the rumored fame and prestige. Still, Lakers did not intend to let his guard down, considering the messages of the gods, but he could not hide his disappointment after seeing Lee Shin's skill.

"I can't believe I have to use this on someone like him..." Lakers muttered.

Mana coiled around Lakers' arm. The sword's movement, which had rippled like a mirage, left multiple afterimages as it swung. It was a skill that Lakers had honed by swinging his sword countless times, even risking his life. Lakers hadn't done all this work to use it on someone like Lee Shin, but he knew that he had to do his best in this fight since a lot of things depended on the result of this fight.

[Phantom Thrust]

Dozens of swords appeared out of nowhere and descended together to strike Lee Shin. There was hardly any space to dodge, and Lee Shin couldn't even block them because the swords were all around him.

'If not for my past self, I would have been a little flustered.'

Lee Shin remained calm as he confronted the Phantom Thrust.

[Shield]

Lee Shin had created a shield in only one direction. The Phantom Thrust struck the shield, cutting several layers of small, intangible, and overlapped membranes.

Clang clang clang clang clang!

Although the Phantom Thrust continuously damaged the shield, Lakers' sword eventually bounced off the shield without breaking through.

"No way... How?" Lakers looked stunned because he could not believe what was happening.

The opponent, Lee Shin, deployed a shield and aimed for only one sword strike among dozens of illusory swords. It was impossible to comprehend and block a new skill in that short amount of time. Due to the impossible situation and the rebound from using the skill, Lakers' movement became slow and dull.

Swoosh—!

"Keugh...!" Lakers gasped.

Suddenly, a skeleton's sword appeared above the black space and penetrated Lakers' heart.

Cough!

Lakers started choking on his blood, which was now flowing erratically. He tried to endure and hold it in, but blood soon filled his mouth, spilling onto the ground next.

"Lakers," Lee Shin called out.

Lakers, kneeling on the ground, looked up at Lee Shin with bloodshot eyes full of resentment. In Lakers' eyes, Lee Shin could see ineffable anger and an emotion Lakers would want to keep hidden in this absurd situation.

Normally, even Lee Shin couldn't have grasped the flaw in Lakers' attack and deployed a shield after seeing the attack once. However, Lee Shin had already seen Lakers' Phantom Thrust numerous times in his previous life. Lee Shin could block the attack only because he had pictured this situation numerous times before he had come here to meet Lakers.

"Do you want to punish those who abandoned you?" Lee Shin asked Lakers calmly.

Lakers' eyes widened as soon as he heard Lee Shin's words.

"Kreuk

...!" Lakers could not respond properly to Lee Shin's question.

Lakers seemingly had something to say but could not because of the blood in his throat.

"I can help you exact your revenge with your own hands," Lee Shin said.

Crack!

Warrie swung the sword again, piercing Lakers' neck this time. The space reeked of the scent of death. Lakers became a one-armed Skeleton and slowly rose, radiating black magic.

"Now tell me about the injustice you've suffered," Lee Shin told Lakers.

Whoosh—

With Lee Shin's words, the background changed. And unlike before, in this scene, Lakers' arms and eyes were both intact. Dressed in armor with elaborate silver patterns, Lakers once again looked like the commander of the Church's paladins. Back then, the Pope had summoned him.

"There is a rumor that an evil group is insulting God outside the city. You must eliminate their leader," ordered the Pope.

"Am I going alone?" Lakers asked the Pope.

"No, you may take only a few of your most trusted men. This mission must be completed in private. Be very discreet," the Pope said to Lakers.

"All right, Sir," Lakers replied.

Lakers, once the Pope's number one swordsman, was respected by all the Church members. The Pope had ordered him to deal with an evil cult, so Lakers had secretly left the city with five of his most trusted men. A plague was spreading in a small, desolate village, and people were dying.

"I can't believe there was a place like this," Lakers muttered.

"Did the evil cult also do this?" one of Lakers' men asked.

"I guess so. I had no idea that citizens were suffering like this," Lakers replied to the man.

