

The Tower 40

Chapter 40: The Eleventh Floor

[You have entered the 11th floor.]

[Protect the Fire Crystal by preventing the Blizzard Army from destroying the village.]

It was a simple goal. Lee Shin looked at the other challengers who were being teleported.

"Kik! There are a lot of humans here!"

"Kik!?It's a t-t-troll!"

"Grrr!" a Troll roared.

Two Goblins freaked out when they saw the Troll next to them. How did they manage to climb the tower with that courage? Lee Shin laughed at them and turned his attention to the side.

'Is that... Harpy?'

It had feathers on both arms, as well as sharp nails and claws. It looked like a combination of a human and a bird. In addition, Lee Shin saw three other human challengers. This meant that the new timeline was linked not just to the challengers on Earth, but to the challengers from other dimensions.

However, that did not mean the challengers could meet each other if they were from the same dimension. From the 11th to 20th floors, the challengers could not climb the tower with challengers from other countries. Maybe the system wanted the challengers to interact with challengers from a different dimension.

"Damn it, I'm screwed... We got two Goblins and a Troll."

"What's that? I've never seen that before."

"That's the Harpies. It's a race that can fly in the sky and handle the wind."

All three of the human challengers who entered the stage like Lee Shin were Koreans. One of them was a challenger whom Lee Shin had met before.

"The Harpies would be helpful at least. And I guess the Troll too, because they are good at fighting... Hmmm... the Goblin is the problem."

"No, the Harpies are a problem, too. They are quick-witted and have no qualms about abandoning their colleagues. Since they can fly, we never know when they will abandon us and run away to other villages."

"Ha..."

The three challengers, unlike Lee Shin, were grabbing their throbbing heads as they watched the composition of the members. They were in a very small town with only a few shoddy fences and four shabbily built wooden houses. They had to stop the Blizzard Army there.

[The one-hour countdown to the first wave of attacks begins now. Protect the Fire Crystal in the village.]

[You may use the Fire Crystal to access the store.]

[The challenger who wants to give up can do so by touching the Fire Crystal and declaring their intention to give up.]

There was a red stone that looked like a tombstone. It was stuck in the middle of the village. The challengers' eyes were focused on the Fire Crystal after hearing the messages.

"Now, let's all gather up. We need to come up with a strategy first." The man with glasses, who was explaining about the Harpies a second ago, gathered the challengers.

"Let's introduce ourselves first, because we have to spend the next few days together. My name is Kang Young-Hoon."

"Kik! My name is Bebagin!"

"And I'm Jorgin!"

At Kang Young-Hoon's words, the Goblins raised their hands first and introduced themselves.

"My name is Shin Ha-Yul."

"And I'm Park Han."

"Grook, I am Belkhan!"

"And my name is Happy."

After everyone introduced themselves to each other, they looked at Lee Shin who was standing quietly on the side. When Lee Shin noticed that they were looking at him, he slowly examined their reactions. It was hard for other challengers to know how Lee Shin looked if they were not at Undermost.

Lee Shin did not allow people to film videos around him to prevent information about him from spreading. Information about Lee Shin might have spread through text, but only a few people would have seen his face.

‘Hmm... great, they probably don’t recognize me.’

Lee Shin carefully examined their reactions and introduced himself with a different name.

"I'm Lee Si-Hoon."

"Oh, it's Si-Hoon. First of all, I don't think we have a ranker here," Kang Young-Hoon said in disappointment.

"We must stop a total of ten waves of the Blizzard Army. And..." Kang Young-Hoon noticed that the voices of other challengers were gradually growing louder.

The team was trying to identify the power each challenger had and implement the strategy to protect the village under the leadership of Kang Young-Hoon. However, it did not work out well.

"No, we need to build a stronger fence and stronger barrier! If you want to defend, we have to defend properly!"

"Grook! Warriors don't fight like cowards. We must advance and attack them first!" Belkhan shouted.

"No guys, ha..." Young-Hoon sighed.

"Kik! I'll help you make the fence. Just go cut down some trees," said the Goblin.

"Kik! That's right. Why don't you go to the woods, because I'm scared to go into that forest!" another Goblin shouted.

