

The Tower 233

Chapter 233. The Behind Story

Cain, the leader of the Platinum Group, was on the hundredth island in the Lardel Archipelago. He had been waiting there to meet the challenger who had placed a bounty on Lee Shin and spread wanted posters throughout the Lardel Archipelago.

Click. Sizzle—

He lit a cigarette with a flick of a turbo lighter, then took a deep drag, exhaling a long plume of white smoke into the air.

"Psh, phew." Cain scanned the surroundings before turning his head, sensing a presence.

A figure with pure white hair and white eyes with no visible pupils stood before him. He wore shabby attire that seemed hastily put together and a necklace with an hourglass pendant. It was Cain's second time meeting this challenger, but his first time seeing his face. During their last encounter, the man had concealed his face with a robe. Cain had an immediate gut feeling that this was the same guy from before.

"You kept delaying our meeting, but finally, we met," Cain said, looking at the man.

This man had placed bounties on Lee Shin, Vuela, and Alice, putting the Earthlings in jeopardy. There was a time when even the Platinum Group had considered working for him in exchange for money, but they had almost fallen into Lee Shin's trap.

"Well, time holds a different value for each of us," the man replied.

"Enough with the nonsense. Who are you, and why did you call me here?" Cain asked the man.

The man had always set the time and the location of their meeting; until now, he had never once shown up, only leaving behind messages for the Platinum Group. But this time, he had promised Cain that he would show up.

Cain noticed a distinct change in the message he received, which deviated from the usual response he had received in the past. This discrepancy sparked a gut feeling within Cain, leading him to believe that, this time, the man would show up.

"My name is Tiempo Dissepuru," said the man, introducing himself.

Thump. Thump.

They were on the island's highest point, untouched by human footsteps. From here, one could see the entire expanse of the island covered in trees, and the wind blew fiercely, creating a constant grass rustling sound.

"I am the Apostle of the God of Time," Tiempo Dissepuru said.

Swoosh—!

The blue sky and the bright sunlight that bathed the surroundings immediately turned monochrome. Moreover, the chirping of birds, the rustling of leaves carried by the wind, and even the distant sound of waves from the other side of the island all vanished instantly.

"Finally, we meet face to face," Cain muttered, looking at Tiempo Dissepuru.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

A man with violet hair emerged from behind a massive tree trunk. His deep eyes slowly scanned the surroundings as he looked at the Apostle. Lee Shin brushed aside his violet hair and looked at the Apostle with a smirk.

"Did you know that I would come?" Lee Shin asked the Apostle.

"Yes," the Apostle replied.

Lee Shin's expression hardened. Cain had invited him here, as he wanted to know about the one responsible for putting a bounty on him and his friends and disrupting their plans before they had even arrived at the Lardel Archipelago. Unexpectedly, the culprit turned out to be the Apostle of Time.

'I thought he would be a servant of the gods or something, but...'

Lee Shin hadn't expected the culprit to be the Apostle of the God of Time. The mention of this divine name at that moment could not be dismissed as a mere coincidence. Lee Shin realized that the very same God of Time whom he had encountered on the hundredth floor in his previous life was responsible for sending him back in time, guiding him to this pivotal juncture.

And that God of Time had now revealed himself before Lee Shin. The aura emanating from him since he displayed his unique power was not something an ordinary Apostle could exhibit. The man calmly looking at Lee Shin was undeniably the God of Time himself.

"You probably have something to say, considering you went through all this trouble, right?" Lee Shin asked.

Manifesting such unique power inside the Tower itself came at a significant cost. Meeting on the isolated hundredth island in the Lardel Archipelago was likely a precaution to minimize the backlash.

"I have a question for you," the God of Time said, looking at Lee Shin.

"What is it?" Lee Shin asked.

"Are you a reincarnator?" the God of Time asked.

Out of the blue, a word was uttered that struck at the heart of everything that had transpired thus far. Lee Shin, who had maintained his composure throughout, could not hide his feelings and, momentarily, his expression.

"Oh, I guess you are," the God of Time said, looking at Lee Shin's expression.

"How did you know?" Lee Shin asked.

Lee Shin thought that there was no point in lying. With the God of Time openly displaying his immense power and making his presence known, Lee Shin became convinced that his suspicions had been all but confirmed.

"I could feel my power coming from you," the God of Time replied.

A thin smile appeared at the corner of his usually expressionless lips. The God of Time seemed satisfied with something, but Lee Shin could not quite grasp what he wanted.

"I see... So that was it..." the God of Time muttered.

