

The Tower 134

Chapter 134: Journey to the Demon King's Castle

Rumble— Crack! Baaaam—!

Countless system messages flooded Lee Shin's view as a torrent of black thunderbolts rained down from the sky.

"Kieek!" screeched some creature from below.

The acrid scent stung Lee Shin's nose as Veck Jack, its massive wings spread wide, approached him. With its mouth open, the creature, nearly twice the size of the Skeleton Crow, flew toward Lee Shin.

However, its large figure posed no threat to Lee Shin. If anything, its size made it an easier target for Lee Shin to hit.

[Dark Thunder]

Lee Shin extended his index finger toward the sky and then pointed it toward Veck Jack.

Baaam—!

A thick, dark thunderbolt, twice the size of the previous ones, descended with great force, striking Veck Jack's head.

"Krrraak—" Veck Jack convulsed and crashed to the ground. The venom in its mouth became gray smoke, seemingly having burned inside.

[You have taken away Veck Jack's Agility.]

[Your Agility has increased by 1.]

[You have taken away Veck Jack's Dominance.]

[Your Dominance has increased by 1.]

[You have defeated Veck Jack.]

[Your merit points have increased by 83,000.]

When Veck Jack fell to the ground with a loud boom, the demons on the battlefield began to waver.

'I've done enough. They should be able to deal with the rest.'

Lee Shin had many other areas to save, so he couldn't afford to waste his remaining mana on the demonic beasts here. His mana hadn't yet replenished completely since his fight with Belial.

"Are they coming out finally?" Lee Shin muttered when he saw the citadel gates open.

Soldiers of the citadel of Bastion rushed out from the open gates. The demons' camp was already in chaos, and only a few name-class demons remained. The tide of the battle was now wholly in Meldeuren's favor.

And amidst the chaos, a few familiar faces could be seen moving through the demons and rushing toward Lee Shin.

"Mr. Lee Shin!"

"Please don't leave yet! Wait a moment!"

Lee Shin slowly descended to the ground in response to their voices.

"You have truly returned." Clark's face lit up with joy.

"Yes, it seems like you've carried out my request well. Thank you," Lee Shin said, looking at Clark.

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"Don't mention it, Sir. Thanks to you, I was able to endure. Oh, and here you go," said Clark.

Clark then handed a small bag he had been holding to Lee Shin.

"If you've fought that devil, you must be exhausted. I put a high-class healing potion in there," said Clark.

That surprised Lee Shin, and he glanced at the bag with a faint smile.

"Thank you," Lee Shin replied.

"And also this one..." Clark said.

Then, Clark pulled out a map from his pocket and unfurled it before him.

"This map shows the current frontlines of each country. I prepared it, thinking you might need it," Clark said.

Lee Shin marveled inwardly at Clark's thorough preparation. With this map alone, he could significantly shorten his travel time.

"You don't have to worry about Merteng," Clark said.

Lee Shin stared at Clark in astonishment. Clark started to explain with a bright smile.

"Trust them. Didn't you raise those challengers?" Clark said.

"You seem to trust them more than I do," replied Lee Shin.

"I'm just drawing conclusions from known facts. Challengers from various countries have also gathered in Merteng; for the first time in history, nearly all countries are working together," said Clark.

Clark's serious gaze was pleading with Lee Shin.

"Please trust the humans. You don't have to solve everything for us," said Clark.

Lee Shin smiled at his words.

"You seem to be mistaken. I wouldn't have come this far if I had tried to handle it all alone. If I hadn't trusted those guys, it would've taken me much longer to reach the twenty-first floor," Lee Shin explained.

Lee Shin had a moment of self-reflection.

"In the tower, you overcome obstacles and build achievements. There is no growth without hardships. Above all, my growth comes first. And I believe that's the path that will save many people," Lee Shin said.

Clark, who had been carefully listening to his words, nodded.

"I see... So, even if someone were to die while climbing the tower, would you consider it an unavoidable consequence?" Clark asked.

"Yeah, if I can help, I will, but it won't do much good ultimately. Death is an experience in this world. An important one at that," Lee Shin explained.

"I'll take that as advice," Clark replied.

"If you know what I mean..." Lee Shin said.

"Are you finally going to clear this world?" Clark asked.

"Yeah, that's the plan," Lee Shin replied.

Suddenly, Clark stepped back and bowed. The people beside him hurriedly followed suit and lowered their heads before Lee Shin.

"Although we can't erase what the United States has done to Korea, we will strive to wash away those mistakes," Clark said.

Clark's gaze was more solemn than ever.

"I'm truly sorry. And I have been sorry," said Clark.

"That apology shouldn't be directed just to me," Lee Shin replied.

