

The Tower 93

Chapter 93

The Pattern was one of the systems that was applicable throughout this world. There were nine different colors of the Pattern, including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, black, white, and so on. The nine Patterns amplified one's ability based on one's merit points.

Additionally, the world was divided into areas and given names by color, such as the Red Zone and Orange Zone, and one could not proceed to that area without the corresponding Pattern. The challengers who set foot on this area, Isocia, the 21st floor, for the first time had no Patterns, but they could go to the first city of each country they arrived at because this city was a colorless zone where Patterns were not required.

'It's been a while.'

As Lee Shin looked at Merteng beyond the castle gate, old memories came to his mind, and before he knew it, the challengers had also reached the castle gate. When Lee Shin and the challengers all gathered, the chief guard who was positioned at the gate greeted them.

"You must be the Qualified ones who just arrived," said the chief guard.

"Yes, that's right. And this person here is Lee Shin." The knight who accompanied the challengers the entire time introduced Lee Shin to the chief guard.

"What!? Is he that Mr. Lee Shin?" The chief guard was surprised.

"Yes, that's right. Also, can you see these guys? Mr. Lee Shin captured them as soon as he arrived." The knight proudly dragged Kanoko and Kohei forward for the chief guard to see.

"Um... Are you perhaps the Qualified ones? How did you get here anyway?" the chief guard asked.

"It seems like they sneaked in. Look over here," said the knight.

The eyes of the chief guard widened with surprise as he saw the Patterns on Kanoko's neck and Kohei's hand.

"These people have Blue Patterns? Are you saying that Mr. Lee Shin had captured someone with that level of skill as well as the ability to sneak across the border?" the chief guard asked.

"You bet. Mr. Lee Shin is truly remarkable," replied the knight, who had become a fan of Lee Shin after seeing his divine status in the Demon Realm.

"Oh my! I apologize for the delay in greeting you. I am the chief guard Heron," Heron, the chief guard, suddenly introduced himself, and his attitude changed— he now sounded very polite.

"Let's get going," said the knight, looking at Lee Shin.

Following the knight's friendly guidance, Lee Shin and the challengers entered the building.

"The Qualified of Isocia will be provided with a separate lodging that we have arranged in our country," the knight explained.

"It seems like this city has developed quite well," Lee Shin said, slightly surprised by the state of the city.

"It's thanks to the help of the Qualified individuals who came before you," replied the knight.

As there was a big group of hundreds of challengers following the knight, Lee Shin and the challengers realized that they were drawing a lot of attention from the citizens.

"It's surprisingly peaceful here," one of the challengers remarked.

"Yeah, did we overreact?" another one asked.

The challengers walked around like newcomers in the city. Once they arrived at the inner city, the knight guarding the place saluted them and opened the door for them.

"Tell the people inside that Mr. Lee Shin has arrived," said the knight that was leading the way for Lee Shin's group.

"Oh really? The Mr. Lee Shin that we talked about?" asked the knight who was guarding the inner city.

"Yes, that's right. He is Lee Shin. The Qualified people had been talking about him," said the knight.

"Alright! Will do!" replied the knight who was guarding the inner city.

They walked past the knight of the inner city gate and entered inside. A man who wore glasses and had his long hair pulled back in a ponytail greeted the challengers.

"Welcome, everyone. I'm Leiden," said Leiden, introducing himself.

"He is the Minister of Defense," said the knight who was standing beside Lee Shin.

Lee Shin had known that already but pretended not to.

"My name is Lee Shin," Lee Shin introduced himself.

"Oh my! You are Mr. Lee Shin! We have heard a lot about you," said Leiden.

"By any chance, are those people in Merteng still?" Lee Shin asked Leiden, thinking about Kim Kang-Chun and his group.

"They are not there at the moment. We are short on staff, you see," said Leiden.

Leiden, the Minister of Defense, expressed his frustration with the lack of manpower, but Lee Shin did not react to that.

"Ahem... anyway, the King wishes to meet you, Mr. Lee Shin," said Leiden, looking at Lee Shin.

"Alright, let's get going," Lee Shin replied.

Leiden took only Lee Shin with him and went inside the castle, and the other challengers followed the knight.

"Lately, the King has been more worried than ever. But with you here, the King will be less worried, finally," Leiden said.

"I've heard a lot of talk about me here," said Lee Shin.

"That's right. The saviors who had revived Merteng often talked about you. Besides, you are quite famous, aren't you Mr. Lee Shin?" Leiden asked.

"Where are those guys?" Lee Shin asked Leiden.

"Well, about that..." Leiden muttered.

When Lee Shin asked that question, Leiden did not seem comfortable.

"The king will tell you more about that," said Leiden.

Suddenly, they arrived at the Throne Room. The magnificent doors opened, revealing the king, who was seated on his throne.