"Wait, what are you afraid of? The wave hasn't even started yet!" Park Han shouted.

"I can't do that either. How am I supposed to carry those heavy logs all the way up here? I might be able to do it once, but definitely not more than that," Happy replied.

The Goblins and even Happy were being uncooperative. Park Han pounded his chest as if he was frustrated by their uncooperative behaviors.

"If we don't cooperate, we won't be able to protect ourselves!" Park Han shouted.

"Grook! We can just go out and fight!" Belkhan shouted.

"Hey, you punk! We can't just go out and fight!"

"Can I scout the area for a second?" Happy tried to run away.

"What are you saying? Why would you do that right now? I'm not even done talking yet," Young-Hoon said.

"I mean... We're going to have to do some scouting at some point," Happy argued.

"No, you can't go anywhere until the conversation is over."

"You're trying to run away, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," Happy replied.

The Goblins simply asked the others to do everything they were tasked to do because they were scared, and the Troll was not only strong but also stubborn and stupid. And lastly, Happy was always thinking of running away. Aside from Lee Shin, the three human challengers were frustrated and were about to go crazy as they started raising their voices louder and louder.

"Si-Hoon, say something to them! Ha... This is killing me!"

"There's not much time left," said Lee Shin.

At Lee Shin's words, they urgently checked the system.

[00:21:38]

39 minutes had passed since the stage had begun. They had not prepared anything yet.

"Si-Hoon, can you please come here for a second?"

Young-Hoon and Ha-Yul, who were sighing in frustration, called Lee Shin out separately. Park Han remained with the other guys to prevent them from causing trouble.

"This is not going to work out. Why don't we move to another village?"

"That Troll won't follow our instructions anyway, and the Goblins won't help. We're anxious about Happy because we don't know when he will betray us. Why don't the four of us leave?"

Even if they left behind the Fire Crystal, that did not mean they failed the stage. Since this stage was kind of a game of defense, where randomly assigned challengers gathered to protect the village, there had to be other villages somewhere on this stage. It might be better for them to abandon this place and join another village and try to work together there.

"Are you aware that if the Fire Crystal breaks, the Blizzard Army gets stronger?" Lee Shin asked.

"Yes, I know. But there's nothing we can do, right? With this kind of teamwork, we will never be able to withstand the tenth wave."

"That's right."

"If we fail to find another village on the way, we may encounter the Blizzard Army in the forest. On top of that, it is unclear whether other villages will accept us," Lee Shin argued.

Lee Shin had no intention of going to another village.

"Wouldn't it be better for them as well? They are getting more people to defend—"

"That's what we think. They don't know why we left our village and decided to move, do they? Plus, it's not all eight of us going, but only the four of us. Why would they trust us and accept us when there's also a chance that we might sabotage them?" Lee Shin interrupted.

"But if we explain it well—"

"Are you going to say that you got rid of the Goblins because they were weak, and the Troll because he was stupid?" Lee Shin argued.

"..."

Shin Ha-Yul closed his mouth, speechless at Lee Shin's harsh objections. And Kang Young-Hoon seemed to be lost in his thoughts as he wore a serious look on his face. In fact, in a way, Lee Shin's words were almost unreasonable.

If the challengers did not see any hope of clearing the stage, it was natural to abandon the village and find another way. There were risks, but choosing another path was definitely better than going for a challenge where they stood no chance. Kang Young-Hoon refuted Lee Shin's words as if he was aware of the fact.

"But there's nothing we can do. I know it's unclear whether other villages will accept us or not, but staying here would kill us all. It will be impossible to beat them," Kang Young-Hoon argued.

"How do you know it's impossible?" Lee Shin asked.

"What? I told you about that before," said Kang Young-Hoon.

"Don't give up without even trying. I'm going to stay here. If the three of you want to leave, then you may leave," Lee Shin said resolutely.

As if Lee Shin had no lingering feelings for them, Lee Shin turned and left the scene. And the two of them stood there with looks of surprise.

"Do you think the five of you can stop them if we leave?" Kang Young-Hoon shouted.

