

ARK THE LEGEND

유성 게임 판타지 장편소설
ROK GAME FANTASY STORY

아크더레전드

ROK
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Ark : The Legend volume 1

Written by Yoo Seong

Translated by arkmachinetranslations

Hero Making

Flash! Flash! Flash!

Flashes continued going off without any breaks from the crowd. Two centuries ago, mankind had no choice but to enter space for their survival and faced a mighty enemy that they never imagined.

They encountered an aggressive alien species called the Rama whose advanced science civilization and tough body were far beyond that of humans. A war started between the two species and humans inevitably suffered a crushing defeat. However, the genius scientist Lucian developed the body coating technology that allowed them to be a match for the Rama and joined hands with the alien species alliance called the Aschulat to counterattack. And after decades.....

After the numerous heroes' sacrifices, they were finally able to end the long war. But just because the war ended didn't mean it was peaceful. They soon realized that the federation and Rama could never coexist and the two species were destined to be enemies. The trouble occurred in the Bellin constellation. For a long time it was barren but the next generation of technology meant that rare space resources were identified in the Bellin constellation. The federation and Rama wanted to monopolize those space resources so they gathered their military power and naturally broke the truce. This was the prelude to the 2nd Space War. However, the circumstances were different from the 1st Space War. Now the galactic federation were the ignorant species that had just arrived in the universe. But just before the conflict in Bellin started, the 3rd alien alliance Aschulat departed from the battlefield due to internal affairs. The federation who were planning to take over the Bellin constellation suffered a huge setback. And they continued losing on the battlefield! However, it wasn't just the disadvantageous military situation that troubled the federation leaders.

–Is the galactic federation going to be okay?

–The Aschulat has left the field and the limitations of diplomacy are

revealed!

–There is no alternative to war! This is a tragedy! What hope is there in this war?

–The war in the Bellin constellation clearly shows the incompetence of the federation army!

Every day the media poured criticisms on the galactic federation! Public opinion seemed to get worse every day! Everybody knew that the federation were being thrashed by the Rama. It was at that time that the federation received news about the victory on Beltana. The officials of the galactic federation who had been worrying about the press had a sudden thought.

‘This is a chance to turn the public opinion!’.....they said.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a roaring sound and a red flash. The huge machine that dissolved in the red flash was the Gigantic. It was a machine with advanced weapons designed for slaughter and destruction on the battlefield. But the Devil of the Battlefield also had a weakness. It was the power reactor that was like the Gigantic’s heart. And the power reactor was involved in the huge explosion just now. The Gigantic’s powerful shield and armour couldn’t protect the power reactor. The nuclear fusion engine had exploded inside the Gigantic near the power reactor. In other words, a nuclear explosion had occurred inside the Gigantic. The explosion instantly vaporized the power reactor and the Gigantic collapsed from the inside. And a red flash soared up from the Gigantic’s body!

| |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>-The Gigantic has been destroyed and 15,000 victory points acquired!</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|

“I-It’s a success!”

Ark ignored his seared face and shouted with glee. Needless to say, Ark was the one who contributed the most to blowing up the nuclear fusion engine. Of course, the Silver Hand and Royal Guards also gained some victory points but Ark was the one who actually dealt

the critical hit!

He had dealt 50% of the damage to the Gigantic so he was given 15,000 victory points. That wasn't all.

| |
|----------------------------|
| -Your level has risen! |
| -Your level has risen! |
| -Your level has risen..... |

It was the level up message! Valencia and the armoured platoon might've defeated their Gigantic but it had previously received the concentrated attack of the federation army. However, Ark was the one who penetrated the hole in the Gigantic's leg and blew up the power reaction almost by himself. Of course Ark would receive more experience and victory points from it! He quickly gained 7 levels.

"Unbelievable! Really....."

"He did it! Hyung-nim really defeated the Gigantic!"

"Oh my god! It's a miracle! Hyung-nim caused a miracle!"

"Waaahhhh! Hooray Hyung-nim!"

The Royal Guards cheered and flocked around Ark. A cross mark was also spinning above the head of the Royal Guards. The detachment had also contributed to Ark destroyed the Gigantic so their levels rose. If he was an ordinary user then he would be going on a wild rampage! Ark wasn't an ordinary user.

