

## **The Tower 97**

### Chapter 97: The Demon Realm

The entire Demon Realm was engulfed in a thick black fog, obscuring everything. The fog, made up of demon power, twisted and disrupted mana flow, making it incredibly difficult for challengers to channel their mana outside their bodies.

Unless one had mana control and intelligence rivaling Lee Shin, sending one's mana far away was impossible.

'The more I think about it, the more absurd it becomes.'

Lee Shin remembered the days when incompetent commanders pushed soldiers into the Demon Realm without any strategy, causing countless deaths. How many soldiers had died in the Demon Realm? Evidently, many had sacrificed themselves to enter this place and step on enemy soil.

After thinking that, Lee Shin could feel the death energy here more clearly than before.

"Wow... I really can't see anything," Lilian muttered.

Lilian, a first-time visitor to the Demon Realm, flew around with great enthusiasm, seemingly fascinated by the place.

"Oh my, Lilian! What are you doing?! You might get lost here. Please stay close to Mr. Lee Shin," Kanoko said, looking at Lilian.

Kanoko, unaware of Lilian's identity, kept an eye on Lilian. She was worried, so she tried to prevent Lilian from getting lost in the unfamiliar territory.

"What a cute child. I think you should worry about yourself first," Lilian muttered.

"Oh my... what are you? Please just stay still. I feel like you're gonna get in big trouble," said Kanoko.

Lilian did not react negatively to Kanoko's concerns, likely because she could sense the genuine care behind them.

"I guess we'll need your abilities from here, Kanoko," Lee Shin said.

Lee Shin snapped his fingers; almost immediately, May, Warrie, and Ahn Jin appeared from the ground.

"May will take care of Kanoko. Warrie and Ahn Jin will take care of Kohei and Kogo," Lee Shin ordered.

Lee Shin's three subordinates moved to their respective positions, and Kanoko approached him and stood beside him.

Click! Thump!

Lee Shin unlocked Kanoko's handcuffs with his key, and the heavy handcuffs fell to the ground.

"Wow... This feels so nice," Kanoko muttered.

The handcuffs were preventing her from using her mana. After the handcuffs were gone, she felt like her heavy body had instantly become weightless. The sense of liberation made her feel like she could do anything now.

"You're so lucky..." Kogo muttered, looking enviously at Kanoko.

"I agree," Kohei replied.

The handcuffs had effectively kept Inyuu Kogo's mana sealed for several months. Although he had become quite used to it by now, he could not help but feel envious when he saw Kanoko without handcuffs.

"Let's begin." Lee Shin ordered, looking at Kanoko.

Kanoko took a deep breath and unleashed her abilities—the Class Skill of an Explorer.

[Terrain Detection]

Even in the Demon Realm, Kanoko's Class Skill allowed her to read the surrounding terrain precisely. Her mana swept the ground instantly, scanning the surrounding terrain's build and feeding the information to Kanoko.

"Show me the map," Kanoko demanded confidently.

Lee Shin handed her the map that he was holding.

"Hmm... where is our destination?" Kanoko asked.

"We're going to Delbet Castle in the Red Zone," Lee Shin replied.

"If we go about 35 degrees to the right from the direction we're facing here, there will be a high mountain. We need to go there," said Kanoko.

"All right," Lee Shin replied.

The group moved quickly, with Kanoko at the lead. And they stopped when the said mountain was in sight.

"There are enemies here," Lee Shin said.

"What? But how did you know that?" Kanoko was surprised.

Kanoko was amazed because Lee Shin had detected the enemies before her [Mana Detection] skill had. It could've been possible outside, as challengers' detection range would be wider there, but they were inside the Demon Realm.

Such a mana detection range, with only mana control and not some unique ability, was astonishing.

'Is this... happening for real...?'

Kanoko found it hard to believe that Lee Shin could detect the enemies faster than her Mana Detection skill, which covered a hundred-meter radius.

"We can continue walking since we're still far from encountering them," said Lee Shin.

"They're far away?" Kanoko was surprised once again.

Even though Kanoko had been walking for a while now, her Mana Detection still hadn't detected the enemy. Looking at Lee Shin's face, she realized he wasn't lying. Besides, there was no reason for him to lie to her.

"It looks like... 40 of them," said Lee Shin.

"F-f-forty people? That's crazy... Wait, how long has it been since we entered the Demon Realm?"

"I'm not sure, but not too long ago."

"No way... And we already have such a large enemy force ahead of us? How did they come all the way here?"

While others talked about the enemy, Lee Shin focused more on his mana control.

'They are closer than I thought.'

That either meant that they had luckily gotten this far or had trained specifically to break through the Demon Realm. Either way, Lee Shin was in luck, as he could deal with them before they set foot on Merteng.

