

The Tower 237

Chapter 237. The 98th Floor

- Congratulations. You have finally reached true Transcendence.

The title Adversary was a qualification that one gained upon reaching the pinnacle of Transcendence. As Lee Shin observed the peculiar energies and currents that obscured the world, it felt as if he had become the creator, as though he was creating the world itself, encountering a reality that he had never seen before.

Things that he had only sensed could now be seen clearly. If he wanted to perceive the world at a slower rate, he could move it slowly, and if he wanted to see it quickly, he could speed it up. Whatever Lee Shin perceived was the world.

Just like the title suggested, he now had the confidence to confront anything that appeared before him; his desire to confront Baal, who was standing there laughing, grew stronger.

"Are you satisfied?" Baal asked Lee Shin with a smirk.

Despite having made this achievement, Lee Shin continued to have an intense sense of unease. Therefore, Lee Shin tried to change the burning fervor that flushed his cheeks into coolness, but this desire that he felt within him was not easily quenched.

"Do you want to fight me?" Baal asked Lee Shin in a mocking tone.

"No," Lee Shin replied.

The truth is, Lee Shin had wanted to slap his face; Baal seemed like he was finding this situation amusing. However, seeing him chuckle, the thought of wanting to fight him vanished in an instant.

"Good. You made a wise choice there," Baal said, looking at Lee Shin.

Baal seemed to be confident that an ordinary human would not be able to do any harm to him even if they had become an Adversary. Baal and Agares were only one throne apart, but the gap in their skills seemed pretty big.

'I can sense it more strongly now that I've become an Adversary.'

Lee Shin finally realized how remarkable Baal was and why he had dared to overthrow the Demon God. Baal's eyes started to glow maleficently. He had a spider-like body and his head had a bizarre shape. Lee Shin could see clearly the greed behind his fiery gaze.

"Did you want me to become an Adversary?" Lee Shin asked Baal, trying to find the intention behind his support.

"Yes, that's right. In fact, that is why I bothered to bring you all the way here," Baal replied.

"You wanted to do that even to the point of killing your own Great Devil kind? Isn't defying the rules set by the Demon God a huge gamble?" Lee Shin asked.

"Hehe... There's plenty of time. Now that you've become an Adversary, climbing the Tower should be even easier." Baal changed the topic, not answering Lee Shin's question.

The next moment, Baal started laughing like a lunatic. It seemed like Lee Shin was the one who killed Agares, Marbas and Valefor, but it was really Baal who had orchestrated the whole thing. Even if he had made use of a legal loophole in the Demon World, that too was to be judged by the Demon God.

Agares, Marbas and Valefor were not just any ordinary devils but high-ranking Great Devils, seated in the second, fifth, and sixth thrones. Baal must have known that the Demon God would not be okay with him killing fellow Great Devils.

"But what if I refuse to climb the Tower?" Lee Shin asked Baal.

"Well then, your world, Earth, will turn to ruins," Baal replied in a serious voice, with a menacing smirk.

It was more threatening than anything Lee Shin had heard before. Even if he were to disregard how easily Baal had subdued Agares, just by standing in front of him, Lee Shin could sufficiently sense the intimidation of Baal's power. He did not have the confidence to win against Baal in a direct confrontation in his current state.

"So what is it that you want?" Lee Shin asked Baal with a confused look.

"Just climb the Tower. That's all I want from you," Baal replied.

"What about the secret on the 98th floor? Are you going to tell me that?" Lee Shin asked again.

"Heh... Since you become an Adversary, you will find out when you get there," Baal replied.

Was becoming an Adversary the condition for activating the hidden stage on the 98th floor? If so, the condition was quite demanding.

"You will learn about the true intention of the gods when you reach the 98th floor," Baal said to Lee Shin.

"Why not just tell me directly?" Lee Shin asked.

"Heh, it wouldn't be so fun if I told you everything," Baal replied.

Amusement gleamed in Baal's eyes, like a child with an interesting toy in front of them.

"Also, when you reach the hundredth floor, choose me," Baal said, reminding Lee Shin.

The God of Time said the same thing to Lee Shin. Lee Shin wondered how he should interpret their words. Judging from their attitudes, the choice that he would make on the hundredth floor seemed significant, but it was strange that the God of Destruction and the others who had been intervening in his climb since the beginning had not made contact yet.

"What if I refuse?" Lee Shin asked.

As soon as Lee Shin said that, Baal's thin lips stretched wide into a big evil grin.

"Well, now that you've become an Adversary, you would be able to understand what kind of being I am..." Baal muttered, looking at Lee Shin.

"..." Lee Shin could not say anything.