Enraged, Lakers infiltrated the cult's stronghold using the Pope's information. The evil cult members had tried hard to hide their energy, but since Lakers and his men had great divine power, they could easily detect the cult members' evil energy.

'The Pope was right.'

With the Pope's information, Lakers and his men solved the code at the entrance. Therefore, they could easily sneak inside.

'Wait, but how does the Pope even know about these little things?'

And shortly after having such a question, Lakers and his people were caught by the evil cult inside. Lakers' group had infiltrated the stronghold deeply before finally encountering a high-ranking evil cult priest.

'... Something is off. This is going too easy compared to what I thought.'

So far, Lakers had executed numerous groups of such heretics. However, the evil energy here was much stronger than any other group he had encountered before. Interestingly though, now that Lakers and his group were inside, they couldn't sense this energy's origin. Even the high priest before him was the same.

Swoosh—!

Lakers' sword easily severed the heretics' necks. The battle between the cult members and Lakers couldn't even be called fierce.

Besides, it seemed like they could have handled the evil cult easily, even if only three paladins had come here. The enemies' combat strength made Lakers personally joining the mission seem like an overkill.

"Boss, something is not right," said one of Lakers' men.

"This is too..." another muttered.

"Something is definitely off. Let's go back quickly and tell the Pop—"

The group was planning on returning to the Pope; suddenly, there was a loud noise.

Baaamm!

The explosive sound had originated from the entrance far away. It sounded like someone had destroyed the entrance to enter the evil cult's stronghold. Lakers could hear his heart pounding, and the anxiety made him go pale. Lakers kept telling himself that what he was thinking could not be true; eventually, that became the only reasonable conclusion.

'No way... it can't be. That cannot be true.'

Lakers hoped that someone else would be at the entrance, not the people he had in mind. He wished and prayed for his thoughts to be wrong, but the truth crushed his hope instantly.

"Commander Lakers?"

"I had a feeling, but I didn't think it would really happen..." Lakers muttered.

"So, the Pope was right."

The newcomers were Church members, and the Pope could be seen standing behind them. They deemed Lakers a heretic and a member of the evil cult.

"This is a m-m-misunderstanding! This i—" Lakers could not finish defending himself.

"Be quiet!" the Pope shouted at Lakers.

The angry voice of the Pope had cut off Lakers' excuse.

"I trusted you..." said the Pope.

"Pope!" Lakers shouted.

"Don't call me with that dirty mouth. Tie up these heretics immediately! If they resist, you may kill them all!" the Pope ordered.

At the Pope's command, the Church's people began to move.

"Commander!" one of Lakers' trusted men shouted desperately.

"Damn it, we must get out of this place first," said Lakers.

"We'll clear the way. At least you have to make your way out, Commander," said another one of his trusted men.

"No, everyone will leave this place alive," said Lakers.

"That's impossible. Please, commander, you should at least survive. And then, you can speak for us as well."

"..." Lakers remained speechless.

Lakers could no longer speak because he knew everyone couldn't make their way out alive from this place.

"Just try your best to survive!" Lakers shouted.

Then, Lakers wiped away his tears and tightened his helmet in preparation for the fight.

* * *

When Lakers finally escaped from the temple, he was missing his right arm, which a paladin had broken off. He had also lost an eye, and his other eye was slowly losing its light.

"Melphrope!" Lakers cried out.

Melphrope was the Pope's name. Lakers tried to squeeze out the last bit of his divine power to regain his sight. However, it was all useless. His body had been deteriorating for a long time.

Since Lakers had dealt with the high-ranking evil cult priest, he couldn't use his divine power smoothly. Was killing the high priest a trigger that activated a curse on him?

Only after seeing the Pope's face had Lakers realize that the real evil cult leader had always been beside him. He had also realized that he had been surrendering himself to that leader.

Lakers' life and hope had all disappeared. His reputation and faith were all gone; he was gravely injured and had nowhere to go.

'It would be better to just die like this...'

With trembling hands, Lakers had aimed his blade toward himself; at that moment, a familiar voice stopped him.

"Mr. Lakers," said the Saint.