"Oh my... I guess it was real," Kanoko muttered.

A bit after Lee Shin had announced the enemies' presence, her Mana Detection also caught them. Close to a hundred humans were crossing the mountain right now.

"I wondered why the Demons did not appear, but it seems like these people have already taken care of them," Kohei said.

"Damn it, don't we have to run away? Why are we going toward them?" Kogo seemed very worried.

Unlike Kanoko and Kohei, Kogo remained restless and looked around nervously.

"There are about ten knights and one knight commander. The rest are ordinary soldiers," Lee Shin said.

"Ten knights and one knight commander? Are you crazy? We can't do this! We should definitely go somewhere else! Why are we still here?" Kogo started shouting, his anxiety peaking.

Annoyed with Kogo's constant worry, Lee Shin gestured to Ahn Jin. Ahn Jin understood what Lee Shin meant, so he nodded and approached Kogo.

"This is really not good... uh... uhp!" Ahn Jin covered Kogo's mouth with his hand.

"Be quiet and follow me," Ahn Jin said.

"Uhp-uhp!" Kogo could not say anything anymore.

After seeing Kogo's action, Kohei approached Kanoko and asked.

"Has he always been like that?" Kohei asked Kanoko.

"I knew there was something weird about him, but I didn't know he was this weird," Kanoko said to Kohei.

Kanoko looked at Kogo with contempt, but then her expression suddenly stiffened.

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

"I think the enemies have also noticed us," said Kanoko.

"What?" Kohei was shocked.

"Stay here quietly," Lee Shin ordered.

After warning them, Lee Shin dashed forward. The distance between them and the enemies was now only about 20 meters. It was a short distance, so even the enemies could pinpoint the location of Lee Shin's group.

'The one who noticed us must be someone skillful, like the knight commander.'

'Then, can they also notice this?'

[Thunderbolt]

Lee Shin wondered if the enemies would be able to block a sudden lightning bolt from the darkness. The lightning bolt illuminated the mountain shrouded in black fog, striking the enemies' heads.

Creaaacckkk—!

The deafening sound of thunder followed as a thick lightning bolt struck the two knights, spreading electric arcs in all directions.

"Kraaaah!"

"Kruk!"

"It's the enemy! There's a wizard! Be careful!"

However, it was already too late for Lee Shin's opponents to react.

[You have defeated Knight Hausen of Tetir.]

[Your merit points have increased by 780.]

[You have defeated Knight Judkal of Tetir.]

[Your merit points have increased by 630.]

[You have defeated a soldier of Tetir.]

[Your merit points have increased by...]

[...]

As Lee Shin watched the merit points pile up, he could not help but smile with satisfaction. His real purpose for coming to the Demon Realm was to accumulate as many merit points as possible to acquire the Pattern he needed quickly.

Lee Shin had to either clear the False Demon Realm or collect merit points to get that Pattern. But since there were only a few False Demon Realms, the only way to upgrade his Pattern was to collect merit points.

Furthermore, soldiers and knights from other countries were the perfect prey for collecting merit points for Lee Shin, even in the Red Zone.

'I had no choice but to enter this Demon Realm!'

As Lee Shin dodged the incoming sword strikes, he scattered his mana on the ground.

Crack—!

The land turned into an ice rink in an instant. Moreover, the soldiers collapsed, unable to move properly because the ground was slanted. As a result, their formation fell apart.

Amidst this chaos, the knight commander approached, breaking the frozen ground with his mana. Although his face was not visible in the darkness, Lee Shin could feel his anger.

"Reveal yourself!" roared the knight commander angrily.

The roar was loud enough to shake the entire mountain. However, Lee Shin simply ignored the knight commander's shout and seized control of the space with his mana. Who would have thought that a wizard could possess such command over mana control in the Demon Realm?

[Thunder Explosion]

Zap!

A thunderbolt exploded suddenly in front of the charging knight commander. Even though he barely managed to dodge it, another thunderbolt exploded where he had escaped.



"Keugh!" The knight commander gasped.

Crackle! Zap!

After being hit by a few thunderbolts consecutively, the knight commander collapsed and started to crawl. Noticing that the knight commander could no longer fight, Lee Shin shifted his attention to the other surviving soldiers.

Then, Lee Shin's wave of mana started to flow out.

[Thunderbolt]

Rumble— Crack!

Not a single soldier could dodge the lightning that flashed from the darkness and struck them. The successive lightning strikes wiped out the enemy soldiers and knights quickly, and message windows announcing the rewards appeared continually before Lee Shin.

Lee Shin ambled toward the knight commander.

"Kuh...ugh..." The knight commander was in terrible pain. He slowly looked up at Lee Shin in astonishment.

