

The Tower 234

Chapter 234. Baal

In a split second, Lee Shin analyzed the opponent's attack and devised a corresponding countermeasure. He strengthened his translucent shield, prioritizing flexibility over strength, dispersing the energy's direction.

Baaang—!

This shield was impervious to destruction as long as Lee Shin constantly infused it with mana. Ignoring the pressing force, he prepared for the next attack.

'It feels as if I'm simultaneously fighting many people.'

From the initial sword attack to the use of magic and the recent attack, each encounter felt like Lee Shin was dealing with a different person.

Woong—!

Baaaang—!

While he was deploying mana, a meteor fragment suddenly fell from the sky. It was a small fragment, but the aftermath was beyond imagination.

Baaam—!

It created a massive crater between the Gravemaster and Lee Shin, and a scorching blast of heat swept in all directions.

"Tsk." Lee Shin clicked his tongue.

This could make the battlefield quite troublesome, as many more meteor fragments were floating in the sky.

"Block the ones that are falling," Lee Shin ordered the seven Grand Spirits.

With seven Grand Spirits, Lee Shin was confident that they could clear the fragments falling in this vicinity. While the fragments were not all targeting Lee Shin, he thought there was no need to introduce more variables to the battlefield. Besides, he did not know what other tricks his opponent had up his sleeve.

'I can beat this guy.'

The Grand Spirits soared into the sky, intercepting the falling fragments from all directions. The graves on the ground began to shake.

"Arise," said the Gravemaster, looking at the graves.

Suddenly, multiple connected fissures appeared on the desiccated ground, revealing white fingers within. It also revealed gleaming eyes within hollow eye sockets.

"Kill the wizard!" the Gravemaster shouted.

After receiving the order, a murderous intent surged from all around.

"Well, it's too bad..." Lee Shin said, looking at the Gravemaster.

[Shadow Space]

From within the vast expanse of Lee Shin's shadow, the Corps of Immortality emerged and clashed with the Gravemaster's Undead.

"I'm not alone either," Lee Shin said with a smirk.

"Ha! You're not an ordinary one either," said the Gravemaster.

The Gravemaster surveyed the battlefield and gripped his sword even tighter.

"Among all the wizards I've encountered so far, you're the worst," the Gravemaster said, looking at Lee Shin.

"Says you. How many identities do you have, exactly?" Lee Shin asked.

As he faced the opponent, Lee Shin became almost certain about his hypothesis. The Gravemaster of the fallen kingdom possessed a singular physical form, yet he was not alone. The mana flow and movements of each entity within him were disparate. It was more likely that he had usurped the abilities of others rather than mastering multiple techniques himself.

"Hmm... Your keen observation of my borrowed powers is rather impressive," the Gravemaster replied.

"It would have been strange if I had failed to notice that after seeing you use so many powers," Lee Shin replied.

"Well, that's true," the Gravemaster muttered.

The Gravemaster then smirked and chuckled.

"I have killed all who figured this out, though," the Gravemaster added.

"Keugh..." The Gravemaster groaned in pain.

Debris was strewn about, littering the surroundings. As the battle concluded, the vanquished Gravemaster, drenched in blood, emitted a pained groan.

"This can't be happening..." the Gravemaster muttered.

[You have defeated the Gravemaster of the Fallen Kingdom.]

[You have cleared the ninety-fifth floor.]

Despite the cascade of messages, Lee Shin remained composed, merely looking at them. Seemingly, he didn't even think about his fierce battle with the mighty Gravemaster.

"Take me to the next floor," Lee Shin said.

Last night, a significant incident unfolded at the headquarters of the Defense Force on the first island of the Lardel Archipelago.

Versia, who had been imprisoned underground, had escaped. Besides, some of the White Elves who followed him had also disappeared.

"Whose work could this be?" Genia asked, inspecting Versia's underground prison cell.

She ran her fingers over the broken handcuffs.

"We are still checking. All the White Elves guarding the entrance died, so we can't do a quick check."

"And how did they die?" Genia asked.

"It's the swordsmanship of a Defense Force sergeant."

"Indeed... Has someone from our side betrayed us?" Genia asked.

"Would you like to take a look at it?"

"Yes," Genia replied.