"I know. After this fight, I plan to visit Merteng in person," said Clark.

"Don't you have a White Pattern?" Lee Shin asked.

"No, Sir, I only have a Black Pattern," Clark replied.

Lee Shin was surprised to hear that someone like Clark did not have a White Pattern, so he stared at Clark for a while.

"Wait, so did you prepare for this kind of situation?" Lee Shin asked Clark.

"Yes. Honestly, I expected you to be strong, but... that was an underestimation. Anyway, if you, Mr. Lee Shin, finally break through the warp and capture the Demon King, I thought there should be someone to handle this chaos," Clark explained.

Lee Shin nodded slightly with a thin smile.

"Anyway, I hope this kind of thing doesn't happen again," Lee Shin said.

"Rest assured that even if it does, at least Meldeuren will be on Merteng's side," said Clark.

"That's reassuring," Lee Shin replied.

After finishing his conversation with Clark, Lee Shin put away the Skeleton Crow and stood before Veck Jack. His black mana took over Veck's corpse; the skeleton Veck Jack soon stood up.

"We don't have time, so let's hurry," Lee Shin said.

Lee Shin's journey across the continent progressed quickly with Veck Jack.

Splash—!

Veck Jack spewed venom from the skies, dissolving the demons below. The green mist spread in all directions, devouring everything it touched.

"You seem to specialize in mass destruction?" Lee Shin, riding Veck Jack, watched the dying demons.

The next area to visit was where Cormir and Aman were, as they were currently in the Blue Zone and blocking the Demon Corps from advancing into the Green Zone.

The Demon Corps intended to push out Cormir's citadel, known as Luge Mong, and then attack Aman's citadel in the Green Zone. This was why Aman was with Cormir, defending against the enemy from Luge Mong.

'How did it come to this?'

Cormir and Aman had considerable military force. Besides, other countries were also holding their ground in the Blue Zone, so it was hard to understand why these two were pushed back to the Green Zone.

After flying for a while, the Green Zone of Cormir came into Lee Shin's view. No one noticed the giant Veck Jack flying in the sky due to the Origin Demon Realm surrounding the citadel.

Thanks to [Aigle's Eyes], Lee Shin could easily see through the demon realm.

"Hmm..." Lee Shin used his enhanced vision to observe the situation on the battlefield.

He noticed that someone else was also watching the battle from a forest not far from the Luge Mong.

'That human is...'

Lee Shin's eyebrows furrowed for a moment. He then realized he unconsciously balled his fist tightly.

'Michael Taylor.'

That Qualified from Comir had killed Ji Eun-Ju and Kim Kang-Chun. He was a traitor who had joined forces with demons in the past. However, neither the humans nor the demons wanted to fight alongside him now, so he was hiding. Such was the fate of a demonized human.

Until now, countries had not rejected demonized humans because they considered them weapons. However, such a relationship was bound to end sooner than later, as humans and demonized humans were on a divergent path. Demonized humans would then try to ally with demons, but that was an impossible choice.

After all, in Isocia, even the demonized humans had to kill the Demon King to clear this world. Therefore, although demonized humans used demonic power, they still could not side with demons.

Until recently, Michael Taylor had been active in Cormir. However, even Cormir had seemingly rejected him now. The demonized humans in Isocia were actually on the humans' side because their goals were aligned. However, there was a reason why it was said that they were on a divergent path.

Lee Shin believed that Michael Taylor's rejection from Cormir was related to that reason, so he swiftly flew toward Michael Taylor.

Whoosh— whoosh—

"W-w-what is that?" Startled by the sound of violent flapping, Michael Taylor hastily looked up.

He saw a gigantic Skeleton with wings landing near him. Taylor drew his sword and looked for a chance to escape, but then he hesitated and froze.

'A Skeleton? No way...'

In this world, only one person could summon and control a Skeleton of this size. Taylor thought hard, desperately trying to figure out how to resolve this situation but failed to devise a proper answer.

'Would I be able to escape this time too?'

He had been able to escape that time from Lee Shin simply because of luck. He couldn't even imagine the same happening twice, now that Lee Shin had grown considerably stronger since then.

"Wait, stop! Don't come any closer! Ahh!" Taylor stumbled backward and fell to the ground.

Lee Shin alighted from Veck Jack and approached him. Despite falling, Taylor quickly got up and kept his distance, making Lee Shin frown. He stretched out his hand and sent a burst of mana.

[Psychokinesis]

An intangible force grasped Taylor's neck and pulled him toward Lee Shin.

"Kuh... uck..." Taylor gasped.

"Michael Taylor, I don't have much time, so speak quickly. Did you receive the hidden quest of the demonized human?" Lee Shin asked.