"Wake up! This is not the time!"

Ark raised his head and exclaimed. The Royal Guards also lifted their heads.

"Hyung-nim is right! This war isn't over yet!"

"There are still Rama remaining. We can't feel relieved."

"Let's join forces with the federation army and clean them up!"

"That's not it!"

“Huh? It’s not?”

The members looked doubtfully at Ark.

“You fools, don’t you know? The Fairy and Star Gate were destroyed earlier but this is the Rama base! Look around! Corpses of the Rama soldiers are interspersed among the wreckage. Do you know how many things will be among the rubble? The Rama are destroyed so they don’t have any owners. If we pick it up then it will belong to us!”

Ark looked around with gleaming eyes.

“This is an opportunity! Search! Put it in your bag as soon as you pick it up!”

The detachment was organized as they struggled to destroy the Rama’s Fairy and Star Gate. They were then chased by Gigantic and almost died many times. Yet the first thing that emerged from Ark’s mouth wasn’t a sigh of relief but it was about loot.

“What.....are you saying?”

Heksu was stricken. But it was the correct comment. The federation army under Haman’s command were cleaning up the Rama. As soon as that ended then hundreds of federation soldiers would be picking up loot. This was the only chance for the detachment to gather the items!

“Ark’s words are correct!”

As expected, it was Heksu who reacted first.

“Nobody can compete with the Scavengers of the Silver Hand in gathering loot! The Scavengers will split into 2 groups. The 1st group will focus on the items around the central base while the 2nd one will search around the Gigantic. Don’t forget. We are mercenaries so we don’t care about honour. We also fought so we should gain some spoils. Our fight hasn’t ended yet!”

“Waaahhhhhhhh!”

The detachment cried out at Heksu’s command and scattered all

over the place. And while there were sporadic gunfire between the federation and the Rama.....

“I’ve found a supplies warehouse in the central base!”

“Move the rubble and salvage the loot!”

“Ohh, there are a considerable amount of supplies left in the wreckage. Quite a lot of it can be used!”

“Just sweep up everything visible!”

“I found large amounts of recyclable materials and semiconductors in the wreckage of the Gigantic!”

“Pack! Pack! Pack! Pack it!”

The detachment gathered random loot. The battlefield was completely cleaned up after 1 hour. The federation army also started to gather loot after taking care of the Rama but the detachment had swept up most of it already. The detachment was the only ones who left the battlefield with full bags.

“That is sufficient payment for them. The federation has also struggled until now.”

Ark muttered with a virtuous heart. And he returned to the federation base with the army.

-Your current physical information has been registered to the Fairy.
<If you die then the character’s levels, skills and the Nymphe’s information will be maintained>

He was finally able to register at the federation’s Fairy after a long journey. All the results Ark obtained in the last fortnight now truly belonged to him.

“The outcome is better than I hoped for.”

The memory of the past two months passed through his head like a panorama. He had been forcibly sent to Beltana and had spent two months on it! He was starving to death on a -50 degrees planet until

he started digging and organized the prisoners. However, these efforts made Valencia bully him. And a fortnight ago he had been left in a hostile area thanks to Valencia.

‘But I came back alive!’

He had felt real despair as he fell into a kilometres deep crevasse. Then he raided the Rama’s main base, blew up the Rama’s Fairy and Star Gate and destroyed the Gigantic. He gained 20,000 victory points! Combined with his previous achievements, he got a total of 22,320 points. There was no doubt that he gained the most achievements among the federation soldiers. In other words, he had monopolized the most achievements on the battlefield. Ark couldn’t hope for better results! However, the biggest thing he received from this war was something else.

‘Why is everything so complicated?’

In the meantime, Ark had been despondent about something. He had some good results from R-14 and Beltana but they weren’t all because of his hard work. He became a criminal after being tricked by the evil hamster and then bullied by Valencia. It wasn’t simply because of bad luck. Such problems occurred because of mistakes that Ark made.

‘Why did it turn out like this? I never would’ve made these mistakes before. Repeatedly making so many mistakes isn’t like me. I seem to have become completely stupid! I’m only in my 20’s so I can’t blame it on age.....’

