

The Tower 98

Chapter 98

The Korean challenger realized the gap between their strengths and tried to run away, but there was no running from Lee Shin.

"Keugh!" The Korean challenger gasped.

A stone fist broke out of the ground and hit the challenger. He rolled on the ground for a while before struggling to get up.

"Why are you running away?" Lee Shin asked.

"Ptooeey!" The Korean challenger spat out blood and glared at Lee Shin.

"Who are you?! Are you from Merteng?!" asked the Korean challenger.

"If you're asking about my identity... My name is Lee Shin, and I come from Merteng," Lee Shin replied.

"What? What did you say? You're Lee Shin...?" The challenger looked surprised.

The man's eyes widened, as he had heard Lee Shin's name countless times while climbing the tower. He was the monster that had surpassed the lower floor rankings and raised the top rankers.

Finally, the man realized how Lee Shin could use such an incredible spell before. He understood that Lee Shin's reputation wasn't just for show.

"M-my name is Kim Chan-Soo! I am also a Korean challenger. I really wanted to meet you, Mr. Lee Shin!" said the Korean man, Kim Chan-Soo.

Upon recognizing that his opponent was a Korean challenger, Lee Shin felt slightly calmer. Lee Shin felt a sense of remorse for the Korean challengers who had been active on the continent of Isocia before.

Because of Lee Shin's actions, other countries targeted and attacked many Korean challengers. When Merteng had fallen, they were left with few options: become captives or refugees, or die.

Lee Shin felt that Kim Chan-Soo was one of those people. Guilty, he sighed and approached Kim Chan-Soo.

"I apologize for what you had to go through," Lee Shin muttered.

Kim Chan-Soo hadn't expected Lee Shin to apologize and was momentarily surprised. He smiled brightly and reached out his hand to Lee Shin.

"It's okay. There was nothing you could have done," said Kim Chan-Soo.

As soon as Lee Shin held Kim Chan-Soo's hand, Kim Chan-Soo smirked—his mana quickly latched onto Lee Shin.

[Serpins Binding Spell]

Kim Chan-Soo's Binding Spell had firmly entrapped Lee Shin.

'Yes! I got him!'

When a challenger was under Serpins Binding Spell, they could not move for at least 10 seconds. It was a complicated binding spell, so few people could easily use it. This spell required eye contact with the opponent for more than three seconds and physical contact.

This spell was difficult to use against vigilant enemies, but it could be easily used against allies who were not on guard. If Kim Chan-Soo could defeat Lee Shin, he could finally get rid of the rumor about him betraying his fellow team members.

Kim Chan-Soo could finally overcome the guilt of betraying Merteng and seeking refuge in Tetir. He didn't let go of Lee Shin's hand even after using the spell, as the spell would break if he lost physical contact with the target.

"Begin!" Kim Chan-Soo shouted.

At the same time, three other Qualified individuals sprang out of the black mist.

"No!" Kanoko shouted.

Kanoko had realized that something was wrong as soon as she saw Kim Chan-Soo's smile and activated her mana. She had no idea that Lee Shin couldn't move currently; she just leaped in front of him out of pure reflex.

Kanoko raised her hand and used her mana to block one of the Qualified individuals' swords. She had blocked one attack, but two more remained. If Kanoko could use her main skills, she could've bought some time, but she had no weapons to use.

[Mana Detection]

Kanoko did not even know why she had used this skill. Perhaps she just wanted to see that Lee Shin's mana was in motion.

'Phew...'

Kanoko learned that Lee Shin's mana was indeed moving. The mana chain continued to tighten itself around Lee Shin, and he just let his opponent empty their arsenal. After noticing that, Kanoko realized that she had worried about nothing.

"Huh?" At the same time, Kim Chan-Soo also realized his mistake.

[Thunderbolt]

Rumble— Crack!

A mana beam exploded and summoned thunderbolts from the sky, which struck the approaching Qualified individuals. When they saw the bright flash, they instinctively closed their eyes, utterly unaware of what was happening.

"Uh... um..." Kim Chan-Soo failed to comprehend the situation and tried to release Lee Shin's hand. However, the endeavor ended with him babbling like a fool and Lee Shin now firmly holding Kim Chan-Soo's hand.

"Hmm...?Sorcery, eh?" Lee Shin muttered.

Compared to Lizardman Chief's wizardry from the second floor, Kim Chan-Soo's sorcery was far lacking. Kim Chan-Soo couldn't cut off and stop Lee Shin's mana with his lacking mana control, which the system actually controlled. Sadly, the challengers had not yet realized that power without essence was a mere facade.

Thud.

