

The Tower 184

Chapter 184

After the press conference, the broadcasts were filled with discussions about the Gate crisis. Provocative words like invasion, monsters, and war seized the public's interest, further fueling the apprehension among citizens worldwide.

- Samuel, the Chairman of the WCA, revealed that the recent Orc massacre in Zaozhuang City was a form of dimensional reconnaissance, hinting at a potential invasion of Earth.

- Yes, that's right. Many experts are currently analyzing the situation with that assumption.

- We managed to kill only 30 of the 38 Orcs. The other eight are thought to have returned to their world.

- So, where do you think the next Gate will appear?

- Ah, well, it's difficult to predict that accurately. However, if you consider how they scouted China previously, I think we know where they will appear next.

- Will stronger monsters come out next time?

- Yes, I think so... We can expect them to be much stronger than what we encountered this time.

- Wow, the damage would be immense.

- We must be fully prepared.

All the broadcasts were seemingly discussing the same thing: the next Gate's location, the adversaries' strength, and whether the challengers could protect Earth from the next disaster. Some suggested that challengers should be restricted from entering the tower, and others even suggested closing the Eternal Gate.

The authorities seemingly didn't want the challengers to go to the Tower, as they feared that there would be no one left in case of another monster wave.

'What a foolish thought.'

Lee Shin believed that the challengers should focus on getting stronger. This first monster wave was nothing compared to what was to come. The military could handle the first few waves, but their enemies' strength would grow with time, and even challengers would perish at their hands then. To avoid such a situation, the Eternal Gate was essential, and the challengers had to become stronger as much as possible by climbing the tower.

'This is not mere reconnaissance.'

This incident showed that the time to open such a Gate had come. Perhaps the limitations had gotten looser when Lee Shin returned from the Tower to Earth. While he couldn't grasp the exact limitations or principles, he did learn a lot from helping Sevrino's research to open the Eternal Gate.

The ability to connect dimensions wasn't exclusive to someone. With the right medium, anyone could connect any place to anywhere using dimension energy as long as they fulfilled one condition. The dimension energy of their destination must be abundant enough to sustain the Gate.

Earth's dimension energy used to be thin and scarce, but with the Tower's emergence, challengers' strength increased, which boosted Earth's dimension energy. The presence of strong characters with a high class increased a dimension's energy.

The gods were currently observing the situation by connecting dimensions. They wanted to see how many gates they could open, so it wasn't simple reconnaissance. After they were done assessing, they would likely open a number of Gates here.

'At this rate, no challenger from Earth would ever reach the 100th floor.'

Gods believed Lee Shin could reach the 100th floor, yet his adversarial stance was clear. Thus, the gods might thrust Earth into a dimensional war, encouraging them to get stronger by competing with other dimensions.

"Where is Mr. Sevrino?"

"He's probably with the researchers."

Researching dimensions and the Gate was of utmost importance to protect Earth.

"Then, let's head over there first."

Korea's research technology was still lacking. Lee Shin thought that the best minds from the United States, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, and other nations needed to come together to study this phenomenon.

'From the forced opening of the Gate to the connection, the blockade, and the maintenance of the Gate... Once Earth has all these technologies, its stability will surpass all other dimensions.'

Unlike other species, Earth lacked physical prowess. Yet, its strength lay in understanding, exploring, and advancing via science and technology. Humans held the potential to manipulate dimensions solely with tech.

'All the preparations are now in place. Now, we just have to endure.'

Zhuge Yun, most closely related to the recent Gate crisis, watched television while unfolding his artifact, Eight-Sided Formation.

"Use Heaven, Earth, Wind, and Clouds as the Four Directions, and the Dragon, Tiger, Bird, and Snake as the Four Features. Thus forming what is known as the Eight-Sided Formation."

The Eight-Sided Formation didn't follow conventions and remained in the form of a book. The book was populated with strange writing and patterns, and the pages flipped on their own, responding to Zhuge Yun's mana.