This had started after Ark began playing Galaxian. He had some misgivings that he wasn’t the same as before. However, this victory wiped away all his misgivings. He was able to gain achievements and results but the most important thing was regaining his mindset. He had overcome many desperate situations and managed to obtain the highest achievement points! It was possible to regain the Ark that he had long forgotten.

‘Yes, I am Ark. The legendary gamer Ark. That’s me!’

It was confidence.

'So far has just been the rehearsal. The game is starting now. That Lucifer bastard, I'll make him realize what a big mistake he made dragging me into this game. I'm Ark!'

Ark had recovered his confidence!

"Everybody freeze!"

A threatening voice shook the square. Ark and the detachment were then surrounded by dozens of soldiers.

"Eh? What, what the? Are you crazy? Why are you doing this?"

The members looked around with shocked expressions. The soldiers separated and a middle aged person with silver hair walked up. He was Haman, the leader of the Beltana garrison. Haman gazed at Ark before saying.

"Ark, you are arrested for deserting the army without authorization. And the 10 members of the prisoner unit. You will be arrested for disobeying orders and going missing during the operation. Disarm them!"

The detachment looked stunned at Haman's words.

"What funny words are you saying?"

Clem leaped forward and shouted in a rough voice.

"Deserting the army without notice? Disobeyed commands? Commander Haman, are you going crazy? Ark....."

"Shut up!"

Haman glared at Clem.

"Are you in the position to defend the prisoners right now? I know that the Silver Hand was the one who took the prisoner unit away from the operational area without permission. You might be a mercenary unit but on the battlefield you still need to take orders from the commander. The commander's order is given priority above anything else. Martial law applied to all military soldiers. The federation isn't an easy place where you can break these rules. Do

you understand? The only reason I'm not arresting you right now is due to a request from the government. Well, the Silver Hand will still be punished."

Haman snorted and turned around.

"Do you have anything to say?"

Until then, Ark had just been standing still like he was involved in this. He only raised his head at Haman's question. There was a pause as Ark looked at Haman before smiling and saying.

"Aren't you going to regret this?"

"Don't make me laugh."

Haman declared sharply.

"Arrest him."

"You really will regret this....."

"Commander-nim!"

The door opened and a female officer stormed in. The person who breathed harshly after running in was Irina. Haman frowned at her sudden visit and raised his head.

"What is going on? I'm busy."

"I just heard some soldiers say that Commander-nim arrested Ark."

"I did. So?"

"I came to tell you that you made a mistake."

"I don't know what you're saying. You should know the outline since you heard the soldiers talking. He failed to return to the barracks after the battle in area B-1. And he also didn't return for over a fortnight. It is similar to a jailbreak so naturally he would be punished. That alone is enough to arrest him. He also made the mercenaries take away the prisoners without authorization. Yet you're saying it is wrong to arrest him?"

“Did you read the report submitted by Peratul-nim?”

Irina narrowed her eyes and declared sharply.

“Ark hadn’t willingly deserted after the B-1 battle. He couldn’t join the main army and was left behind. While escaping the pursuing Rama and getting lost, he managed to discover the location of the Rama base and sent the information with a Carrier MR-II.”

“That information isn’t confirmed yet.”

“But if it is true then he isn’t guilty of desertion. Someone also intercepted the information on the Carrier MR-II. If that is true then Ark had no choice but to draw out the other prisoners. Because the suspected person who stole the information from the Carrier MR-II is the influential Valencia. If Valencia wanted to hide that he committed a crime.....”

“That information isn’t confirmed yet!”

Haman slammed his fist against his desk and shouted. But Irina just lifted an eyebrow and continued speaking.

“After the battle at the enemy base was finished, Ark explained the situation to Peratul and handed over the data on his Nymphe. He looked at the data and declared that the reason to arrest Ark is invalid. Please release Ark immediately.”

“Hah, really.....”

Haman scratched his head with a tired expression. He turned around slowly before gazing outside the window and muttered with a deep voice.

“The data submitted by Ark.....dispose of it.”

“Huh? What are you saying? Why?”

“You still don’t understand?”

Haman clasped his hand together and said.

“Let’s assume that Ark is telling the truth. 400 regular troops have been fighting the Rama on Beltana for months. The military gains

hadn't been that good. The army experienced so much defeat that the federation considered withdrawing from Beltana. Yet a prisoner who was just sent to Beltana managed to discover the Rama's central base and played a key role in the victory.....what would people think?"