"S-Saint?" Lakers was surprised.

Upon seeing the Saint's face, Lakers felt despair. He knew if the Saint set his mind to it, he could easily prevent someone like Lakers from dying.

"Sob..." Lakers dropped his sword to the ground and sat down.

Lakers then began to cry, as was overcome with an unbearable sense of injustice.

"Dear Saint... I was falsely accused." Lakers explained to the Saint.

"I know, Lakers. I know that you are a faithful believer," the Saint responded.

It was an unexpected response. Lakers looked up at the Saint with trembling eyes, hoping that the Saint might be able to rescue him.

"I'm sorry... I cannot disobey my father," said the Saint.

"Your... father...? No way... Is your father the Pope?" Lakers asked.

"Yes, that's right. I'm sorry I had to hide it from you. The Pope was worried the believers would misinterpret the situation if his son became the Saint, so we had no choice but to keep it hidden."

"I see... I understand," said Lakers.

Lakers gave up when he heard these words from the Saint because he thought it was really over. Suddenly, he felt his wounds healing, and he soon realized it was all thanks to the Saint's divine power.

"Saint?" Lakers' eyes had widened.

"I can't do anything about your eyes with my current strength. Please run away. This is all I can do for you right now," said the Saint.

It seemed like the Saint knew the power of evil in Lakers. Nevertheless, he did not seem surprised at all.

"Did you already... know about this?" Lakers asked the Saint.

"I'm sorry. Please live so that one day we can correct my father's wrongdoing," said the Saint.

Lakers stopped reminiscing as he remembered running away from that place. The past clearly showed what Lakers had experienced and where this world was heading.

"Did the gods talk about me?" Lee Shin asked Lakers.

"I can't remember properly," Lakers replied.

"Really?" Lee Shin asked again.

"However, I remember they told me to kill you, Master. They told me that doing so would heal me perfectly and make me a Saint," Lakers explained to Lee Shin.

Lee Shin nodded after hearing Lakers' explanation.

"I have to meet the Saint in two days," said Lakers.

"If you go out like that, you'll get killed immediately," said Lee Shin.

"Yes, that's right. The Saint's divine power will purify me, so you must go instead of me," Lakers said.

"Okay," Lee Shin responded.

Lee Shin looked around the room, which was now a mess. The furniture and utensils were all destroyed, and even the walls were on the verge of collapsing.

"Don't let anyone in here for a while and pretend to be alive," said Lee Shin.

"All right," Lakers replied.

Lee Shin left the room and found the woman who had brought him here still waiting outside. She seemed worried; she had heard what had happened inside the room.

"What's going on?" the woman asked Lee Shin nervously.

"Nothing," Lee Shin replied.

"What about the master...?" the woman asked Lee Shin again.

"Just go," Lee Shin said.

The woman swallowed her words and passed by Lee Shin to knock on the door.

"Master...?" the woman asked, worried.

"What's going on?" the master replied. His voice sounded scratchy, and something seemed off. Therefore, the woman decided to test him out.

"I'm here to ask about the scheduled meeting that's in two days," said the woman.

"Something important has come up, so send that guy to the meeting with the Saint instead," said Lakers.

"Sorry? But still..." said the woman.

"Stop questioning my words. I hope you didn't forget that I don't like to say things twice," said Lakers.

"All right," the woman replied.

The brief conversation convinced her that the person inside the room was indeed Lakers. After all, only they knew about the meeting with the Saint. And even his manner of speaking matched Lakers'.

"What had happened inside?" the woman asked Lee Shin.

"You don't need to know," Lee Shin replied.

"Okay. Since we have to work together from now on, let me introduce myself. My name is Maria," Maria introduced herself.

"Okay," Lee Shin replied.

"I already know your name, but can you introduce yourself again?" asked Maria.

"What kind of person is the Saint?" Lee Shin asked Maria.

Lee Shin had ignored her request, so she pouted and spoke about the Saint.

"Well, the Saint is... In short, he is the Church's most powerful believer. He can even crush the Pope if he wants to."