

The Tower 91

Chapter 91: The Opposition

[Predator of the Sea]

You, who caught the predator of the sea, are the true predator of the sea!

You can breathe underwater for 10 minutes. (The timer resets upon coming up from the water.)

Your resistance to water increases by 20%.

Lee Shin had gained a lot from this stage. This title was particularly useful if he were to encounter another stage that was set in the sea. Being able to breathe underwater for 10 minutes and having a 20% increase in resistance to water could increase a challenger's magical efficiency by several times.

[The majority of the gods request to speak with you. Will you accept?]

Ignoring the message window that appeared once again, Lee Shin approached Vuela.

"Are we parting ways now?" Vuela asked Lee Shin.

"You remember, right? Wait for me on the 30th floor, alright?" Lee Shin reminded Vuela.

"Got it. Don't be late," Vuela replied.

"Okay, good work on this stage," Lee Shin said, looking at Vuela.

Lee Shin had been on a journey with Vuela—though short, it was enough time to get a sense of him as an individual. After bidding farewell to the challengers, Vuela disappeared.

"Mr. Lee Shin," Hwang Il-Han called Lee Shin and approached him.

Behind Hwang Il-Han, Lee Shin could see hundreds of challengers waiting for Lee Shin to speak. Even though the 20th stage was over, the challengers still seemed nervous, fidgeting or fiddling with their clothes in anxiety.

“Are you alr—” Lee Shin could not finish his sentence.

[The gods invited you.]

Suddenly, a message window popped up, and at the same time, Lee Shin’s expression became stiff.

Swoosh—

With this sound, Lee Shin realized that he was in a new place all of a sudden. What was happening? He was now inside of a massive temple, where hundreds of figures floated around him.

Some figures were clear, while others were so faint that it was hard to tell if they really existed.

‘Tsk.’

Lee Shin expected some kind of intervention from the gods after this stage was over, but Lee Shin never thought that he would be forcibly brought to them. With a cold look, Lee Shin looked at the figures of the gods.

Lee Shin felt displeased about what was going on. The gods were always above the challengers. Lee Shin hated how the gods would move to make the challengers look up at them. He could not help but make a disgusted smile.

[Challenger, Lee Shin.]

A voice echoed in Lee Shin's ears. It did not seem like the sound was transmitted through the air; but rather, it was being created right in his ears. The eerie yet mystical sound, as if someone turned on a mechanical noise, prompted Lee Shin to respond.

"Yes?" Lee Shin replied to the gods.

Here, dozens of gods were revealing their true selves. Therefore, there was no need for Lee Shin to show hostility from the beginning.

[Many gods are watching your every move.]

"Yes, I'm aware," Lee Shin replied to the gods.

Perhaps because Lee Shin had taken a step closer to the class of transcendence, Lee Shin could feel the gods' power even more intensely.

[You have the qualifications to receive our baptism.]

As those words were spoken, a system message window appeared.

[The gods want to appoint you as an apostle.]

[Will you accept?]

Lee Shin barely managed to suppress the frown on his face. If Lee Shin were to take an openly hostile stance here, he would be more likely to face harsher oppression in the upcoming stages.

According to what Lee Shin had heard from the previous administrator, most of the gods still wanted to make him an apostle rather than constrain him.

Lee Shin could also tell from the number of gods present. Lee Shin had been convinced that his reckless behavior up until now was somewhat acceptable, but that was not the case anymore. Having the Qualification of an Adversary alone put Lee Shin at a crossroads, because having this title implied the potential to threaten the gods.

"Which god's apostle will I become if I accept?" Lee Shin asked the gods.

[You will become the apostle of the god you choose.]

"Not all gods want me, do they?" Lee Shin asked, once again.

[You will find out after the baptism.]

Lee Shin tried for a while to gain some more information, but the gods did not tell him anything. Disappointed, Lee Shin stood still in silence.

The next moment, Lee Shin felt a strong, indescribable pressure that was pressing on him. It reminded him of the time when he had reached the 100th floor.

‘This feeling is similar to that time.’

The pressure to become an apostle, and the gods’ arrogance in thinking that they would get what they wanted if they were to just use force, was no different from back then. However, that had been the experience on the 100th floor, and now Lee Shin was only on the 20th floor.

"No, thank you," Lee Shin replied to the gods.

As Lee Shin spoke, a powerful force exploded toward him. Lee Shin felt like he was about to suffocate, and his whole body trembled.

“Keugh...” Lee Shin gasped.

It was only a moment, but for the target, it felt like an eternity. Every moment, Lee Shin barely held back the urge to kneel and collapse. No matter how much pressure was applied to Lee Shin by the gods, he did not want to show any signs of submission to gods.

[How insolent.]

Were the gods feeling the same way? Or was it just their opinion on Lee Shin's refusal of becoming a apostle? Though no tangible form could be seen, Lee Shin sensed that the faces of the gods who kept speaking to him were contorting.