Haman's face warped.

"An incompetent federal army. That is what people will think."

"Commander-nim, surely....."

"Listen to my words carefully Irina."

Haman turned and started straight at Irina.

"The person who led us to victory must belong to the galactic federation. Not a criminal."

"Then that is Valencia?"

"Who else is there?"

"Commander-nim seems to have forgotten my duty."

"No, I know. You are a secret inspector from the central government's 2nd branch."

"Then I'll talk quickly. I was sent to Beltana to investigate claims that prisoners will paying bribes to someone. That person is Valencia who was the leader of the 1st armoured platoon. And I've secured evidence through my investigation. Do you really want such a person to play the main role in the victory?"

"It's not like that."

"Huh?"

"This is a decision from higher up."

Irina stiffened at Haman's words. Haman stared at Irina and continued in a dull voice.

"You're clever enough to understand my words. Public opinion has

been against the federation since the day we started fighting against the Rama in the Bellin constellation. What will be the response if an elite warrior like Valencia was accused of stealing an ally's achievements as well as taking bribes? Even if he is fired, the federation will still be criticized. It is necessary to change the atmosphere."

"Isn't that just an excuse?"

"No, it is a strategy."

Haman answered curtly.

"Right now the galactic federation needs a hero. The hero can't be a mere prisoner. We need someone who can give hope to soldiers on the battlefield. We need to look at the wider picture. Sometimes the small things need to be ignored."

"I only hear excuses."

Irina replied in a cold tone.

'Dirty.....'

Her eyes trembled. But the person who appeared in her mind wasn't Haman but 'him.' Once she had loved 'him.' In her childhood she had seen many people bow to him and was proud. But she gradually started to learn the truth. 'He' had power and money and would do anything to keep that power and money. She felt betrayed the moment she realized it. However, she couldn't do anything. She couldn't go against the money and power that 'he' had. The thing that made her even more powerless was that 'he' was her father. So she ran away. She couldn't escape in reality so she entered the virtual world of Galaxian. And became an inspector. It was work she couldn't do in real life. Yet.....yet.....

—In this line of work, sometimes small things need to be ignored for the larger picture.

'His' voice seemed to flow from Haman's mouth. He said that while casually trampling on other people. She had run away from words like that. She escaped to the game world but now she was hearing

those words again. And.....

“Didn’t I tell you? This is a decision from higher up. There is nothing you can do.”

‘Even in this place.....’

She felt helpless.

“Those damn federation guys.”

Clem said angrily. While Ark had been trapped in prison for several hours, Clem had been going around to the officers and protested violently. But the answers were always the same. It was hard to prove that Valencia intercepted the Carrier MR-II with the record that Ark submitted from his Nymphé. Therefore he couldn’t argue against the legitimacy of the desertion claim.

“It is clear what they mean by those answers. They used such lame excuses for a reason. They intend to make him a scapegoat.”

“Scapegoat? Why?”

Mellin asked.

“They want to save face.”

Clem spat out angrily.

“The federation isn’t going to announce that a war going on for several months was won by some prisoners. The reason the federation is doing so badly in the Bellin constellation is because the Aschulat broke the alliance and withdrew. If the federation announces that the war was won by prisoners then it is like announcing they are incompetent. So they are trying to make Ark a criminal.”

“Then who do they intend to announce received the best achievements in this war?”

“Valencia.”

The person who answer was Ark who had been keeping silent until

now. Clem glanced at Ark before sighing and nodding.

“That seems to be the case when looking at the atmosphere.”

The Royal Guards then cried out.

“Valencia? That is ridiculous!”

“Yes, how could someone who stole information and embezzled become a hero?”

“We have to stop something like this!”

“Of course. I have no intention of leaving this alone.”

Clem snorted and rolled up his sleeve. But Ark scratched his head and muttered in a calm voice.

“Let’s see. The federation won’t easily change their minds if you’re the only one protesting.”

“It’s not just me. Someone else is helping.”

“Someone else is helping?”

“Irina, the leader of the prisoner unit.”

“Irina?”