It sounded like he had just concluded organizing his thoughts. The God of Time quickly scanned Lee Shin and chuckled.

"Did you reach the hundredth floor in your past life?" the God of Time asked.

"Yes," Lee Shin replied.

"Interesting. Do you know why I sent you back?" the God of Time asked.

The man's words seemed to imply a connection between himself and the God of Time from Lee Shin's past life as if they were one and the same.

"Why did you do that?" Lee Shin asked. He was having difficulty discerning the God of Time's intentions.

"It was to make time start flowing again," the God of Time replied.

"What do you mean by that?" Lee Shin asked, looking confused.

"Do you know why the gods of Astria established the Tower? The true reason?" the God of Time asked.

Every new statement by the God of Time made it harder for Lee Shin to discern his intention.

"It has to do something with the chief gods. The gods of Astria wanted to create the chief gods to elevate their world. And that was why the Tower was created," the God of Time replied.

"They wanted to create a chief god?" Lee Shin asked, failing to understand the statement.

"Yes, that's right. The most likely candidate for that is currently dormant in the tower. You might or might not know about it, but considering the potential of the Tower, nothing is impossible," the God of Time explained.

The God of Time himself was a god in Astria, a high-ranking one at that. If his words were true, it would clarify the long-ambiguous purpose of Astria.

"But not all the gods of Astria agreed with that plan," the God of Time continued.

Lee Shin had anticipated that there would be conflicts among the gods of Astria with differing opinions. Besides, he had already heard from Metatron that the managers of each floor were the gods who opposed them.

"I remained more of a bystander, not leaning toward either side. But as time passed, time itself started to flow meaninglessly. That... is no different from time stopping altogether," the Time of God explained.

"So, is this why you sent me back in time?" Lee Shin asked.

"Yes, most likely," the God of Time replied.

"Most likely?" Lee Shin asked back.

"Timelines vary. The 'me' from your past life isn't the same as me. In essence, we are the same, though, so I can speculate why he would have taken such actions," the Time of God explained.

While Lee Shin could agree and understand the God of Time's version of the story, he just couldn't ignore the many questions that still needed answers.

"The God of Time from my past wasn't on the same level as you," Lee Shin replied.

Lee Shin recalled the God of Time he had encountered on the hundredth floor. He couldn't help but acknowledge the stark contrast between that god and the one standing before him. At best, that god could be compared to the God of Blessings.

"Heh, it seems like you're too naive sometimes," the God of Time muttered.

God of Time chuckled, seemingly finding Lee Shin's words amusing for the first time.

"I don't know how powerful you were back then, but I was aware that humans often give up easily when they feel they are at a significant disadvantage. So, I merely offered you a small incentive to motivate you," the God of Time explained.

"So you're saying you pretended to be weak?" Lee Shin asked.

"Yes, that's right," the God of Time replied.

The God of Time spoke confidently as if he were really the God of Time from Lee Shin's past life.

"If so, then why did you choose me? Because even if you sent me back to the past, time would not necessarily stop flowing, would it?" Lee Shin asked.

"Hmm... Look at yourself. Do you still think my choice was meaningless? I just wanted to offer you an opportunity. If you destroy the Tower, time will start flowing again as it should. However, time could start flowing again even if you don't destroy the tower, but that's just a maybe, not a certainty," the God of Time replied.

Lee Shin nodded. Initially, he had believed that he was merely sent back to the past and became the boss of the first floor due to his refusal to become an Apostle after reaching the hundredth floor. He now knew that wasn't the case. The God of Time had intended to unlock Lee Shin's hidden potential and reignite the stagnant time within the Tower again.

'So I was just a bullet in their gun, wasn't I...'

Lee Shin realized that he was merely a disposable tool the God of Time utilized for a specific purpose. However, he couldn't find any satisfaction in this revelation. The God of Time had sent him with an indifferent attitude, seemingly unconcerned about whether he succeeded or failed.

"You've grown tremendously, but you are still lacking. Do you think you've achieved extraordinary results? The position of a chief god is much higher than that," said the God of Time.

"Yes, I'm already aware of that," Lee Shin replied.

"What the gods want is for you to have enough energy when you reach the hundredth floor for one of them to become a chief god. If you ascend to the hundredth floor, choose me," the God of Time said.

"What do I get if I choose you?" Lee Shin asked.

"At the very least, I hope you understand that I don't particularly like the current system," the God of Time replied.

Lee Shin nodded slowly.

"I'll think about it," Lee Shin replied.

This marked the end of their conversation, and time began to flow again. The faint sound of the wind, the soothing songs of birds, and the crisp sound of the sea waves filled his ears.

