

The Tower 107

Chapter 107

Park Joo-Hyuk climbed up the tallest tree around him to assess the situation. The barrier that enclosed the territory was shimmering faintly. Seeing the boundary area, his eyes widened in surprise.

"It's the enemy's trap," said Park Joo-Hyuk to the other two after he climbed back down from the tree. "The barrier extends out from the sniping point."

"You mean they expected us to use this place as a sniping position?"

"No way, that's impossible."

The enemy camp and the sniping point were several kilometers apart. There were many points in-between that they could have chosen. In addition, if the group had decided to change direction, there would have been even more possible sniping points. Therefore, it was ridiculous to think that the enemy had predicted this to be the location they would choose among all those possibilities.

"We can't be sure of that, but we can be sure that the enemies will soon arrive," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Let's move quickly for now."

The three of them moved toward the barrier, trying to hide as much as possible.

"Shh, it's the enemy," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

Bilone's soldiers kept appearing as the group climbed the mountain. Park Joo-Hyuk could tell that these soldiers were the ones waiting in this area.

"Don't you think we're encountering them more and more often?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"Wait a minute," said Park Hye-Won.

He stopped in his tracks, and the other two followed suit.

"Why? What's wrong?" Baek Hyun asked.

"If the enemies really expected us to snipe them and that's why they set up the barrier, then even if we reach the barrier, can we get out? We might be surrounded by enemies when we touch the barrier," said Park Hye-Won.

"Well yeah, that could also happen. But unless we find the power source that supplies energy to the barrier, there's no way around it," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

"I think we might be able to find it. As we get closer to the barrier, I can sense the flow of mana more and more," said Park Hye-Won.

Park Joo-Hyuk nodded, thinking that Park Hye-Won, who had learned how to do mana manipulation directly from Lee Shin, would be able to find it.

"Do you think you'll be able to find it?" he asked Park Hye-Won.

"If I get a little closer to the barrier, I think I can get a rough sense of it. When we move away from the barrier, it's possible that I will no longer be able to feel the mana flow, but I can still keep a mental note about the source's approximate location and move around. If there's a power source nearby that is generating the barrier, I'll be able to know right away," Park Hye-Won replied.

"Sounds good. And of course, the enemy will assume that we are heading toward the place where the barrier is instead, so it will be easier for us to move around." Baek Hyun agreed with Park Hye-Won's suggestion to find the power source first.

"Okay, let's do that then," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

With his permission, the three of them moved to find the power source of the barrier.

‘It's still safe.’

Since there were no enemies appearing yet, Park Joo-Hyuk could tell that the enemies had not accurately predicted their location. That also meant that they had not yet missed the golden opportunity. He was confident that there would only be a few enemies near the power source.

"Wait, I can sense something," said Park Hye-Won.

"What? Where is it?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"This way... It's this way," said Park Hye-Won.

Soon after, the three discovered the power source hidden in the forest. It was hidden, covered in grass, but it was undoubtedly the power source that they were looking for. In the middle of it was a mana stone, which emitted a bright light, supplying mana. The three smiled with satisfaction.

‘We'll break it right away.’

A soldier who was hiding a little further away from the power source had noticed them and came out from his hiding spot, but Park Joo-Hyuk was too fast for the soldier.

‘It seems like the enemies did not accurately predict the sniping position.’

Seeing the fact that there were hardly any soldiers guarding the power source, Park Joo-Hyuk was confident about his theory. It was clear that the enemies had placed power sources close to several possible sniping points.

‘Yes! We won.’

Park Joo-Hyuk had a victorious smile on his face as he thrust his sword into the power source.

Creeaacckkk—!

The power source started to break apart as the mana stone cracked and the mana began to surge wildly. Perhaps triggered by the destruction of the mana stone, there was an unstable flow of mana and it seemed that a massive explosion was about to occur.

‘Damn it!’

He realized the sudden change in mana flow within the power source, but it was too late to withdraw his sword.

Kwaaaa!

Flames spewed out in all directions in an instant, and Park Joo-Hyuk, who faced the explosion head-on, clenched his teeth and used the [Power of Transformation].

[You have used the Power of Transformation.]

The surrounding flames retreated as if rewinding a video.

[You have insufficient transformation energy to transform the result.]

The flames that were quickly retreating suddenly stopped moving. Park Joo-Hyuk's face crumpled in frustration as he read the message.

[You may utilize your achievement points to draw transformation energy from this world.]

[Will you utilize your achievement points?]

He had encountered a similar situation before. The Power of Transformation was a skill that defied causality to an unreasonable degree, as Lee Shin had once said. Drawing transformation energy to perform such an action meant that he would have to consume a lot of achievement points. However, without hesitation, Park Joo-Hyuk decided to use his achievement points.