[Are you sure you won't regret it?]

Hearing that voice, Lee Shin tried not to laugh out loud. The gods who were just about to kill Lee Shin were now threatening Lee Shin because they could not break the will and determination of a challenger.

No matter how much the gods could intervene in the tower, the lower the floor, the more the casualties. There was nothing these beings could do to Lee Shin anymore.

"Yup, no regrets," Lee Shin said.

Lee Shin had given up on even trying to be respectful. It was absurd to be respectful to these beings, calling them gods. Although every god had a different class, Lee Shin was sure that there were no high-class gods among those in this place.

[Do you believe in the God of Death...?]

'Are they thinking that I have something with the God of Death...?'

These gods did not represent all the gods, meaning they would not represent the high-class gods, one of whom was the God of Death. Since Lee Shin had been dealing with death from the early stages of the Tower, it was not strange to believe that the God of Death was behind Lee Shin. At least Lee Shin was now sure that there was no God of Death among them.

‘Well, it's kinda funny to think that the God of Death is among these guys.’

Lee Shin laughed openly in response.

“If so?” Lee Shin asked the gods.

Since Lee Shin had come this far, Lee Shin decided to drop the name of the God of Death, hoping that other gods would not step forward out of fear of the name.

[You're acting recklessly.]

Why would the gods even ask him anything, if they were not going to believe what he said? Lee Shin could feel that the end of this frustrating time was approaching.

[It is not a wise thing for you to make gods as your enemy.]

A voice different from before was heard in Lee Shin's ear.

‘Who's this?’

Lee Shin looked around, but he could not figure out who this was. Once again, the original voice of the god echoed as before.

[I will say it again. Receive baptism.]

“Get lost,” said Lee Shin.

With Lee Shin's response, the background shattered like broken glass and Lee Shin returned to his original location. When Lee Shin regained his senses, Hwang Il-Han was standing in front of him, just like before. Judging from the reactions of others, it seemed that only Lee Shin's mind had been transported, not his body.

‘Was it just my mind...?’

Even the duration probably was not that long, because other challengers including Hwang Il-Han did not notice anything was off.

“Mr. Lee Shin...?” Hwang Il-Han said it again.

“Oh, sorry,” Lee Shin replied, looking at Hwang Il-Han.

Hundreds of Korean challengers were in Lee Shin’s view, and neither the challengers nor Lee Shin knew anything about the situation in Isocia. Even if the top rankers had climbed up to Isocia, the situation could not have been good. It was no wonder that those challengers felt uneasy.

"Let's go to the 21st floor," said Lee Shin.

Lee Shin did not worry, because he knew that change was the only constant around here.

The ship that poured out the essence of Lantan's Hextech had arrived on the continent's land.

"We have finally arrived," said Kohei as he got off the ship.

"I never want to do this crazy thing again," said Miura Kanoko.

Miura Kanoko adjusted her glasses while shaking her head, got off the ship and set her foot on the ground. It had been at most a week since she had last stood on solid ground, but given her experience in that week, it felt like it had been more than a month.

"Merteng wouldn't even imagine that we broke through the Demon Realm and got here by crossing the sea," said Kohei.

"Still, be careful. It's not like challengers completely abandoned this area," said Miura Kanoko.

"I know," Kohei replied.

As Miura Kanoko said so, she manipulated the ship's controls and hid the ship between the large rocks.

"We won't get caught, will we?" Kohei asked.

"They won't bother to search this far. But, we still have to move quickly, because there's a lot to do," Kanoko replied.

"Okay," Kohei said.

After saying that, Kanoko placed her palm on the ground and released her mana.

[Mana Detection]

After a while of detection, Kanoko narrowed her eyes and stood up.

"Someone is coming this way," Kanoko said urgently.

"Did someone notice we're here?" Kohei asked.

"I don't think the newly resurrected Merteng would have noticed, but... just in case, we need to keep an eye out," Kanoko replied.

The two of them hid behind a nearby tree and waited for people to approach them.

Thud, thud, thud, thud.?

Two knights walked calmly toward them. Looking at the eagle emblem on their armor, they were clearly knights of Merteng.

"Well, they're not challengers," Kohei said.

"Shh!" Kanoko covered Kohei's mouth with her index finger and signaled to hold his breath.

The knights who had been walking along the coast stopped in their tracks.

"I'm sure I heard a sound from this direction."

"But there's nothing here."

"It's weird, it sounded like water parting and a ship moving."

"Maybe a big fish moved. Everything beyond this place is the Origin Demon Realm, so what ship would come here?"

"Yeah, that's true."

"We just need to keep an eye on if any demons come out of this place or not."

"Right, let's go."

After the knights left, Kanoko, with a look of confusion, looked in the direction they had disappeared.

"What the hell, how did they hear the sound of water parting? Are they some kind of superhuman or something?" Kanoko said in confusion.

