

The Tower 112

Chapter 112: The Chase

The war surrounding Windsor was swiftly concluded, almost as if it had never happened. Was it due to the overwhelming might of Dark Thunder or the reputation and influence of Lee Shin?

The enemy soldiers lost their morale in an instant. The knights did not drop their swords but could not swing them either. The wizards gazed at the now-empty land in disbelief as Dark Thunder dissipated. The enemy Qualified fell into anguish when they recognized the challenger as Lee Shin.

The soldiers hiding in Windsor poured out like a flood, realizing they no longer had to stay within the castle. The enemy knights advised their people to retreat, so the confused enemy soldiers ran away haphazardly.

However, Lee Shin had no intention of letting them go just yet. He suspected that the enemy might know something about the absent challengers from Korea and Japan. Lee Shin released his mana onto the ground, spreading it throughout the land.

Crackle! Pizz!

The lightning energy flowed over the ground.

[Reverse Thunder]

The lightning energy shot up from the ground into the sky in front of the fleeing enemy soldiers. The victims of the thunderbolt trembled and fell to the ground, unable to defend themselves.

"What the hell..."

"Shit! Where are all these things coming from!"

"Fine! I won't run away! I surrender! I surrender, all right?"

Those other enemies had seen what the lightning energy on the ground could do, so they simply threw down their weapons with anxious eyes. Bilone's wizard, fleeing with these people, trembled as he realized the overwhelming gap between him and Lee Shin.

It seemed like Lee Shin's mana was everywhere. No one knew when or where his thunderbolt would strike. Besides, these people couldn't gauge how much control they had over the mana. The enemy wizards used to boast that no wizard on this continent was stronger than them.

However, this wizard named Lee Shin was an unparalleled master. An enemy wizard sweated profusely as he thought about the thunderbolt that might strike him from the ground.

If this wizard had not lost an arm to some Lantan knight, he would have had a little more room to breathe, but he knew that he could not have escaped still.

"I surrender! I surrender!"

The enemy wizard raised his only arm above his head without any resistance. When the others around him saw that, they also gave up and surrendered.

"We won!"

"Whoa!"

The knights of Windsor shouted in excitement. They wiped away the blood on their faces and screamed in victory.

"We've protected Windsor!"

"Merteng won!"

"Mr. Lee Shin has ended the war!"

Windsor's bloody siege ended like that, with numerous casualties.

Following Juan's orders, the challengers who had set out to find Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, and Park Hye-Won wandered through the mountains, looking for them.

"Look over here! There are signs of someone moving," Kim Kang-Chun said.

The depressed soil suggested something heavy used to be above it. Kim Kang-Chun examined the faint footprints around the area and suspected that they might be related to the three missing people.

"Didn't people say a barrier was set up?" Kim Kang-Chun asked.

"It's probably a power source," said Baek Hyun-Ah.

Baek Hyun-Ah carefully examined the traces. The incident here led to the disappearance of her team leader, Park Joo-Hyuk; therefore, she couldn't miss or overlook a single thing.

"Did an explosion happen here? And they disappeared after?" Kim Kang-Chun asked.

"It must be Team Leader Park Joo-Hyuk's unique ability," Baek Hyun-Ah replied.

They concluded that Park Joo-Hyuk and the team had fallen into a trap. Seeing that even a barrier had been set up in this place beforehand, they could tell that a skilled strategist was undoubtedly on the enemy side.

'The dimensional energy is probably running low. Then that means...'

Baek Hyun-Ah feared that if Park Joo-Hyuk had experienced that recoil again, the chances of him and the other two being in danger would increase even further. With Park Joo-Hyuk incapacitated, they would have tried to escape without encountering the enemy.

"If they tried to escape from here avoiding the enemy, there are only three places to go," said Baek Hyun-Ah.

"Where do you think they went?" Kim Kang-Chun asked.

"Hmm... They would have likely gone into the forest. It has the most cover and can help shake off the enemy," Kang Ji-Hoon suggested.

The others nodded in agreement with Kang Ji-Hoon's opinion.

"Hmmm... typically speaking, that's true. But I think it's too obvious. I don't think the Team Leader or Park Hye-Won would have chosen such an obvious route." Baek Hyun-Ah thought differently.

"That's true..." Shin Ha-Neul agreed with Baek Hyun-Ah.

"But, think about the situation. They were in a life-threatening crisis, and any wrong move could prove fatal. The forest seems to be the least risky option compared to the other two, as following the ridgeline or the riverbank would increase the chances of being caught by the enemies." Kim Kang-Chun disagreed with her opinion.