'King Adolf.'

Lee Shin was happy to see King Adolf, even though he looked different from how he did in Lee Shin's past life.

"It's an honor to meet you, Your Majesty," Lee Shin said.

Kneeling on one knee and bowing his head toward the King, Lee Shin presented himself in a perfectly composed and respectful stance. The Knight Commander standing next to the King and the Minister of Defence, who came in with Lee Shin, were amazed by Lee Shin's understanding of etiquette.

Generally, even those who were referred to as the Qualified did not know about the royal etiquette; and even if they had been taught, they did not follow the royal etiquette. However, Lee Shin had shown perfect etiquette as soon as he arrived, which caused Adolf to first be surprised, but a moment later, he smiled contentedly.

"Rise. Are you Lee Shin?" King Adolf asked, looking at Lee Shin.

"Yes, I am Lee Shin," Lee Shin replied.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Adolf Gin de Merteis. And did you learn the royal etiquette somewhere by any chance?" King Adolf asked Lee Shin.

"I learned it before coming here, because I thought it would be necessary," Lee Shin replied.

"I see. The saviors of Merteng talked about you all the time," said King Adolf.

Lee Shin had already expected that, because everyone he had met here so far had reacted in the same way.

"Since you're here, they will be contacted soon," said King Adolf.

"Thank you," Lee Shin replied.

"Also, I've heard that you've brought in the captives. And were they two Qualified with Blue Patterns? This is quite impressive. Do you have any reward in mind?" King Adolf asked Lee Shin.

"I don't have anything that I want at the moment. But would it be possible for me to let you know later on?" Lee Shin asked the King.

Lee Shin's such request made the surrounding officials uncomfortable, but King Adolf laughed heartily and accepted the request.

"Hahaha, sure. Let me know when you think of something," King Adolf laughed and replied.

"Thank you," Lee Shin replied.

"Also, sorry to bother you right after arriving, but do you mind if I make a request?" King Adolf asked Lee Shin.

"Please, tell me whatever it is," Lee Shin replied.

Lee Shin did not expect King Adolf to assign a mission right after he had arrived. Lee Shin could tell that the situation in the kingdom seemed worse than he had expected, just like Leiden had mentioned earlier.

"I heard that a battalion dispatched to the border near Tetir has gone missing. I will provide you with military power, so will you be able to investigate this for me?" King Adolf asked Lee Shin, desperate.

As soon as King Adolf said that, Lee Shin opened up the map in his mind. The border near Tetir was adjacent to the Red and Orange Zones. As soon as the battalion crossed to the Orange Zone, it would be impossible for Lee Shin to investigate, because Lee Shin only had the Red Pattern as of now.

However, as if he could read Lee Shin's mind, Leiden spoke up next to Lee Shin.

"I understand your concerns, but we lost contact with the battalion within the Red Zone. Also, their mission was only within the Red Zone, so they wouldn't have gone to the Orange Zone," Leiden explained.

"Alright," Lee Shin replied.

"I heard that you and the saviors have a special relationship. Is that true?" continued the King, who gulped.

"Yes, that's correct," Lee Shin replied.

"Mr. Kim Kang-Chun and Ji Eun-Ju are being held captive in Tetir, Mr. Lee Shin," said Leiden.

After listening to Leiden's words, Lee Shin's eyes widened the most since arriving here.

"Shin Ha-Neul and Kang Ji-Hoon are being treated for their wounds," Leiden added on.

With these consecutive reports, Lee Shin's head suddenly turned numb. In a way, these were because of Lee Shin. Therefore, Lee Shin could not be at ease.

"I will take care of it," Lee Shin replied.

Kanoko arrived at the underground prison of Merteng.

"Get in there," a soldier said.

"Ah!" Kanoko screamed.

The soldier in charge put Kanoko in a cell. Kanoko tried to wriggle out of the handcuffs, but eventually, she got tired and slumped to the ground, leaning against the wall.

'I never thought this would happen as soon as I stepped on the land of Merteng.'

As Kanoko let out a deep sigh and lifted her head, she saw a very familiar face in the opposite cell. A man who was lying down in a very relaxed manner, with both hands untied, was looking at her.

"Master... Inyuu Kogo...?" Kanoko was surprised to see him here.

At Kanoko's voice, Inyuu Kogo, who was picking his ears, looked at Kanoko.

"Huh...? Is that you, Miura?" Inyuu Kogo asked, looking at Kanoko.

Inyuu Kogo, who looked more bewildered than Kanoko, came closer to the cell bars and stared at her.

"Oh man, this is crazy... Why are you here!" Inyuu Kogo asked Kanoko.

"I was caught," Kanoko replied.

"Ha... how did that happen?" Inyuu Kogo sighed and asked.

With a desolate expression, Kanoko looked up at the ceiling of the cell.