"Lee Shin? Why are you..." Cain looked surprised when he saw Lee Shin.

"Let's go back," Lee Shin said to Cain.

Cain looked around with surprise because the white-haired man had abruptly vanished.

"What about that guy from earlier..." Cain asked.

"He's gone," Lee Shin replied.

Noticing Lee Shin's serious expression, Cain realized that something had happened without him noticing, so he remained silent.

"We're heading deeper into the Lardel Archipelago," Lee Shin said.

[You have entered the ninety-fifth floor.]

[You have chosen the Hell Level difficulty.]

[Defeat the Gravemaster of the Fallen Kingdom.]

In a world ravaged by destruction, the remnants of a once glorious kingdom lay in ruins. The night sky cast a somber darkness, and dilapidated buildings and scattered tombstones stood as testaments to the past in every direction. Amidst it all sat a lone man. His ash-gray hair fell to his shoulders, and his unfocused pupils gazed blankly into the void.

Swoosh—!

With a swift motion, the Gravemaster drew the sword stuck in the ground.

"I kill and kill and kill and kill... but it's never over. It's a never-ending task," the Gravemaster muttered.

His voice was devoid of all emotions but one: annoyance. The gleaming ash-colored glances left an afterimage in the darkness as he moved.

'Tsk.'

The graceful movement of the sword continued as it cut through the space, closing in on Lee Shin.

"Ugh...!" The Gravemaster gasped.

The blade hadn't reached Lee Shin, but he could feel the pressure. Reflexively, he extended his mana to create a shield before him and leaped into the air.

Swoosh!

The blade neatly cleaved the shield.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

He traversed the terrain with five seamless leaps devoid of any unnecessary motion. In addition to stepping on the ground, tombstones, and the remnants of buildings, he gracefully soared through the air, altering his trajectory at peculiar angles. And then, he poised his sword to strike.

[Dark Thunder]

Rumble—! Crack!

A lightning bolt struck down without warning, blocking the path of the Gravemaster's sword. Lee Shin expected the Gravemaster to dodge the attack, but the latter instead swiftly changed his direction and swung the sword, deflecting the dark thunder.

Ziiik—

The Gravemaster, who had been forced back, scraped against the ground. He gazed at Lee Shin with a bewildered expression, his features reflecting his astonishment.

"Are you sure you're a human? I've never encountered someone this strong before," the Gravemaster said, looking at Lee Shin.

"That's what I want to say. I've never encountered anyone like you before," Lee Shin replied.

With a smirk, Lee Shin released his mana into the air.

[Lightning Field]

Pizz— Crackle—!

The mana spread out like fog before igniting into bright lightning energy.

[Thunderbolt Explosion]

Suddenly, the lightning energy fragmented into hundreds of branches, each radiating currents that erupted with explosive force, overwhelming the surrounding space.

"Tsk." The Gravemaster clicked his tongue in annoyance.

Then, blue mana gathered in the Gravemaster's clenched fist.

'Wasn't he a swordsman?'

The moment the Gravemaster activated his mana, Lee Shin sensed that the aura of that guy had significantly changed from before. The Gravemaster's mana pierced through the Lightning Field, scattering flashes into the sky.

"Take this!" the Gravemaster said, looking at Lee Shin.

As the flashes disappeared, the Gravemaster yanked his arm downward as if pulling an invisible lever in the air. In response, a colossal meteor commenced its descent, emanating intense heat. A rough estimation suggested that it possessed a size spanning several kilometers and seemingly had the force to destroy several more kilometers.

'Is he insane?'

If Lee Shin didn't stop that, the Gravemaster would also end up hurt due to the meteor. This led Lee Shin to believe that the Gravemaster either had a means of escape or was convinced that he could stop it. If this were not the case, the Gravemaster probably did not care whether he lived or died.

'Regardless of what happens, nothing will change.'

Lee Shin did not plan on getting hit by that meteor.

[Summoning of the Grand Spirit]

The seven Grand Spirits burst through the air, piercing through space. As soon as they appeared, they began gathering and merging their power.

[Elemental Cannon]

Various colors and types of energy swirled in a spiral and flew toward the tiny dot descending from the sky.

Thud.

The deafening sound of the distant collision reached them here. Afterward, tens of thousands of fragments fell like a fireworks display.

Thunk!

Before anyone could marvel at the beautiful sight, thick skeleton hands sprung from the ground and seized Lee Shin's ankle.

Kugugugugu—

Suddenly, a violent wave of energy erupted from the tip of the Gravemaster's sword like an explosion and rushed toward Lee Shin.