"Oh, I guess that's also true." Shin Ha-Neul nodded at Kim Kang-Chun's words.

"You shouldn't think that the risk is low because the probability of encountering enemies is high. Therefore, the risk is not low," said Baek Hyun-Ah.

"Right, we're trying to avoid the enemies," Shin Ha-Neul murmured in agreement.

"Hey!" Kang Ji-Hoon, who had been watching them, hit Shin Ha-Neul on the back of his head.

"Hey, what are you hitting me for?" Shin Ha-Neul cried out.

"If you don't know, then just be quiet. Don't mumble next to me," Kang Ji-Hoon said.

"Why are you getting mad at me for speaking?" Shin Ha-Neul frowned and decided to close his mouth.

"Then let's just do this. Since we don't have much time, let's split into pairs and look for traces. If there are none, we'll go in another direction," Kim Kang-Chun suggested.

"Then what about the remaining route?" Baek Hyun-Ah asked.

"We'll have to exclude that one because splitting into three groups here would be too risky," said Kim Kang-Chun.

Baek Hyun-Ah agreed with Kim Kang-Chun's suggestion.

"Then, Ji-Hoon and I will go together, and Hyun-Ah and Ha-Neul can go together. How does that sound?" Kim Kang-Chun said.

"Sure," Baek Hyun-Ah said.

After reaching an agreement, the four of them were about to split into two groups when they detected movement among the trees. Instantly, they drew their weapons.

"Hey, it's us, so put your weapons down."

The three individuals who emerged from the forest were the Qualified from Lantan. When Inyuu Kogo sensed the tension and the fierce atmosphere, he raised his hands to indicate that he had no intention of fighting.

"Huh? What are you guys doing here?"

The four Korean challengers didn't know that Lantan was now an ally. And even though these Japanese challengers had been with Lee Shin, they used to be their enemies, so their abrupt appearance cautioned the group.

"We came to help." Kanoko stepped toward Kogo.

"Who sent you?"

"Lord Juan sent us to go help."

"Lord Juan told you that?"

The Korean challengers thought it strange that someone like Juan, who did not trust Lantan, would send these people here.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that Lantan has officially allied with Merteng. This is the proof that Lord Juan gave us."

Juan had anticipated this type of situation and handed the Japanese challengers evidence to prove their alliance. The four Korean challengers could let their guard down only after seeing the proof.

"I happened to overhear the conversation you were having earlier, but there's no need to split up to look for them," Kanoko said.

"Yeah, why bother going through all that trouble?" Kogo added.

Shin Ha-Neul didn't like Kogo's attitude, so he glared at Kogo and tried to pick a fight.

"Then why did you come to Merteng and get yourself locked up for months?" Shin Ha-Neul shouted.

"Ha-Neul!"

"What's wrong with you?"

Inyuu Kogo had put them in danger when they had tried to reclaim Merteng. As Ha-Neul was part of that effort, he understandably had negative feelings toward Kogo. Kogo was about to respond, but realizing this, he stopped himself.

'Ugh... this annoying kid. Ha... I'll just hold it in once.'

Kogo tried to smile, and Kanoko and Kohei breathed a sigh of relief after seeing Kogo's face. The atmosphere could have turned sour if Kogo had fought back.

"I am aware of what Lantan had done to Merteng. And I would like to apologize for that," Kanoko apologized.

"I am sorry too," Kohei sincerely apologized as well.

"I... I also... regret the bad things I did to you guys. I'm sorry," Kogo also apologized, bowing his head.

Since these Japanese challengers were apologizing to them sincerely, the Korean challengers could not continue to have negative feelings toward them.

Kim Kang-Chun, Baek Hyun-Ah, and Kang Ji-Hoon had been there when these Japanese challengers did harsh things to Merteng. However, it was the past, and they understood the power struggle between countries, so they understood the Japanese challengers.

Even though Shin Ha-Neul had raged emotionally, he felt his ill feelings melting away when he saw them apologizing. Shin Ha-Neul was a simple man.

"Oh... I think I spoke too harshly!" Shin Ha-Neul said.

"Hahaha! Are you forgiving me, Brother?" Kogo asked, laughing at Shin Ha-Neul.

"B-b-brother? Hey, I think that's a bit..." Shin Ha-Neul pushed away Kogo, who tried to get close to him suddenly.

"Ahem! Was I too hasty? Well, it's not bad to stay like this, either. Just call me whatever you want," said Kogo.

"Okay," Shin Ha-Neul replied.

With the situation ending well, Kanoko resumed her story.