"I was caught by Lee Shin," said Kanoko.

"Lee Shin...? Lee Shin? That Lee Shin that I know...?" Inyuu Kogo could not believe that.

"Yeah, that Lee Shin. That monstrous creature," Kanoko replied.

"He's here?" Inyuu Kogo asked nervously.

"Yes," Kanoko replied.

"Damn it! How is that bastard? It's because of him that I'm in this mess," said Inyuu Kogo.

In fact, WOFP was formed as an alliance and as a cartel because of Lee Shin. As a result, Inyuu Kogo was sent on a mission as part of WOFP and was captured in Merteng.

"Well... but you don't look too bad, master. I thought you would be a wreck after being ruthlessly tortured," said Kanoko.

"I don't know if these guys are soft-hearted or just stupid, but anyway, they're not treating me too badly." Inyuu Kogo shrugged as if he could not understand either.

"But, I guess you didn't ask for political asylum?" Kanoko asked.

"Asylum? What are you saying! How could I abandon my country?" Inyuu Kogo replied.

"Hmm..." At Inyuu Kogo's words, Kanoko seemed to be lost in thought.

She rolled her eyes and gestured to Kogo to come closer to the bars.

"What is it?" Inyuu Kogo asked her.

"There's something I need to tell you," said Kanoko.

Kanoko was speaking in a hushed tone as if she was trying to make sure no one could hear their conversation, ignoring how Inyuu Kogo thought she was being too sensitive since no one was around.

"Well, to be honest, I was considering whether to apply for asylum," Kanoko said.

"What? How can you think that right after being caught? Do you have no sense of patriotism?" Inyuu Kogo criticized her.

When Inyuu Kogo shouted at her angrily, she raised her index finger to cover his mouth with a surprised face.

"Shh! Shh! Please be quiet!" Kanoko hushed Inyuu Kogo.

"Tsk..." Inyuu Kogo clicked his tongue.

"Earlier, you asked me how Lee Shin was. Quite some time ago, you fought against the top-rankers of Korea here, no? What was he like?" Kanoko asked.

At Kanoko's question, Inyuu Kogo sighed, with a look of disgust on his face.

"That's an unpleasant story that I don't even want to remember," said Inyuu Kogo.

"No, tell me!" Kanoko insisted.

"I was surprised... It was miserable and I felt a sense of crisis. If those guys without any Patterns were already this strong, I wondered how they would change when they acquired Patterns. Besides, I thought that if we don't step on them now, Korea will become the most powerful country of all," Inyuu Kogo explained.

Kanoko nodded at Inyuu Kogo's words.

"It's already been a few months since then. And Merteng, which we thought could be quickly crushed, is still alive. Although, the situation isn't too good..." Kanoko muttered.

"Yeah, but no matter what, one hand can't beat ten. Merteng will eventually fall apart," said Inyuu Kogo.

As Inyuu Kogo said that, he murmured, "Will I be released soon?" and laid down on the floor with a thud. Thinking back to that moment made his head hurt.

"Those top rankers don't have multiple lives. Eventually, they'll all die, one by one. Then, Merteng will also come to an end," said Inyuu Kogo.

"That's right. Kim Kang-Chun and Ji Eun-Ju were captured by Tetir last time. We thought the same thing then, that 'Merteng would soon fall apart,'" said Kanoko.

"Did you just say 'we'?" Inyuu Kogo asked.

"Oh right! I forgot to tell you that Kohei was also captured, together with me," said Kanoko.

"What? That guy too? Huh. What kind of mission were you guys doing?" Inyuu Kogo asked.

Inyuu Kogo stopped thinking. With the two promising challengers from Japan being captured, it was clear to him, without even looking, that Japan was in a difficult situation.

"We had to pass through the Demon Realm of the Southern Sea to get to Merteng," said Kanoko.

"What? You did something crazy like that?" Inyuu Kogo could not believe her.

"Well, it was pretty doable. Anyways, we succeeded and made it near Merteng. But then Lee Shin came up at the same time," said Kanoko.

"Then what happened?" Inyuu Kogo asked again.

"Then, Lee Shin captured us. We tried to run away, but..." Kanoko muttered.

"You did? That Lee Shin guy must have great detection skills," said Inyuu Kogo.

"It wasn't just that. Anyway, Kohei and I fought Lee Shin. And do you know what I realized?" Kanoko asked.

Inyuu Kogo had a rough idea of what her response would be like. He thought that it would be a story of being shocked and frustrated by an opponent who was too strong. Inyuu Kogo thought that the girl must have felt the same way he did.

"I realized that that was why the Korean challengers did not give up and withstood so stubbornly. This is how I felt," said Kanoko.

"What are you talking about? You're saying that they were able to withstand everything just because of Lee Shin?" Inyuu Kogo could not believe what he was hearing from her.