“Yes, she overheard soldiers talking about you being arrested and went to talk to the Commander. She is different from the other officers and insists that you’re innocent. She is willing to testify about your innocence.”

‘Irina went to the Commander to protest?’

Ark was confused by the unexpected words. The prisoners called Irina a ruthless woman. Even if the prisoners were about to die from starvation, she wouldn’t distribute food if they were missing even 0.1 grams of food. There were even rumours that she was an ugly lady in her 40’s. Of course, Ark knew that rumour wasn’t true. He had met a woman who looked like Irina at a charity party. The synchronization rate was 99%. It couldn’t be a coincidence. Yet she pretended she didn’t know Ark when they met in the game again. It

was hard to believe that she was proclaiming his innocence.

‘Perhaps.....she was unconsciously aware of me?’

He thought about it. No other plausible reason floated into his head.

‘Yes, that might be it. I also saved her from being humiliated at the party. She must’ve pretended she didn’t know me because she was shy. I thought she was just someone without good manners but doesn’t she have a surprisingly cute side?’

He thought like that. But this situation was different. Even if she went on a hunger strike to protest Ark’s guilt, there was no apparent way to solve the situation. After a while, Ark shrugged it off and said.

“It is impossible.”

“Impossible? What do you mean?”

“Clem-nim said it a while ago. Commander Haman arrested us to protect the reputation of the galactic federation. If it is true then this wouldn’t just be Commander Haman’s decision. The galactic federation probably made a decision to ignore that information from my Nymphe that I submitted about the Carrier MR-II. The Captain Clem and Irina’s protests won’t be heard.”

“I also know this!”

Clem snapped angrily.

“But are you telling us to do nothing?”

“Of course not.”

Ark smiled and replied.

“Didn’t you hear what I said when the Commander arrested me?”

“What did you say?”

“I said he was going to regret it.”

Ark leaned back with a relaxed look and continued.

“Maybe he is already regretting it.”

“It will be closed like this?”

Irina asked with a cold voice. She couldn't accept the federation's decision. No, she couldn't accept that she was powerless in the game. She came here to escape the unavoidable reality. So she left headquarters and headed towards the Star Gate. If she returned to the galactic federation then she could find someone to help.

‘Someone has to listen to me.’

That was her only hope for now. However, she wasn't even able to approach the Star Gate.

“Commander Haman said that no one can use the Star Gate at the moment. Especially Irina-nim.”

The soldier who smirked and replied was from the 1st armoured platoon.

“I have a special permit to use the Star Gate any time I want. You are violating federal law if you stop me. Even if the Commander said so.....”

“We are only following orders. You should object to the Commander.”

“You guys really.....”

Irina frowned and took one step forward.

Woong woong woong woong. Woong woong woong woong.

Suddenly light started being emitted by the Star Gate. A bunch of light gathered in the centre like fireflies and a group of people appeared. They were soldiers with the mark of the galactic federation on them. But Irina and the armoured platoon was looking at a middle aged man in the centre with various medals on his uniformed chest. Irina looked at the middle aged man with bemused eyes and muttered.

“Why is Marquis Martin.....”

“M-Marquis Martin? Marquis Martine from the central government?”

The galactic federation was a republic where medieval ranks existed. Even ordinary citizens were divided into 1st class and 2nd class citizens, with noble ranks existing above them. Of course, unlike medieval times there was no discrimination by status but the benefits they could enjoy were different.

There was no need to talk about nobility. The central government positions were similar to present day congressmen. Moreover, Marquis Martin was the aristocrat who held the post of special advisor to the central government about military affairs. He had a lot of power over the federal army. In fact, the person Commander Haman talked to and who sent mercenaries from Istana was Marquis Martin.

The armoured platoon saluted after hearing Irina’s words. Then Irina moved between the armoured platoon members and exclaimed.

“Marquis Martin, I need to talk to you!”

But Marquis Martin didn’t even look at her. Marquis Martin just approached the armoured platoon and raised his voice.

“Guards, guide me to Commander Haman right now!”

“Uhh.....”

Thick drops of sweat rolled down Haman’s forehead.

“What’s wrong? Are you in pain somewhere?”

The voice expressed concern but he wasn’t thankful about it at all. The voice who smirked belonged to the protagonist, Ark.