As soon as Lee Shin let go of him, Kim Chan-Soo stumbled backward and fell on his ass, looking up at Lee Shin with a pale face.

"No, no way. I'm on your side too... I couldn't help it... Ahh..." Kim Chan-Soo muttered.

Lee Shin strangled him with psychokinesis, lifting Kim Chan-Soo into the air and bringing him closer.

"Have you betrayed other Korean challengers like this too?" Lee Shin accused Kim Chan-Soo.

"Uh... ah... no..." Kim Chan-Soo could not say much.

Kim Chan-Soo's attempts to make excuses were in vain, as Lee Shin's mana was squeezing his larynx, leaving him speechless. Despite his efforts to squeeze out some words, it was all for naught.

Lee Shin also had no intention of listening to his excuses. The soul of the Qualified individual Lee Shin's thunderbolt had killed a second ago appeared behind Kim Chan-Soo. Filled with injustice and anger, the soul had become a demon soul.

- He is a betrayer... He survived by betraying others...

With death, those with a lower class lost many things. Therefore, Lee Shin could not hear the entire story, but he had heard enough of what he wanted to hear.

"A coward like you would not have held out until the end," Lee Shin said.

"Kk... kuk...!" Kim Chan-Soo could not breathe anymore.

Lee Shin started to squeeze his neck even harder. And not long after, a cracking sound came from Kim Chan-Soo's throat, and he died. The battle had started abruptly, so afterward, only silence was left.

The three Japanese challengers and Lilian moved away from Lee Shin to Kanoko's head when she felt the cold atmosphere around Lee Shin that was much different from before.

"I've never seen our master's mood so down before," Lilian muttered.

"Your first time too, Lilian? Maybe it's because he met a Korean challenger," said Kanoko.

"I can't even talk to him," said Lilian.

"At times like this, we should just be quiet."

A chilling breeze blew. After regaining his memories as the first floor's boss, Lee Shin had never killed a Korean challenger even once.

'Tsk.'

Lee Shin didn't feel guilty about killing Kim Chan-Soo. Instead, he felt remorse for those who had sacrificed themselves in this tragedy. Be it his previous life or the current one, Lee Shin had never climbed the tower for his own sake. He thought he represented the humans of Earth, so he felt it was his duty to shoulder all their burdens.

The consequent changes and aftermaths were bound to bring suffering to some. Sacrificing a handful to save the rest of the world was, in plain terms, actually a beneficial deal. And Lee Shin was well aware of these facts, but his guilt just wouldn't let him accept it.

'Am I too weak?'

Lee Shin couldn't help but feel tormented by the conflict between his ideals and the harsh reality of the tower.

"Mr. Lee Shin..." Kanoko called Lee Shin.

Lee Shin turned his head toward the warm voice's source. There was concern in the speaker's gaze, gesture, and expression. Lee Shin realized that he had become too depressed, so he tried to relax.

"I'm sorry." Lee Shin apologized to Kanoko.

"No, it's okay. It seemed like you had something on your mind," Kanoko muttered.

"But why did you help me?" Lee Shin asked.

"Sorry?" Kanoko asked back.

"Had I been caught by those Qualified individuals, you could've escaped. The war will end too," Lee Shin explained.

"Ah... that's..." Kanoko muttered.

Why did Kanoko do that? Was it because she trusted Lee Shin more than those Qualified individuals? Or was it because of their past relationship?

Kanoko could not understand her emotions at that moment. She was used to making decisions using cold judgment and a broad understanding of the situation. However, this time, there was a lack of a clear reason for her actions.

"I... don't really know," Kanoko said.

Lee Shin looked at her and chuckled before turning away. "Let's get moving again."

"Kuhung—!" roared a demonic beast.

Ahn Jin landed a powerful blow on the charging monster, and Kogo just nonchalantly walked behind him, picking his ears as if nothing had happened.

Swish—! Thump!

Babababam!

A quick yet deadly connection of spells slaughtered all the approaching demonic beasts. And Lee Shin's subordinates quickly dealt with any monsters that managed to slip through.

Kogo and Kohei were initially nervous, as their abilities were limited, but all their tension and fear had disappeared. As long as Lee Shin was there with them, they were confident that nothing in the Red Zone could even harm a hair on their bodies.

"I'm hungry."

"Yeah, it's about time for us to eat."

"But what happens if we run out of food?"

"Well... Merteng provided us with a lot of food, but it'll probably only last us about ten days," said Lee Shin.

"Really? It's already been two days—no, wait, I'm not even sure how long it has been. Anyway, we've already eaten four days' worth of food. Even if we ration the rest, it'll only last us a week," Kanoko said with a sigh, looking at Lee Shin, who was sitting calmly.