Genia entered the Defense Force's autopsy room next. The corpse there had a punctured heart and a partially severed neck. She carefully examined the White Elf's corpse and took a twig from her pocket.

"Wait! That is...!" The White Elf who was with her saw the twig and raised his eyebrows.

"It's a branch from the top of Ardalgia. With this, we can determine the exact cause of death," Genia replied.

After saying that, Genia focused on the twig, scanning the corpse. The twig emitted a unique power; in response, violet demon power flowed out of the corpse's wounds, which dispersed and disappeared as soon as it touched the twig.

"Demons?" Genia muttered with a frown. "Bring all the challengers related to demons immediately. Right now!"

"Understood!"

A few days later, having successfully conquered the ninety-fifth floor, Lee Shin arrived at the Lardel Archipelago. The first thing that caught his attention was the sight of billowing, ominous smoke. A sense of foreboding washed over him, prompting him to swiftly extend his mana to see what was happening.

"Are the Platinum Group and White Elves fighting?" Lee Shin muttered, confused.

At first glance, the situation proved perplexing. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, Lee Shin concentrated his mana on a specific area, aiming to analyze their mana patterns.

"The White Elves are fighting among themselves. And this is... demon power?" Lee Shin muttered, surprised.

Lee Shin detected the presence of demonic power emanating from certain White Elves who stood in opposition. He quickly realized that demons had caused this situation. Determined to confront the situation head-on, Lee Shin prepared to move in that direction. However, just as he was about to take action, the sound of a sword being unsheathed reached his ears from the side.

Swoosh—

'No way... This didn't get detected by my mana detection?'

Lee Shin's expression quickly hardened. Under the moonlit sky of the night, a man emerged from the darkness, previously hidden behind towering trees.

"It's been a while..." Versia muttered in the darkness.

His violet eyes glinting, Versia, once the head of the Defense Force, stood there unharmed, waiting for Lee Shin.

"You're not Versia, so what do you mean, 'it's been a while?'" Lee Shin asked, looking at Versia.

Lee Shin could tell that some entity had taken hold of Versia's body at a glance. Besides, this Versia was emanating immense demon power. The demon power was so intricate and complex that one could only detect it with concentrated effort when using their mana.

"So the rumors about you weren't lies, human," Versia said.

The entity was surely daring, acting like Lee Shin's presence didn't intimidate it and stealing Versia's body. Lee Shin could tell that the entity was a Great Devil from the demon power he was releasing. Moreover, if the demon could exert this level of influence within the Tower, he was likely one of the top-tier ones residing in the fifth district.

'He most likely manipulated Versia's fragile emotions to steal his body; still, it is an audacious act that no ordinary Great Devil would dare attempt.'

Lee Shin had a déjà vu ever since he reached the fourth district. He would have undoubtedly ascended to the fifth district if he had not encountered Endo. So, who was waiting for him in the fifth district?

"Baal..." Lee Shin muttered.

After trying to come up with an answer for what seemed like hours, he finally had it. Versia smirked when he heard that name.

"I have something to tell you, so come to the Demon World," Baal, in the body of Versia, said.

"Why should I?" Lee Shin asked back.

"I will give you some useful information. You just cleared the ninety-fifth floor, right? I can give you info about the next floor," Baal replied.

"But what if I don't need it?" Lee Shin asked again.

Lee Shin had already ascended to the hundredth floor in his previous life. Unlike the ninety-fifth floor, which he had not explored due to his choice of difficulty, he already knew what awaited him on the ninety-eighth floor. Therefore, he could reject Baal's offer.

"Do you know why the gods have left you alone?" Baal asked Lee Shin.

"Left me alone? Wouldn't it be better to say they were previously too involved with me? Now, they are just treating me as they should," Lee Shin replied.

"Heh, are you pretending not to know, even though you do? Or are you just hoping that I'll reveal the story?" Baal asked.

Baal let out a wicked laugh and continued.

“They are nothing more than a sacrificial offering to nurture you,” Baal said.

“They want to nurture me?” Lee Shin asked.

“Yes, that’s right. To make you stronger. Do you know why?” Baal asked again.

“Are they planning to capture and devour me on the hundredth floor to become the chief gods?” Lee Shin replied.

Lee Shin’s casual remark intrigued Baal, as it implied this information was nothing special. He knew that Lee Shin was strong and had connections, but he still hadn’t expected Lee Shin to have deduced this much.