[You have utilized your achievement points.]

[You have drawn 100 transformation energy.]

[You have used the Power of Transformation.]

As he used the Power of Transformation, consuming his achievement points, the explosion disappeared and the power source began to function normally again.

"Ha... Ha..." He gasped for breath as he fell to the floor. He felt his power sharply dropping.

‘Who the hell...’

Now that Park Joo-Hyuk had experienced it firsthand, he realized that the barrier was designed as a trap to lure them in. They were never concerned about setting up barriers for defense. The power source was designed to release all its energy for this explosion.

Someone on the enemy side had been convinced that their opponent would not go through the barrier but instead come looking for the power source, and they had consequently devised this strategy. Park Joo-Hyuk had fallen into that trap.

"Ah... Ahh!" A soldier who had just witnessed the explosion screamed in surprise.

Baek Hyun, who had been frozen, came back to his senses at the sound of the scream. He then immediately slit the soldier's throat and unleashed his mana to detect the soldiers hiding nearby, killing them as well.

"Oppa! Are you okay?" Park Hye-Won asked Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Yeah... I'm fine," he replied.

Park Hye-Won supported Park Joo-Hyuk, who was sweating like crazy. Because he had forced the transformation energy out, he was about to faint.

The situation had just taken a nosedive.

"What should we do?" Park Hye-Won asked.

"Bro, do you think you can move?" Baek Hyun asked Park Joo-Hyuk.

"We don't have time for this. If we don't get out of here quickly, they'll come for us," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

He felt that they were in a greater crisis now than ever before. He thought that the bigger problem than losing his strength was the unknown strategist on the enemy side.

He felt that they had played into the strategist's hands this whole time. In fact, he could not even imagine how the other side would react now.

For the first time in a long while, Park Joo-Hyuk felt like his mind was going blank.

"Well... there are three paths we can use as an escape route," he said.

Park Joo-Hyuk continued to think as he listed the three escape routes. Which of the three paths would allow them to escape the enemy's grasp? Or should they move to a different place outside of these paths? Where could the enemies be now?

Since he realized that his strategy had been predicted by the enemy, he started to feel as if all of his thoughts were exposed to the opponent's scrutiny. His judgment started to be clouded by a feeling that nothing he did would work against the enemy.

"Let's go this way," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

He had no choice but to choose the path along the mountain ridge that the enemies would be least aware of. The three tried to suppress their anxiety and moved toward the area.

'The mountain ridge is exposed to enemies. Therefore, it will be difficult for the enemies to anticipate, because people in danger will not take such big risks.'

Park Joo-Hyuk, determined not to be seen through this time, took the risk and chose the mountain ridge. The surroundings of the mountain ridge were wide open, and this route would make them easily exposed to the enemy. However, if the opponent had not prepared a trap in advance, he thought they would be able to escape.

"From now on, we have to speed up. Otherwise, we will definitely be caught by the enemy," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

When the three arrived at the starting point of the mountain ridge and were about to take a deep breath in preparation to set off, a stranger's voice stopped them in their tracks.

"Well, there's no need to do that, because you've already been caught. Hahaha."

As if declaring a checkmate, a man spoke and walked slowly toward Park Joo-Hyuk and his group.

"Nice to meet you all. I've always wanted to meet you," said the man, waving a flag that covered half of his face.

The three could not find the words to respond, and their expressions stiffened. In an instant, the mana wave in their surroundings surged. A number of people who had been hiding in the area revealed themselves at once.

'Damn it!'

Park Joo-Hyuk had not expected them to be here. Clenching his jaws, he glared at the man who stood in front of him.

"It seems like you do not want to talk to me. I've been waiting for days to talk to you all," said the man.

His face was covered by a fan, and Park Joo-Hyuk's team could only see the man's eyes. Yet, just from looking at his crinkled eyes, Park Joo-Hyuk and the other two could tell his expression.

"Who are you?" asked Park Joo-Hyuk.

The man started to smile as if he was delighted to hear Park Joo-Hyuk's voice.

"Oh! You didn't respond because I didn't introduce myself, right? My name is Zhuge Yun. It hasn't been long since I started climbing the tower, and I don't have any reputation yet, so I'm quite nervous," Zhuge Yun replied.

The three of them frowned at the name they were hearing for the first time.

"So, you... were the one who orchestrated all of this?" Park Hye-Won asked, looking at the man as if she could not believe that everything that had happened until now was plotted by one person.