"They probably have that kind of ability at least. Don't worry about it," replied Kohei.

"We almost got caught right after we got here. We shouldn't mess with the knights of Merteng if possible," said Kanoko.

"I know. But can we take care of the ones coming up here now?" Kohei asked.

"Yeah, it's not like those would be affiliated with Merteng so... Plus, it would be better to take care of them before we get the Pattern," replied Kanoko.

After saying that, Kanoko took out a map from the bag Kohei was carrying and unfolded it.

"Hmm..." Kanoko was lost in thought.

[Terrain Detection]

Kanoko's magic swept across a radius of dozens of meters along the surface of the land. After scanning the surrounding terrain perfectly, Kanoko slowly nodded her head and looked at the map again.

"There's a starting point for Korean challengers around here," said Kanoko.

"It would be quite nice if a few of them made it up here," replied Kohei.

"Well, it would be nice to get rid of them, but we must not forget our mission. We have to monitor Merteng's movement, gather information, and assassinate if the opportunity arises..." Kanoko said with determination.

"...and also confirming the existence of Lee Shin," Kohei added.

When the name Lee Shin was mentioned, the expressions of the two people quickly hardened.

"That's right. Actually, that's the most important thing, because the challenger named Lee Shin is the reason for the closure of Isocia," said Kanoko.

"But, I still don't understand. How can a newcomer who just arrived on the lower floor cause such a stir?" Kohei asked.

Kanoko sighed at the triumph shown on Kohei's face.

"Some people ignore him, and some people simply regard him as having no chance against a crowd, but my opinion is different," said Kanoko.

After learning about the incident in Korea and discovering the existence of a person named Lee Shin at the center of the controversy, Kanoko had been researching and collecting information about him.

"A challenger cannot win against the majority alone. I agree with that, but Lee Shin is not alone. You can tell just by looking at the many top ranked challengers that he had created. All the Korean challengers who are causing a stir on the Isocia continent right now are his work," Kanoko explained.

"But those guys are just candles in the wind now," said Kohei.

"But, the real problem is that these candles are still not extinguished yet. They should have gone out a long time ago. And now, when Lee Shin comes up, what do you think will happen?" Kanoko asked.

At Kanoko's words, Kohei had nothing to say, so he shut his mouth without saying anything more.

"The reason why major powers are joining forces to attack Korea is because they feel a sense of crisis. But even that alliance is unstable at the moment," Kanoko explained.

"So that's why we came here, isn't it?" Kohei asked, looking at Kanoko.

"Yeah, that's right. So, even if we see Lee Shin, forget about the desire to compete, alright? If we can capture him, Japan will be able to catch up to the United States in a heartbeat," Kanoko explained.

However, after saying that, Kanoko suddenly stopped walking.

"Why? What's wrong?" Kohei asked.

"I sense multiple mana powers," said Kanoko.

"What? Are challengers coming or something?" Kohei asked with a nervous look on her face.

"I think so..." Kanoko replied with nervousness.

As Kanoko confirmed the number of challengers through her Mana Detection, her expression quickly stiffened.

"There are too many challengers here," said Kanoko.

"How many are there?" Kohei asked.

"A hundred... No wait, actually, more than two hundred." Kanoko explained.

Although Kohei's expression also stiffened at such a high number, he wondered if this event was that serious to make Kanoko's expression stiff.

"There are quite a lot. It will be difficult to deal with them, even if they don't have any patterns yet. It will be impossible with such a number," Kanoko muttered.

Kanoko's face trembled slightly. She gritted her teeth and activated her mana power.

"We need to stay out of this first," Kanoko said, as she made up her mind.

"What? Why? But they don't even know about us. We're so far away from them..." Kohei muttered.

"Don't you get it yet? The challengers who haven't come up for a while have all come up together!" Kanoko shouted at Kohei.

"What's the problem with that?" Kohei still could not understand what was going on.

Without even knowing what Kanoko was talking about, Kohei followed Kanoko for now.

"It's Lee Shin! He's here. That's why the challengers who were too scared to come up are now coming up together!" Kanoko shouted at Kohei.

The distance between the Korean challengers and the two was about three hundred meters. In terms of the Mana Detection skill, there were only a few challengers who could keep up with Kanoko, but Kanoko could not help but assume that the monster named Lee Shin had a detection range as wide as hers.

"You worry too much," Kohei said, looking at Kanoko.

In Kohei's eyes, Kanoko seemed to be overreacting, but Kanoko could not shake off the sudden feeling of unease.

"Well, there's nothing bad about being ca—" Kanoko could not finish her sentence.

Kanoko was silenced by a sudden lightning bolt. A large tree was hit by the lightning bolt and fell in front of the two, blocking their path.

"This is insane..." Kanoko muttered.

The two froze in place just like statues, sensing that the situation had taken a turn for the worse.