“Did someone tell you that? Or did you figure it out on your own?” Baal asked.

“Why should I tell you that?” Lee Shin replied.

“Hey, you’re quite something, human, or should I say ‘He Who Knows Death.’ Your insight into death is remarkable,” Baal said to Lee Shin.

“Stop with the obvious and tell me the truth,” Lee Shin said.

Lee Shin thought that if Baal only knew this much, he wouldn’t have been so composed. Although he had not revealed everything he knew, he believed that Baal had likely done the same.

“Hehe... How interesting. Is this how you managed to come so far?” Baal replied.

Baal flicked his fingers. The demon power on the other side, where black smoke was rising, surged, and he absorbed it into his grasp.

“You think what you know is the truth, don’t you? The true intentions of those guys are different. And you can find a hint about that on the ninety-eighth floor,” Baal said.

As the demon power in his hands condensed, it soon turned into a massive eye with a red pupil.

“This is the [Eye of the Demon God]. And I will swear in front of this eye that I have not lied,” Baal said seriously.

The [Eye of the Demon God] was an ungovernable power. Despite being just one of the many eyes of the Demon God, anyone who wielded demon power could not escape its pervasive influence.

Lee Shin was speechless.

“Are you a bit interested now?” Baal asked.

Demon power slowly crawled out from Versia’s body and gathered in the air. His eyes' dark, eerie glow faded, and Versia collapsed.

“Come over to the fifth district. I will open the door for you soon,” Baal said.

Lee Shin did not respond to his words, but Baal was confident that he would accept. Therefore, without waiting to hear his response, Baal and the [Eye of the Demon God] disappeared into the sky.

“The fifth district...” Lee Shin muttered.

Initially, Lee Shin wanted to ascend directly to the hundredth floor, but he had to halt his ascent due to Baal’s unexpected proposal. Baal had claimed that the gods' true purpose extended beyond merely consuming him, a remarkable challenger who had reached the hundredth floor. There was something

greater at stake, something beyond becoming the chief god. Moreover, Baal had revealed that the key to unraveling this purpose could be found on the ninety-eighth floor.

"Tsk." Lee Shin clicked his tongue and closed his eyes.

Lee Shin knew that being pulled along like this was not ideal. However, Baal's offer was something that he could not refuse. There was something to gain on the ninety-eighth floor.

He could not think of any other way. While he could navigate through the floor effortlessly due to his memories, there had to be another method, as Baal had asserted with such certainty.

'And looking at the current state, there's no reason for Baal to harm me in the fifth district.'

Lee Shin thought he would be fine because Baal's intentions seemed obvious. The only reason why Baal would join forces with Astria was to become the Demon God himself.

When Lee Shin recalled the discomfort on Baal's face when using the [Eye of the Demon God], anyone would think along those lines. After contemplating for a while, he made up his mind before heading toward the laboratory.

The next day, Lee Shin arrived at the Gate Research Facility on Earth. Sevrino noticed the sudden appearance of unidentified coordinates on the Gate Signal Device and immediately reported it to Lee Shin.

"But Mr. Lee Shin, we can't be certain that this is the fifth district. We should investigate further and..." Sevrino said to Lee Shin.

"No, please open the Gate," Lee Shin said to Sevrino.

There was no need to be overly cautious. Unless they were the highest-ranking gods, Lee Shin would be safe. However, even those high-ranking gods had no intention of attacking Lee Shin right now, as they wanted him to climb the Tower. Therefore, the gods would rather assist than hinder him.

"I don't really care what comes out," Lee Shin said.

"All right then. Understood," Sevrino replied.

Sevrino acknowledged Lee Shin's confident reply and activated the Gate Device.

Bzzzz—

A loud vibration echoed as the Gate formed. Lee Shin looked at the darkness beyond the Gate and smiled.

- Baal... I'm seeing that guy for the first time in person.

For some reason, Gene Ebrum's voice was filled with excitement.

"We might have to fight," Lee Shin told Gene Ebrum.

- It doesn't matter. It will be an opportunity to strengthen the Corps of Immortality.

"You know, we are quite alike," Lee Shin told Gene Ebrum.

- Heh, I think the same.

Lee Shin entered the Gate, brushing his hair, fluttering in the wind created by the Gate.