"My class is an Explorer, so I can find them." After saying that, Kanoko immediately dispersed her mana.

[Trace Search]

Trace Search could find artificial traces. Kanoko soon found footprints seemingly belonging to Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, and Park Hye-Won.

"I found them!" Kanoko shouted.

"Awesome!"

Kanoko confidently took the lead, as the Korean challengers' problem was solved instantly.

"Follow me," said Kanoko.

They followed the mountain ridge. At the halfway point, Park Joo-Hyuk and the group had seemingly stopped, and the traces of many others were discovered.

"I think there was a fight here," said Kanoko.

There was no need to use Kanoko's ability here. Kanoko noticed various traces, including burn marks on the ground that seemed to move out in multiple directions from a central point.

Kanoko crouched down and examined the pile of ash. She quickly realizes that a powerful thunderbolt strike had made this mark on the ground.

"Could this be Mr. Lee Shin?" Kanoko muttered.

"You think it's the master?"

"Isn't this... a mark from a thunderbolt?"

"I think it is!"

It was definitely a mark of a thunderbolt from the sky. The Qualified of Lantan, who had seen Lee Shin's thunderbolt strike several times, were sure that it was a trace of lightning.

"But Mr. Lee Shin can't be here, can he?"

"Right, when we parted ways, he had a Yellow Pattern..."

"Well, you never know. Maybe he obtained a Blue Pattern in the meantime."

"No way... I don't think that's realistic. It hasn't been that long since he came here, though. It's impossible!"

"Yeah, it would take him a week to get to Windsor. Or at least three to four days..."

While other challengers were arguing about Lee Shin, Kanoko closely examined the trace left by the thunderbolt.

'This is definitely different... from Mr. Lee Shin's thunderbolt.'

She had never closely observed Lee Shin's thunderbolt before, but she could tell there was a power difference. If it were his thunderbolt, the trace wouldn't have been this small and insignificant.

"I don't think this is Mr. Lee Shin's thunderbolt. The trace is too small to be his," Kanoko said.

"What if the master adjusted his power?"

"No, that's a meaningless question. If Mr. Lee Shin had been involved, we would see the corpses of the owners of these footsteps scattered around here. But we don't see many traces of that battle or blood," Kanoko replied.

"Yeah. We'll just have to assume that the enemies also have a wizard that can use thunderbolts."

Kanoko immediately examined the traces again. It was impossible to find footprints with the naked eye. The enemies had seemingly thoroughly erased their traces before they had moved on. So, Kanoko had to use her ability again.

"They went this way," said Kanoko.

"We have to hurry."

The traces showed that the enemy had captured Park Joo-Hyuk and the others following the battle. Unfortunately, if the enemy took them back to their homeland, there was no guarantee they would survive. This was a real concern, as they had already lost a comrade, Ji Eun-Ju.

"Wait a minute." Kanoko suddenly stopped walking and frowned.

"What? Why?"

The footprints once visible due to the Trace Search had abruptly disappeared.

"The footprints..." Kanoko muttered.

"Wait a second. What's up with the ground?"

The challengers had stopped because the ground beneath their feet was transforming. They had been traversing a mountain, but in an instant, it had transformed into a plain and then a forest, leaving them disoriented and surprised.

Swish—

Whoosh—

Suddenly, a vine of an underground tree sprang up and charged toward Shin Ha-Neul. All he heard was the sound of fierce wind in his ear.

"Ugh!" Shin Ha-Neul gasped.

The tree vine brushed past Shin Ha-Neul's neck. The sharp vine would have pierced his neck if he had not reacted quickly and avoided it.

"Everyone be careful!" Shin Ha-Neul shouted.

The trees surrounding these challengers began to move all at once.

Swish— Swoosh— Whoosh—

The challengers tried to cut down the vine, but they grew back very fast and continued to attack the challengers from all directions. As if they were in a swamp, avoiding, blocking, and attacking all seemed useless.

Therefore, Kim Kang-Chun thought he might have to burn down the entire forest to escape, so he infused his greatsword with his mana. Kim Kang-Chun's class was Explosive Swordsman, and he could cause an explosion by swinging his mana-infused sword.

Kim Kang-Chun swung his sword and scattered his mana around.

Babababam—!

Explosions occurred all around them, and flames shot up. The trees writhed in agony and could not attack them anymore. Inyuu Kogo also immediately worked with the flames to create a wall of flames around them. Thanks to him, the group could relax for a moment.

"Damn, this is insane. What the hell is going on? It's not like we're in the Demon Realm or something."