“Is the indoor heating too high? Outside it is still -50 degrees but in here it is quite hot. Perhaps Commander-nim should go outside and gather Iridium? You can exercise and get some food.”

“Shut up!”

“Aigoo, I’m hurt that Commander-nim told me to shut up. Should you be treating the prisoner unit like this?”

“You dare.....”

“Commander Haman, back off.”

Haman’s face contorted with discomfort. The middle aged man staring out the window turned around. With various medals hanging from his uniform, it was Marquis Martin. Marquis Martin started at Haman who twitched and withdrew. Marquis Martine then sat down and asked Ark.

“Are you Ark?”

“Do you know me?”

“You’re a celebrity.”

Marquis Martin placed a small metal plate on the table. Light soared up and a 3D holographic image was displayed. The video shown a group of people rushing inside a domed building. They killed the Rama they encountered and installed bombs where the Star Gate was located then blew up the base. That wasn’t all. The main character of the video also defeated 1 Gigantic by himself and earned some amazing achievements. The protagonist of that video was Ark! This video was taken by Ark.

‘I didn’t think it would be used like this.....’

Ark had started filming when he was rushing towards the Rama’s headquarters.

‘If I destroy the Rama’s Fairy and Star Gate then I will receive the most achievements!’

That was the purpose of Ark and the detachment. However, he started to become uneasy once he actually arrived at the Rama’s main base. Ark’s purpose was to gather achievements so he could leave Beltana. If they destroyed the Fairy and Star Gate then Ark and the Royal Guards would receive the achievements. The problem was the overflowing achievements.

‘If I was a normal soldier then I would receive the compensation. But I’m a prisoner. Prisoners just need to gather enough achievements to

decrease their crime value. Once the crime value was paid off, special compensation will be given for the remaining achievements. In other words, there is no guarantee that I will be rewarded for so much achievements.'

Of course, he hadn't thought about the compensation at first. But the thoughts started coming once he received so much achievements. Ark thought about it. He needed a safety device.

'If suffered so much to obtain the achievements so it will be troubling if the federation doesn't give it to me. But it is different if I film the scenes directly. If the federation becomes reluctant then I can show them the video. If this video is seen then I will definitely receive the most achievements. The federation won't be able to put it off.'

He started the recording function on his Nymphe with those ulterior motives. Ark could afford to be calm when arrested because of this video. Once they returned to the base, the federation's attitude towards Ark had immediately changed. The problem was that Ark raised an excessive amount of achievements. Destroying the Fairy, Star Gate and Gigantic meant he gained 22,320 points. Needless to say, it was the best among all the Beltana soldiers. They were prisoners so none of the regular troops wanted to see them sweep up the achievements. Ark hadn't considered the problem of public sentiment. Anyway, the conclusion was the same. The only thing the federation could do was invalidate Ark's achievements.

'If the galactic federation acts like this then I can't stay still.'

The video stored in his Nymphe floated in his head. If he showed the video then the federation couldn't deny that Ark was the one who displayed the most merit in the war. Of course, Istana was light years away from Beltana and Ark was imprisoned but users had different ways to get information to other users. It was the Internet. Ark had distributed the video through the internet as soon as he grasped the situation. The Beltana war was the first one to be concluded since Galaxian was commercialized. The battle even involved the Gigantic that few users would've heard about before. As soon as it was uploaded on the internet, the users' interest explosively concentrated on it. It received 10 million hits in one

day! It spread through the players so naturally the NPCs would also know about it. Some of the 10 million users who saw the video downloaded it to their Nymphe and distributed it in the game. That was the video Marquis Martin showed him.

“This isn’t ordinary. A mere prisoner managed to calculate up to here and made a safety device for such a situation.”

Actually, he had made it for a different reason. But there was no reason to tell him that.

“I spent many days in -50 degrees weather holding my starving stomach so of course I’m prepared.”

“Let’s cut a long story short.”

Marquis Martin laughed and continued.

“I admit that our side made a mistake. Commander Haman didn’t handle the post-war circumstances so I apologize on behalf of the federation. Now that I know the circumstances, we will admit your achievements as well as grant amnesty to the rest of the prisoners.”

“And?”