"Yes, that's right. Honestly, I think that one person can change the course of everything," said Kanoko.

"Did you get hit out of your mind by Lee Shin?" Inyuu Kogo shouted.

"He didn't hit me even once," Kanoko replied.

"What are you talking about?" Inyuu Kogo could not understand.

Inyuu Kogo shook his head as he listened to the girl ramble on.

"You're just out of your mind, I think," Inyuu Kogo muttered, looking at Kanoko.

"No, I'm not!" Kanoko shouted.

"Then what is it? You keep talking nonsense," said Inyuu Kogo.

"Everyone thinks like you. That's why it's more dangerous. You don't even know what kind of person Lee Shin is," said Kanoko.

Inyuu Kogo listened silently to see how long the girl would go on, talking about Lee Shin.

"While going up to the 20th floor, Lee Shin strictly controlled the information that went out about him and leaked only fragments of information. That way, he was able to make people even more complacent toward him. I think he deliberately created this kind of situation," Kanoko explained.

"You're such a conspiracy theorist," Inyuu Kogo said, looking at Kanoko.

Now, Inyuu Kogo looked at her with pity in his eyes.

"In the past, one hero used to change the world. Isn't it time for that to happen again?" Kanoko asked, thinking about Lee Shin.

"And you think Lee Shin is that hero? Have you been brainwashed or something?" Inyuu Kogo massaged his temple and spoke.

"I'm serious! What do you think of Park Joo-Hyuk's combat power?" Kanoko asked Inyuu Kogo.

"Hmm... honestly, if Cui Qian had the Blue Pattern, he might have won," said Inyuu Kogo.

"Oh, is that so?" Kanoko asked.

Inyuu Kogo tilted his head at Kanoko's serious expression.

"What about Lee Shin? What do you think about his combat power?" Inyuu Kogo asked.

"I think Cui Qian with the Blue Pattern is equivalent to Kohei or below him with the Blue Pattern," said Kanoko.

"Really? Has he become that strong?" Inyuu Kogo asked.

"Yes, but even if we have Kohei, we will not be able to defeat Lee Shin," said Kanoko.

Inyuu Kogo furrowed his eyebrows as if all these were nonsense.

"Well, if there were a hundred Kohei... I think we could win by making Lee Shin get tired," said Kanoko.

Inyuu Kogo could not tell if she was being serious or not.

"Is this the place?" Lee Shin muttered.

Lee Shin looked toward the border near Tetir that was enveloped by the Origin Demon Realm, and spread his mana. The wave of mana that spread in an instant began to search for the missing battalion's mana.

"Hmm..." Lee Shin was lost in his thoughts.

"Can you find anything?" a knight asked Lee Shin.

Three knights came with Lee Shin. Among them was the knight who had guided Lee Shin to Merteng.

"No, it's nothing," Lee Shin replied.

The wave of mana extended for several kilometers for the simple purpose of detection. Lee Shin had never stopped his mana detection so far. However, if he did not pick up anything yet, that probably meant that there were no knights on the ground.

"Veren," Lee Shin called out.

"Yes, Mr. Lee Shin," Veren replied.

"You have been sure to guard the border, right?" Lee Shin asked Veren to clarify.

"Yes, we have not seen the battalion, the enemies, or even any shadows," said Veren.

That meant that the battalion was still in this Red Zone. Lee Shin looked up at the sky. Except for the occasionally floating clouds, nothing could be seen except for the sun.

Unless the missing battalion had risen into the sky, the only place left was the underground. When the black mana flowing over Lee Shin's hand permeated into the ground, the earth began to shake as if there was an earthquake.

Lee Shin had been feeling an unusual feeling of death, which was bothering him since he had arrived here. The scent of death that rose from the ground told Lee Shin that something was here, under the ground.

[Summoning of Golem]

The earth and rocks on the ground began to gather, forming a giant figure. The figure was at least five meters tall. The knights' jaws dropped as they witnessed the scene. They could not take their eyes off the massive hole that appeared in the ground as the Golem was formed.

Ssss—

They could hear the sound of dirt falling through the hole.

"What is happening?" one of the knights muttered, puzzled.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The giant Golem began to pound its fist toward a spot with a small hole. As the Golem started pounding, cracks started to form. The knights noticed the cracks and looked around in surprise.

A man, who was covered with dirt, stood on the exposed, overturned earth in the ground.

"Who dares to mess with my barrier without fear?" The man's voice was full of anger.

Half of his face was covered in burns, and one of his eyes had a strange white pupil.

'Is that an artificial eye?'

As Lee Shin looked at the man with a furrowed brow, the man swept back his white hair and his eyes scanned the battalion and Lee Shin.

"Whoa... the test subjects have come here on their own." The man smiled wickedly and rose from the ground.