Taylor's pupils momentarily widened, which was a good enough response.

"Ugh... Ah... No..." Taylor replied.

"So you betrayed Cormir? Is it because of you that they were pushed back to the Green Zone?" Lee Shin accused him.

"Keugh... Ahh... Ah..." Taylor could not speak properly.

The hidden quest was why demonized humans couldn't co-exist with humans. This quest was exclusive to them and asked them to betray and kill the humans instead of focusing on defeating the Demon King.

Taylor was already one of the stronger people in Cormir, so becoming a demonized human had further increased his strength. He could've backstabbed Cormir and stopped them from completing their mission of defending.

Obviously, he had wanted to focus on obtaining the rewards from hidden quests and hide, expecting Lee Shin to kill the Demon King and clear this world.

'He likely killed Ji Eun-Ju and Kim Kang-Chun also because of a hidden quest.'

In any case, when the demonized humans reached the thirtieth floor, they were transported to a different dimension from humans because their species had changed entirely in the Tower. They had to ascend the Tower from the demonic dimension.

Lee Shin glared at Taylor, who was groaning in pain, gasping for breath. It would be a good idea to release this guy and send him to the next floor. After all, if Taylor clung to hope only to be consumed by despair later, the suffering would be even more intense.

Despite considering the possibility of letting Taylor experience the harshness, filth, and peril of the demonic realm, Lee Shin couldn't bring himself to release him.

"I guess I won't do that." Lee Shin muttered.

"Please... sp...are... me..." Taylor said with much struggle.

"Have you ever spared those who pleaded for their life?" Lee Shin asked.

"Ye—!" Taylor tried to reply.

"Of course not. So just die," Lee Shin replied coldly.

He threw Taylor into Veck Jack's mouth.

Crunch—!

Veck Jack held Taylor between its teeth and began chewing, but Taylor's head tumbled down. Lee Shin briefly watched that sight before flying off on Veck Jack toward the demon army.

Having arrived at the Blue Zone of Wildes and Tetir, Lee Shin wiped out the Demon Corps and headed toward Merteng and Lantan's location with only Natasha. She had assured him that there was no need to worry about Merteng, and her words were accurate.

Upon arriving at Merteng's citadel, Windsor, Lee Shin saw that the Demon Corps had been completely destroyed for the first time.

"Master!"

"Why are you here now? You came so late."

"We have taken care of the Demon Corps."

Watching them proudly boast, Lee Shin let out a bitter laugh.

"Indeed..." Lee Shin muttered.

Before him stood Park Joo-Hyuk, Baek Hyun, Kim Kang-Chun, Park Hye-Won, Hwang Kang-Woong, Kang Ji-Hoon, Shin Ha-Neul, Baek Hyun-Ah, and many others.

They were all exceptional individuals; even calling them monsters wouldn't be an exaggeration, although they still couldn't match up to Lee Shin. They all had the White Pattern now. While he was traveling around the continent doing other tasks, they had continuously accumulated merit points, so it was natural.

‘Were my worries all for naught?’

Those guys had reclaimed Merteng, neutralizing the pressure from foreign countries without any Patterns. There was no need to worry. Behind these people, Lee Shin could see the challengers from various countries. They had given up their own countries to support this place and protect Merteng.

"Fortunately, no Solo Digit demonic beasts appeared," Park Joo-Hyuk said, but he did not seem satisfied.

"Are you not satisfied?" Lee Shin asked, looking at Park Joo-Hyuk.

"Haha... a little bit," Park Joo-Hyuk replied.

"We could have won against a Solo Digit demonic beast this time. Last time, our conditions were not good!" Baek Hyun shouted angrily.

Lee Shin chuckled at the sight and looked at the people around him. They had all grown well.

"Well, then let's hurry up. By now, everyone must have already set off," Lee Shin said.

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Baek Hyun asked.

"Haven't we caught all the Solo Digit demonic beasts?" Natasha asked, looking confused.

"No, number one is still alive," Lee Shin replied.

Having traveled to all the countries, Lee Shin knew that the number one demonic beast—the Demon King—remained.

"If you want to try defeating a Solo Digit demonic beast, it's better to set off quickly. It's also your last chance to accumulate merit points," Lee Shin explained.

The expressions of the people became serious.

"Wait a second. Meldeuren has already set off, right?"

"Oh man! People said Dier and Tashara have left too!"

"Cormir and Aman are closer than us, aren't they?"

"Damn it, Wildes and Tetir left when Lee Shin and I left to come here," said Natasha.

They hurriedly prepared to leave for the White Zone.

"All those Qualified with the White Pattern, get ready! We will be heading to the Demon King's castle!" shouted the commander of Windsor.