"While you are on the hundredth floor, the Earth will be wiped out," Baal said in a serious voice.

Madness flickered in his eyes. It felt like the moment Lee Shin chose another god, this one would invade Earth and destroy the Earth. In fact, Baal's divine title was the 'God of Demolition.' This mad Great Devil could truly destroy the Earth.

"Well, I will think about that," Lee Shin replied.

Lee Shin gave the same response as he did to the God of Time. Baal seemed dissatisfied, and anger flashed in his eyes.

"You better think carefully about that..." Baal threatened Lee Shin because he did not get the answer he wanted.

Lee Shin furrowed his eyebrows as Baal's eerie and sinister face came closer and closer. The pressure that he felt just from him glaring at him was immense. If there were ordinary people there, they would have fainted from just meeting his gaze.

"Go back now," Baal said, looking at Lee Shin.

The next moment, Baal lifted his leg and sliced through the air, as if tearing a piece of paper.

Woong—!

Then, Lee Shin entered the black Gate that was leading to Earth, ignoring Baal's gaze.

[You have entered the 98th floor.]

[Endure for thirty days in the World of Ghosts, the Archipelago of Punishment.]

A dense greenish fog hung heavily and the chill air pricked at his nose.

Pssss—

A sinister voice continued to tingle at Lee Shin's ears. Beyond the green fog was a white shadow that emerged and swayed.

"Uuuh..." A ghostly figure of an indiscernible shape started making sounds.

Lee Shin started to think that the two empty holes could be its eyes. The unfocused pupils and the head swayed to and fro. Then, when the figure noticed Lee Shin, it approached.

"Why... are you..." the ghostly figure said to Lee Shin.

It had a slow, trailing voice. The middle part of the ghost's body, painted with green patches throughout its entirely white body, split open, revealing a massive gaping mouth.

"Alive!" The ghost shouted at Lee Shin.

With a deafening scream that could destroy his eardrums, the ghost lunged forward at Lee Shin. He gazed at it with a composed look and extended his mana forward.

Thunk.

The ghost was pushed back as it got hit by Lee Shin's mana. Then, overwhelmed with fear, it disappeared into the green fog.

"Just as I had expected..." Lee Shin muttered.

Lee Shin's view was filled with small green particles. When these particles made contact with mana, there was a peculiar reaction—faint waves rippled out to the surrounding particles.

'So, was it because of this?'

In his past life, when Lee Shin reached the 98th floor, souls would cling to him wherever he went, making it bothersome. It seemed to be caused by these particles that made up the green fog. Only after becoming an Adversary, Lee Shin could see this phenomenon more clearly.

By wrapping himself with his mana, Lee Shin pushed back the green mist to keep it from approaching him. Besides, it was not too difficult for Lee Shin to prevent the mixing of mana and green particles using his mana control.

Thump— Thump—

The Archipelago of Punishment was made up of hundreds of islands. Normally, one would need to wander around these islands to find items to fend off souls and obtain food to survive as long as possible. Some of the islands also had magical devices that would keep the green fog away, but Lee Shin did not need such items.

Clip-clop— Clip-clop— Clip-clop— Clip-clop—

From beyond the cold mist came the sound of clattering hooves of horses. In the gradually thickening black shadows, a green crescent-shaped spear jutted out and was thrust toward him.

Baang—!

The spear was blocked by Lee Shin's shield, and the creature that revealed himself wore full armor and had a flickering green gaze. He was a hybrid being, part human and part horse. Perplexed by the unsuccessful attack, he twitched his body and swung the spear forcefully once again at Lee Shin.

Swoosh—! Baaang!

"Ugh..." The creature, whose attack was blocked by Lee Shin's shield once again, let out a short cry.

"It is useless," Lee Shin muttered, looking at the creature.

Using his index and middle fingers, Lee Shin drew a line in the air. The sword of flame that formed along the trajectory sliced the creature in half. Flames erupted from the point of contact with the sword, quickly consuming the creature and erasing it from existence.

The reason why this monster was so confused became apparent. This Archipelago of Punishment was a world of the dead. Therefore, no living person should be able to harm the souls here using magic or physical attacks. Besides, it was also impossible to block the attacks of the ghosts. However, for some reason, Lee Shin was able to effortlessly block the attacks of a ghost and even thoroughly wiped the monster out.

'So, I guess I can make use of these green particles even in this manner.'

Analyzing and manipulating things that were clearly visible and sensed was not a difficult task. Although, of course, this might not be the case for ordinary wizards.

- All the souls here seem to be all broken in some way.

"Yeah that's right... just like the souls on the first floor," Lee Shin replied to Gene Ebrium.