"Detect the changes from the Gate that appeared in Zaozhuang City recently," Zhuge Yun muttered.

As Zhuge Yun's mana seeped into the pages, a map of China appeared above the previously blank pages, and his mana pulsed at a specific region.

"Tianjin...!"

Unlike Zaozhuang City, where almost no one lived, Tianjin had a big population. If a Gate appeared here, there would undoubtedly be more casualties. It would be unlike anything that had happened before.

"Ugh..." Gripping his throbbing head, Zhuge Yun frowned.

The price of forcefully using the Eight-Sided Formation was evident. He grimaced and picked up the phone.

"Tianjin. Stay in Tianjin. Move only when I give the order," Zhuge Yun said over the phone.

Zhuce Yun believed that they should take action when the military leadership struggled to manage the situation. The Challengers Association needed to project itself as a more dependable entity than the nation's armed forces.

'There aren't many countries apart from China where the country's military has more influence than their Challengers Association.'

This highlighted the gravity of China's internal checks and power pursuit among various parties. It was also an opportunity for the Challengers Association to fortify its influence. Zhuge Yun was determined to prevent ineptitude from undermining his nation.

Lucerne, Switzerland.

Lee Shin, Yoon Sang, Sevrino, and Vian emerged from a house behind an expansive green field. Dozens of bodyguards guarded the place, and one of them was Kim Kang-Won, the Task Force commander of SWCG.

"Thankfully, Dr. Lerto accepted it," Vian said.

"How was he?" Sevrino asked Vian about his impression of Dr. Lerto.

"He's not bad. Although it's not my area of expertise, I could sense that his knowledge about the subject ran deep," Vian explained.

"There seem to be many outstanding individuals here as well," said Sevrino.

"When Dr. Lerto is ready, we'll bring him over separately," Vian said.

As they finished evaluating Dr. Lerto and were about to leave, Kim Kang-Won, who had been waiting outside, rushed over to them.

"What's the matter?"

"Gates have appeared in China and Italy," Kim Kang-Won hurriedly explained.

"What did you say?"

Kim Kang-Won immediately turned on two tablets, showing them the real-time footage. On the screens, Tianjin in China and Naples in Italy were both shown under attack by Gate monsters.

"So it's Orcs in China and Water Beetles in Italy?"

However, the situations in the two countries were different.

"The Orcs appeared about ten minutes ago. Since Tianjin is such a big city, the challengers residing there managed to defeat the Orcs, so the damage doesn't seem severe," Kim Kang-Won explained.

"Were there no challengers in Naples?"

"There were few, but since the number of challengers in Italy is relatively small, to begin with..." Kim Kang-Won muttered.

Naples, a port city, was overrun with black Water Beetles. Unfortunately, the Water Beetles crushed and devoured people who failed to escape.

"But you see, it might not look like it, but China isn't in a good situation either. There are tens of thousands of Orcs there. While the Chinese military is trying to hold them back, citizens are still dying due to their undermanned response," Kim Kang-Won explained.

After grasping the situation, they could not hide their fear. Their gazes naturally fell on Lee Shin.

"What will you do?" Kim Kang-Won asked Lee Shin.

"I'll head to Italy," Lee Shin replied.

Luckily for Italy, Lee Shin happened to be in Switzerland.

"Since China is too far from here, I suppose you'll be late."

"Please request entry to Italy. I'll fly there on a Skeleton," Lee Shin said.

"Understood," Yoon Sang replied to Lee Shin.

Yoon Sang immediately made a phone call. Lee Shin also summoned his Skeleton and soared into the air.

"Please take good care of both of them," Lee Shin said, referring to Sevrino and Vian.

Sevrino and Vian were much stronger than ordinary people, but they could still be in danger if monsters or challengers tried to kill them.

"All right," Kim Kang-Won replied.

"Don't worry," Yoon Sang also replied.

Lee Shin received a tablet from Kim Kang-Won, which enabled him to monitor the situation in Naples in real time as he flew toward Italy.