Kanoko could not understand why Lee Shin was silently letting Kogo and Kohei—the ones responsible for inhaling their food like air—get away with it.

'Does Lee Shin have another plan or something?'

Frustrated, Kanoko hit Kogo's back.

"Stop eating!" Kanoko shouted.

"Ah! Okay!" Kogo replied.

"Ugh..." Kanoko sighed and looked at Lee Shin.

Lee Shin was now butchering a demonic beast corpse on the ground.

"What is he doing?"

"No way... Is he trying to eat that or something?"

"I don't think so. How can you eat a demonic beast? It's filled with demonic power. We don't even have a high-ranking priest with us."

Lee Shin butchered the beast, seemingly unaffected by the murmurs, with a sword while listening to Martyr's nagging.

- Master! Are you doing this again?

- Oh no! There's demon power all over this demonic beast's body! I'll purify everything!

- Oh my! The blood is full of demonic power...

"Just shut up," said Lee Shin.

Martyr could destroy evil. That power was the perfect antithesis of demons and devils. Martyr could destroy demon power and make negative energy disappear. In a way, finding an item as efficient as Martyr in this place might be challenging.

Every time the sharp white edge of the sword touched the flesh of the demonic beast, its black demonic power evaporated like mist.

"Oh..."

"Wow... is that Martyr?"

"Is this Martyr's intended use?"

The three Japanese challengers watched the butchering as if they were watching a fascinating trick. After roughly cutting the meat apart, Lee Shin finished butchering the beast and gathered the meat in one place.

The beast's dark demonic power had disappeared, leaving only the fresh meat behind. Initially, the trio had been disgusted at the thought of eating the demonic beast's meat; however, they were now drooling over it.

Click! Swish!

Lee Shin flicked his finger and lighted up the logs gathered together. He then used Psychokinesis to make the meat hover over the flames to cook it.

"I can't wait."

"What does the demonic beast meat taste like?"

"I haven't seen such fresh meat in ten years."

He then cut the meat further into easy-to-eat pieces and skewered it onto wooden sticks, ready to be eaten.

"We have plenty of food, so don't worry and eat," Lee Shin said.

"Thank you for the food."

"Thanks for the wonderful experience."

"What can you not do, Mr. Lee Shin?"

Lee Shin laughed when he saw the three challengers acting like children. He sliced off a piece of meat and chewed it. The trio saw Lee Shin eat first and then put the meat into their mouths.

The meat melted in their mouths, and its fantastic juices exploded at the same time. Even though there was no seasoning, the meat alone was just perfect.

"Wow..."

"Man... This is awesome."

"This is the most delicious meat I've ever had."

The initial concern about the safety of eating demonic beast meat had long dissipated. They were now more worried about who would get the last piece.

"Mmm... it's delicious. Even demonic beast meat... can be this good." Lilian, who was eating the meat beside Lee Shin, was also satisfied with the meal.

Tuk. Tuk.

An abrupt sound interrupted their happy mealtime, and the faces of the three challengers froze.

"What kind of crazy people are starting a fire and cooking meat here?"

The newcomer, a Qualified individual who had appeared from the black mist, saw the party of four humans, three Skeletons, and one bat and laughed maliciously.

Next, the clanking of armor spread in the area as more than a dozen people, a rough estimate, appeared behind the newcomer.

"Not Tetir people and not the Wildes either... Are you from Merteng?" asked the man.

Ignoring his question, Lee Shin and his group returned to eating their meal. Annoyed, the man knocked down the firewood and the food.

"These crazy bastards... How dare you ignore me and eat the meat?!" the man shouted.

"Well, I don't know who the crazy bastard here is!"

"Do you know what you just did?"

"You... you ruined the precious meat...!"

The three Japanese challengers glared at the man, their attitude utterly different now.

"Release these damn handcuffs right now! I'll burn them all to death!"

"Yes, he's right! If you release the handcuffs, I'll do it immediately...!"

"Ha!?Are you sneakily trying to get rid of the handcuffs?" Lee Shin pushed the two of them aside and stepped forward.

"Step back. They're all mine," said Lee Shin.

The Red Pattern on the back of Lee Shin's hand shone. The Russian challenger sneered after seeing it.

"What a bastard! You're quite brave, huh?" said the Russian challenger.

A Purple Pattern appeared on his cheek, and 30 knights surrounded the Qualified individual. Despite the obvious disadvantage, there was no fear on Lee Shin's face.

"Bring it on. I'll deal with all of you alone," Lee Shin muttered.