- Do you think it is related to what happened on the first floor?

"I'm not entirely sure, but I just have some suspicions," Lee Shin replied.

The next moment, Lee Shin pushed aside the green fog and moved further inward. He continued until he arrived at the edge of a black sea. On the other side, nothing could be seen as it was shrouded by the green fog.

"Heh heh... Are you trying to cross the sea?" a voice asked.

A sudden voice from behind made Lee Shin turn around. Eyes, a nose and a mouth protruded from a massive tree trunk and it started talking.

"No, I'm planning to just fly across," Lee Shin replied to the voice that seemed to be coming from the tree.

"Well well, that's a path toward death," the tree spirit replied.

"Huh? Why is that?" Lee Shin asked.

"The sea is confined by the laws of the punishers. If you were to catch their attention, you would sink into the sea and not be able to return," the tree spirit replied.

"But before that happens, I can just reach the surface, can't I?" Lee Shin said.

"The moment you leave this land, you will lose your way. Forever..." the tree spirit said.

As if casting a curse, the spirit of the tree kept clinging to Lee Shin.

"I feel like just staying here won't make any difference anyway," Lee Shin said.

After saying these words, Lee Shin activated his mana. Combining the powerful thrust that pushed everything away and a separate force that pulled his body along with precise control, Lee Shin flew freely.

"What a foolish decision..." the tree spirit muttered with a hint of disappointment.

One could hear some regret at the end of his sentence. Was it pity stemming from a sense of empathy for a human heading toward death? Or perhaps it was from losing a prey?

'Is it the regret of losing the prey that is escaping?'

Swishhh!

Just as he expected, dozens of tendrils suddenly sprouted from the ground and flew toward Lee Shin. After noticing that, Lee Shin gave a chilly smile and flicked with his index and middle fingers.

Babababam—!

Flames erupted from beneath the wooden base and quickly engulfed and consumed the tree.

- Oooh, quite fiery indeed.

They were in the world of the ghosts. He was aware that there were no spirits who would be favorable toward Lee Shin, who was a living being.

"Luckily, the distance to the next island doesn't seem too far," Lee Shin muttered.

After flying through the fog for about ten minutes, land became visible. Lee Shin immediately extended his mana to scan the overall topography of the island.

"Hmmm... Is this not the place again?" Lee Shin muttered.

- Are you looking for something specific?

"Yes. I'm thinking of finding the Ruler of this land," Lee Shin replied.

- The Ruler?

"Yes, that's right," Lee Shin replied.

The Ruler of this island was the manager of the punishers who oversaw matters of the Archipelago of Punishment. In his previous life, Lee Shin had not dared to oppose the Ruler, but this time was different. Perhaps that person held the secrets of this world.

Thump. Thump. Thump...

As soon as Lee Shin set foot on land, he could hear footsteps from all directions. Since he had been pushing back the green fog with his mana, it would have been impossible for the ghosts to detect his presence. This meant that they were other individuals coming to capture the intruder who had entered the island.

'Are they the punishers?'

The figures who emerged from the green fog were humanoids. Their entire bodies were covered in light greenish color. In their right hands, they held long spears with a blend of blue and green shades. Their attire was predominantly black armor that covered key areas of their bodies as well as their body and head, leaving their long limbs exposed.

"This is not a place for the living..." said a voice.

"Who are you?" Lee Shin asked.

"My name is Karax. I will grant you rest," said the humanoid.

The next moment, Karax raised his right hand, which held the imposing spear. Karax's muscles rippled as he pulled the sword to the back, and then the blue spear was hurled straight at Lee Shin.

Swoosh—!

With a fierce sound that cleaved the air, the spear sped toward Lee Shin. However, the attack was futile as it was effortlessly blocked by Lee Shin's intangible shield and just crashed to the ground.

"How can a living being use divine energy... You are defying the natural order!" Karax said, looking at Lee Shin with a confused look.

Karax's comrades, who all looked exactly like him, walked forward. They raised their spears in unison. In the hand that had just thrown a spear at Lee Shin a moment ago was yet another spear.

"Enjoy your eternal rest," Karax said, looking at Lee Shin with a smirk.

Swwwoooosh—!

Blue spears came flying from all directions. After noticing that, Lee Shin deployed his shield in mid-air to block the spears, and extended his five fingers to manipulate the earth beneath the enemies.

The next moment, a whip from the earth was created following the trajectory drawn with his fingers and bound the five punishers in an instant.

"Keugh...!" Karax started to groan in pain.

"So, where is your Ruler?" Lee Shin asked in a demanding voice.

Lee Shin's cold eyes casually surveyed the punishers.