Bang Bang Bang Bang—!

Riflemen fired on the Water Beetles swarming the city, trying to push them back. The Water Beetles did not have tough shells, so bullets easily pierced their hide. However, there were just too many of them. They were as big as small cars and even had wings. Since they could fly, dealing with them was even more challenging.

"Watch for their mouths! Their spit is incredibly sticky, so avoid it at all costs! Otherwise, block it with a shield!"

A missile made a bunch of Water Beetles burst like a Watermelon, but some other beetles spit their mucus toward the tank, making it immobile. Then the Water Beetles covered the tank entirely.

- Save me!

- Aaaahhh!

- A monsterrrr!

- Where are the challengers? Where are they!

- No, no, nooo!

The endless echoes of people's screams filled the air, turning the situation in Naples into an unmitigated disaster.

"Do we only have three challengers?"

The impact of the Eternal Gate was evident. Challengers could now return to the tower whenever they wanted, so a lot of them were inside the tower despite it not being December. Even with reinforcements converging in Naples from various locations, their numbers remained limited.

- Darn it! Argh!

Lee Shin could hear the screams of the challengers from the tablet. He saw a giant Water Beetle called Lethocerus rising from the sea and pinning down an Italian challenger with its front claws.

- Oh, oh no! We're in big trouble! The challenger Orso Baldoni is in danger right now!

The broadcast reporter shouted.

- What power! Even though this challenger had given up on climbing the Tower on the 50th floor, he is still someone who climbed all the way to the 50th floor! But he seems to be in trouble already!

It was only the second Gate opening, yet such a powerful monster had appeared.

- We need help! If this continues, Naples will be overrun by monsters!

- What is the military doing? They are hesitating to deal with the monsters stuck to the buildings! They seem to be worried about the damage to Naples! The lukewarm response is only increasing casualties!

Lee Shin accelerated; Naples, the port city, soon came into view. Chaos reigned in the area. The Italian military had established a perimeter, containing the onslaught of monsters. Soldiers were actively rescuing those who hadn't yet evacuated within this zone.

Siiii—!

Shwiik! Shiiik!

The first thing Lee Shin heard in Naples was the loud cries of the monsters. Just their monstrous shrieks were enough to drive people to insanity.

"P-please... help me..." a kid asked Lee Shin for help.

A child trapped under a car pleaded for help as a Water Beetle approached. Swiftly, Lee Shin employed Psychokinesis to lift the vehicle and free the child. Then, he tore off the car's metal plates and stabbed the Water Beetle with them.

"Siiik—" After the Water Beetle shouted in pain, it vomited blood and died.

"Sob! Sob!" The frightened child trembled and sobbed.

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The little girl continued to cry.

"It will be okay now." Lee Shin tried to comfort her.

"T-thank you, Sir... Sob," the girl replied.

[Shadow Space]

A giant bear-like Skeleton appeared from the Shadow Space and kneeled before the girl.

"Get on up. This guy will take you to the army," Lee Shin said.

"Sob... Mister... please help..." said the girl once again.

"It's going to be all right," Lee Shin replied.

However, Lee Shin quickly noticed the child's peculiar behavior and wondered how the child endured this situation for such a long period.

"H-help... Please help..." repeated the girl.

This girl was in a state of panic and could not speak properly, but Lee Shin had a strong feeling that her parents, who had likely sacrificed themselves to protect her, were somewhere near this place.

"Where are your parents?" Lee Shin asked the girl.

"Sob... They are hiding... inside the market..." the girl replied.

Lee Shin did not know how she ended up in this situation, but there was no time. Besides, it would not be just this child. Others could be waiting, hoping for someone to rescue them.

"Don't worry. I'll save your parents. So just go back first and wait for them there," Lee Shin said, reassuring the girl.

[Shadow Space]

Hundreds of Skeletons crawled out of Lee Shin's pitch-black shadow. Lee Shin gave an order to his Skeletons.

"Rescue the people, and kill all these filthy Water Beetles on sight."