"Yes, that's correct. I came up with everything, from pretending to prepare the combat formation to lure you in, to setting up traps at the sniping point, and even to setting a trap in the power source for the barrier... All of these were my ideas. Hahaha," Zhuge Yun replied.

Behind his laughter was an expression that geniuses, especially real geniuses, had. It was a look that they subconsciously acquired as they lived in a world different from ordinary people. Having encountered such people twice in the past, Park Joo-Hyuk could recognize that same look in Zhuge Yun as well.

He gritted his teeth and bit his lips.

"...How did you know that we would come here?"

"Well, that part wasn't so difficult, but I was a little disappointed because it was too predictable. I had higher expectations of you, Mr. Park Joo-Hyuk. Hahaha," said Zhuge Yun.

"Answer my question," said Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Based on your actions so far, it was not too difficult to predict. Considering the kind of magic circle we have in Windsor, the three of you are the most suitable to deal with it. Of course, Park Hye-Won, who can snipe, was bound to be here, and since she couldn't come alone, the probability that the two of you followed her was high, given that you have the greatest combat power," Zhuge Yun explained.

"Although Baek Hyun is outstanding in terms of strength, his judgment is inferior to the two of you, so if only two were to come, I thought it would be Park Joo-Hyuk and Park Hye-Won who would come together. And if three people were to come, I expected that it would be Baek Hyun who came along. Hwang Kang-Woong is needed on the other side for defense, so I excluded him, and the other challengers are not that outstanding in terms of combat power. Besides, having too many people involved in an assassination plan does more harm than good."

Zhuce Yun looked at them as if asking if they could understand what he was saying. Baek Hyun frowned, noticing that the man was talking to them like a teacher giving a lesson to his students.

Seeing Baek Hyun's face distorted, Zhuge Yun chuckled again and continued. "We knew that time was on Windsor's side, and we had to bring down Windsor quickly. Well, both sides knew that. While Bilone was a more urgent problem to deal with, Windsor would soon be captured by the enemy if nothing was done. Windsor had to stall for time no matter what, and what was the way to do that? Of course, the only way was to snipe."

Park Joo-Hyuk tried to recover as much as possible while listening to Zhuge Yun's words. Zhuge Yun continued with his explanation slowly.

"There were a total of twenty-three points that you could use for sniping. Among them, the places that you could go to in a hurry were the west and east side, which excluded the northern region from the equation. Since Windsor's castle is near a cliff in the west with numerous Demon Realms around it, it would have made it difficult for you to find a sniping point, which would have caused you more pressure. The odds were almost 9:1 that you would go to the point in the east. Of course, you could always do something that defied the odds, but I knew that you guys wouldn't take big risks when you have a reasonably safe path in such a crucial moment like this," Zhuge Yun explained.

As Park Joo-Hyuk and the other two listened to his words, their expressions became increasingly stiff.

"Then out of those remaining possibilities, there are eight mountains where you could find good locations, with a dozen sniping spots across them. The farthest mountain from where Park Hye-Won's shot could reach us was this one. Oh! But I didn't predict exactly where you would go. The point with the highest probability was here, but I couldn't be sure. So I put the same barrier on all those points," said Zhuge Yun.

This was just as Park Joo-Hyuk had expected. China had enough financial strength to support such an operation.

"I installed a mana detection device on the power source and set it up so that the barrier would be activated when a sniper attack occurred. Then, I thought about it more. Will Park Joo-Hyuk and Park Hye-Won go to the barrier, or will they look for the power source? But the two of you have always been shrewd, always having tricks up your sleeves in any operation. You've always thought about other possibilities and intentions of the enemies before you moved and acted," continued Zhuge Yun.

"So, we placed only a few soldiers and had them move like crazy after the sniper attack to make you think that this is a trap and increase the probability of you guys finding the power source. It would have been nice if the explosion occurred as it should have, but since that didn't happen, then Park Joo-Hyuk must have used his unique ability. Then the probability of you surviving from there would be close to zero percent. Now, here is the problem! How did you behave in the previous operation to recapture Windsor?"

The three frowned. Once more, the man in front of them was talking as if he was educating some children.

"Oh, I guess you don't know the answer. The answer is that you took risks and found the way with the highest effectiveness! When you encounter danger, you seem to prioritize effectiveness over efficiency.

“That's how we knew that you would appear on the mountain ridge. Although there was a higher risk on the mountain ridge than other places, this ridgeline was definitely the place where you could escape if you succeeded.

“Well, there were other factors as well, but I'll skip them because this isn't a debate, haha,” Zhuge Yun explained.

After finishing his sentence, he folded his fan, finally revealing his face, and smiled at them.

"Now, what are you going to do? Ah! Whatever you do, we already know," he said.