"W-w-who... are you...?" the knight commander asked.

"I'm Lee Shin," Lee Shin replied.

The knight commander's pupils shook wildly, but it was no longer a surprise to Lee Shin.

"S-surely... the decisions... made by the gods... were not wrong..." said the knight commander.

[Martin, the Knight of Tetir, has been defeated.]

[Your merit points have increased by 2,100.]

After Martin closed his eyes, Lee Shin turned Martin into an undead and put him in the shadow space. A few seconds later, the Japanese challengers finally arrived there.

"Did you kill them all already?" Kanoko asked.

"Wow..." Kohei was surprised.

"This is insane... Was he really a knight commander?" Kogo asked.

The challengers had seen how easily Lee Shin had dealt with all the soldiers and knights. When they had realized how strong he was, they had gotten goosebumps. However, their heads began to throb when they saw the knight commander's corpse.

"Did you really handle all of them alone? And alone in the Demon Realm?" Kohei could not believe what was before his eyes.

"It took you less than 5 minutes to defeat them all?" Kanoko asked Lee Shin.

"Man, does that even make sense?" Kogo muttered.

Inyuu Kogo finally understood why Lee Shin moved so confidently and why Kanoko and Kohei had spoken so highly of him. Kogo was not the only one who was shocked. Kanoko and Kohei had seen Lee Shin's ability once before, but they had only now seen his true strength in its entirety.

Dozens of soldiers and ten knights, along with the knight commander leading them, were all defeated in less than 5 minutes. Besides, it did not seem like Lee Shin had exerted much effort—he wasn't even sweating.

'Where did this guy even come from?'

The more Kanoko got to know Lee Shin, the more she was confused.

"We have no time to waste. Kanoko, take the lead." Lee Shin ordered.

"Yes, sir!" Kanoko replied.

A second ago, the trio had been thinking about how they should escape, but after witnessing Lee Shin's strength, all those thoughts had disappeared in an instant.

'I hope the rest of our journey goes just as smoothly.'

Inyuu Kogo sighed. They had been moving for hours, fighting Tetirian soldiers and demons that occasionally popped up. There was nothing to look at, and no worthwhile enemies appeared, so it was incredibly boring for the challengers.

"Ugh, I wish something would appear. Anything!" Inyuu Kogo said.

"Hey, what are you saying?" Kanoko said, looking at Inyuu Kogo.

"You can't even fight in those handcuffs. So why would you say things like that?" Kohei said to Inyuu Kogo.

"Who cares? That guy will defeat everything. It's all so boring now; we'll at least get a show to watch then," Inyuu Kogo said.

"Ugh! Don't say such things! Words have weight!" Kanoko shouted.

Kanoko smacked Inyuu Kogo's arm and warned him. Exhausting themselves wasn't a wise decision, especially when they had no idea how long they would be stuck in this situation. Despite feeling bored, Kanoko appreciated this moment of calmness, considering the dangers they could face in the future.

As they approached the enemy countries, the probability of encountering more enemies increased dramatically. So, Kogo only grumbled after, looking annoyed, instead of saying stuff he might end up regretting.

"What do you mean 'words have weight!' It's not like enemies would magically appear just because I talked about th—"

Swoosh—! Crack!

Kogo couldn't finish his sentence because of the arrows flying toward his head. Ahn Jin pulled his collar at the last moment, narrowly preventing his head from having a new pointy accessory. Kogo broke out in cold sweat.

Kogo thought about the arrow that his head had barely dodged and froze on the spot. From there, he just rolled his eyes to see what was happening.

"W-w-what's that?" Kogo asked.

"It's the enemy," Lee Shin replied.

Lee Shin had been aware of the enemy's location for a while.

'They are the Qualified.'

The enemies had seemingly predicted their location from Kogo's voice and then shot an arrow. This idea turned into a fact when the next arrow did not come.

“Ugh! I told you that your words have weigh—”

Swish—! Clang!

Kanako couldn't finish her sentence either, as Warrie had precisely cleaved an arrow whooshing toward Kanako.

Thump—!

The enemies shot arrows when they hear sounds. The Japanese challengers quickly noticed that and covered their mouths.

"There's no need for that," Lee Shin said.

They felt a powerful mana wave when Lee Shin opened his mouth. He directed his mana toward where he had felt the wave. He then strangled one of the attackers with his psychokinesis.

Lee Shin pulled the enemy toward him and threw them in a surprise attack in front of the Japanese challengers.

"Keugh...!" The enemy gasped.

The enemy challenger had somehow survived being strangled and looked at Lee Shin with trembling pupils, aghast.

"Are you Korean?" Lee Shin asked when their eyes met.

However, the Blue Pattern on his neck was not that of Merteng's but Tetir's.