Despite Kang Young-Hoon's cry, Lee Shin did not answer and walked toward where the rest were gathered. Lee Shin felt sorry for his harsh words, but if not for those, they would have left.

"What are we going to do? It's too dangerous for the three of us to move without him," Shin Ha-Yul asked.

"... Let's just wait until the first wave. There might be something we missed, just like that guy said," Kang Young-Hoon suggested.

"What if there's nothing special? It might be too late to run away then!" Shin Ha-Yul cried out.

"Then what is it that you want to do? You tell me. What do you want to do!" Kang Young-Hoon shouted.

Kang Young-Hoon was frustrated. He wanted to persuade the others, clear the 11th floor properly and proceed to the next floor. However, as soon as the stage started, nothing was going as he planned.

"... I'm sorry I yelled at you. Let's get going."

* * *

[00:00:00]

[The first wave has begun. You have 3:00:00 left until the next wave.]

"We will be okay up to the first wave. It will be easy to stop them if we use the formation that we have planned."

Following Kang Young-Hoon's instructions, the team went into formation and blocked the Blizzard Army. The first wave was not particularly difficult because it was almost like a practice round.

"I think we're okay?" Park Han was glad.

"I know right? They are pretty good at fighting," Shin Ha-Yul replied.

"... No guys, this is not enough. We have to be much stronger," Kang Young-Hoon muttered.

After they saw the two Goblins, Belkhan and Happy fight, Park Han and Shin Ha-Yul thought it would be doable, because they fought better than expected. However, Kang Young-Hoon thought differently.

'We're not in sync. The fundamental problem has not been solved.'

All of them were challengers who had passed through the stages from the first floor to the tenth floor. It was expected of them to have a certain level of skill. The reason why Kang Young-Hoon decided to wait for the first wave was not only because there was not much time left, but mostly because of Lee Si-Hoon's attitude.

Lee Si-Hoon seemed confident. He was not talkative, but something about him was different from others; it was something that Young-Hoon wanted to gamble on. That was why Kang Young-Hoon looked forward to the first wave.

'So his confidence came from being able to manage three Skeletons?'

The power of the three Skeletons was quite good, but it was nothing more than that. Kang Young-Hoon thought that Lee Si-Hoon might not have revealed all of his power, but even considering that, Lee Si-Hoon did not seem to have the ability to overturn the situation.

'Oh shit, what am I going to do now?'

The challengers only had about two hours remaining. Should they go look for another town now? While wondering about that, Kang Young-Hoon kept thinking about what Lee Si-Hood had said earlier. If the people did not accept them, they would just be abandoned and isolated from a group of people. Kang Young-Hoon ended up thinking that it would be better to protect this place where there was some food, a house and some fences.

"Sigh... I don't know what I should do," Kang Young-Hoon muttered.

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[The fourth wave has ended.]

[You have 2:52:51 until the 5th wave.]

"Ha... ha..." Belkhan was out of breath.

"Hey, you stupid Troll! I told you not to go there!" Park Han could not control his anger and shouted at Belkhan.

"Grook!?What are you talking about? How can I not go when the enemy commander is right there!" Belkhan shouted.

"You bastard! If you go forward, our formation gets ruined!"

"I win if I kill the enemy commander, so why does that matter?" Belkhan asked.

"Ugh!"

Kang Young-Hoon went to the Goblins who were resting at one side.

"Hey Bebagin and Jorgin, we don't have time to rest now. We need to repair the fence quickly and come up with a defense plan," Kang Young-Hoon explained.

"Kik, I'm tired," Bebagin muttered.

"Same, I'm tired, too. Let's do it later," said Jorgin.

"No, we cannot push it to later. Starting from the fifth wave, the enemy commander will change. So we must respond accordingly," Kang Young-Hoon explained.

"Kik, you talk too much," said Bebagin.

"That's right! Stop bothering us! Kik!" Jorgin shouted.

"No, I'm not trying to bother you... Ha..." Kang Young-Hoon sighed.

While Kang Young-Hoon was grabbing his head and clenching his teeth, Shin Ha-Yul was busy on the other side.

"Happy! Happy! I know you're there! Come out here!" Shin Ha-Yul shouted, facing a tree.

When Shin Ha-Yul still got no response even though she was screaming, she lifted her wand.

"If you don't come down now, I'm going to burn down the tree. One, two—" Shin Ha-Yul started counting.

"Ugh, why are you so fussy? I've been busy, too," Happy replied.

"What were you busy with?" Shin Ha-Yul asked.

"Some of them ran away, so I was busy catching them here," Happy muttered.

"You cannot just run away like this! We need to work together!" Shin Ha-Yul shouted.

"What are you saying? I said I was busy!" Happy shouted.

Seeing Happy lying shamelessly, Shin Ha-Yul barely suppressed her urge to set his wings on fire. The three people, tired of these creatures from another dimension, gathered in front of the Fire Crystal in the village. And they called Lee Shin along as well.

"Hey Si-Hoon, can you still say the same thing when you see such behavior?"

"Look at how much trouble we are going through because of you! I'm really going crazy!"

"Hey bro, let's just get out of here on our own. We can look for another village."

"It's too late to find one now! The Blizzard Army could be in the forest somewhere. And if we want to find another village, we have to get through them first!"

"That's right. It will be impossible for us to wander around in the forest in this state because we haven't even been able to rest properly."

The three people spoke and looked to Lee Shin, the cause of their problem. When Lee Shin saw how frustrated they were, he felt sorry for them. Lee Shin did not know that those creatures would bother them this much.

"I'm sorry," Lee Shin apologized.

Lee Shin meant it. Lee Shin thought they could easily stop the army until the fifth wave. However, Lee Shin was also disappointed when he realized that those creatures were much worse than what he had expected.

"What difference does it make if you apol... ha... Well, you wouldn't have known..." Shin Ha-Yul seemed depressed.

"Should we just give up?"

"But isn't it a pity to give up like this?"

"..."

When Lee Shin saw how depressed they were, he thought it was time for him to step up. He was sure that they would have experienced something. He knew that the tower rewarded those who had gone through the ordeal and overcame it. Lee Shin did not want them to only rely on him to climb the tower.

"Why don't we try until the next wave?" Lee Shin asked.

"Well, that's possible, but...is there really any hope? Unless there's a miracle," Shin Ha-Yul replied with a face as if she had given up.

"Miracles only come to those who don't give up," Lee Shin muttered.

[00:00:00]

[The 5th wave will now begin.]

[The main force of the Blizzard Army has arrived in the forest.]

"They are coming."

"Damn it, it's on again."

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"Pay attention, everyone!"

Everyone seemed nervous. They could feel the vibration on the ground as the army approached them.

Wooong— Wooong—

All of a sudden, several black portals were created everywhere.

"What are these? What's going on?"

The Goblins, Belkhan, Happy and the three challengers started to panic when they felt the mana flowing from the portals.

"I-I-I never heard about the portals though."

A giant Skeleton stopped out of the black portal. It had a vicious-looking skull and its black eyes stared at the challengers.

"Is that an O-o-ogre?"

"Shoot! Shoot that! Stop that thing!"

Crrraak!

The Skeleton Ogre, who was named Bark by Lee Shin, let out a scream that threatened to burst the challengers' eardrums. The Goblins were about to attack, but they dropped their poison needles because they were too nervous. Happy turned pale and started to scream. Besides the humans, Belkhan was the only one who endured the fear the Ogre set in them, because the fear of the Ogre became stronger having received Lee Shin's black mana.

"Wow... It's... amazing..." Belkhan clenched his teeth and tightly grabbed his curved sword.

Bam!

All of the sudden, Bark got on his knees and gazed somewhere with his flashing eyes.

"Did you call me... Master..." said Bark.

Everyone turned their heads along the gaze. The subject of Bark's gaze was a calm Lee Shin.

"Did he say master...?"

"What's going on? He's the owner of that monster?"

"Si-Hoon, is that right?"

"Grook! So he was our comrade?" Belkhan asked.

Everyone looked at Lee Shin with surprise. Lee Shin ignored all of their responses, looked past the undead and lifted his wand.

"Stop them all. Block all those slabs of ice," Lee Shin commanded.

His gaze was fixed on the Blizzard Army who were running towards the challengers.