Marquis Martin was confused by Ark’s question. His expression was saying ‘what do you want other than amnesty?’ But it was no use in this atmosphere. Once again, Ark had gained 22,320 achievements. Being pardoned was an inevitable result. Ark had taken the video in the first place to extort even more compensation. He had to spend a couple of hours in prison so Ark wasn’t going to let it go that easily.

‘Martin is placing all the blame on Haman but clearly the galactic federation was involved. If I return to Istana and make noise then it can embarrass the federation. Now I’m the one holding the sword hilt. If they persist in attacking me then I will bite them.’

Ark’s intuition was pinging. Marquis Martine narrowed his eyes as Ark persisted and asked.

“What do you want?”

In this situation, the government was forced to accept any request

no matter how absurd it was. However, Galaxian was a game and Marquis Martin a NPC. Just like in real life, NPCs had different personalities. For example, some NPCs would give rewards if their lives were saved regardless of the quest restrictions or difficulty. If he wasn't too greedy then sometimes he could receive even more. Therefore it was more difficult when users had a lot of options for compensation....Ark had to guess the upper limit of how much compensation Marquis Martin would give.

“I don't want a lot. I just want to be treated like a regular soldier.”

In other words, he wanted to receive the same reward that a regular soldier would get if they earned 22,320 achievements.

“Of course, that also applies to the prisoners who follow me and the Silver Hand. Oh, I also want Valencia to receive punishment for stealing the information I sent.”

“To receive the same treatment as a regular soldier and punish Valencia.....”

Haman jumped up after hearing Marquis Martin's words.

“Don't make me laugh! You're a prisoner. A prisoner wants to be treated like a regular soldier?”

“Commander please don't interrupt.”

Marquis Martin sent a sharp look at Haman. He then relaxed his body and looked at Ark.

“That deal is possible. Okay, that conditions aren't bad so I'll accept. You will be acknowledged as the one who earned the most merit in the war. But I also have a condition.”

Marquis Martin smiled and continued.

“I need a hero.”

And several hours later. A user exited the underground plaza in the Nephelim branch of the galactic federation. The light disappeared and people flocked like vultures around the user.

“Please give us a short interview!”

“How does it feel becoming a person with the highest merit after being a prisoner? Can you fully explain the situation on the battlefield?”

“Did the Gigantic really appear on Beltana?”

“You defeated a Gigantic directly?”

“I heard you don’t have a sponsor yet. Scouting offers should be sent by the galactic federation and the 4 big businesses. Have you decided on one?”

The people swarming around the Star Gate were reporters.

“Ark-nim, please tell me how you feel leaving as a prisoner and returning a hero!”

The recipients of the quick-fire questions was Ark! He was the protagonist of the video that swept through Istana, the hero who won the war on Beltana for the galactic federation. But Ark shook his head and said slowly.

“I’m not a hero.”

“Huh? But the video of Ark-nim.....”

“Yes, I’m the one in the video. But as you can see, I didn’t destroy the Rama base or defeat the Gigantic by myself. I had the help of my colleagues and fellow prisoners who committed some diversionary tactics as well as Marquis Martin who sent the mercenary troops to help.”

“Marquis Martin-nim? Then Marquis Martin is involved in this victory?”

“That’s right.”

Ark looked up and nodded.

“Don’t be modest!”

A cry was heard from a group of light behind him. It was from the

uniformed Marquis Martin. He was also baptised with relentless flashes from the surprised reporters. Marquis Martin approached Ark and grabbed his shoulder before saying.

“I’m the one who approved the operation and dispatched the mercenary troops to Beltana. But that would mean nothing if we didn’t win. The soldiers on the battlefield are the ones who risked their lives to defeat the enemy. As you can see from the video, Ark is the hero who contributed the most to the victory. Although he has the status of a prisoner, he is still a member of the galactic federation. I acknowledge him as a worthy hero. That’s why I want to make an announcement. For his contributions in this war, Ark will be given the rights of a 1st class citizen.”

Marquis Martin lifted his hand as he spoke. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have earned considerable achievements on the battlefield and your status increased!

-Ark-nim is now registered as a 1st class citizen of the galactic federation.

Two types of classes exist in the galactic federation. When pioneers first step into the universe, they are automatically 2nd class citizens. Pioneers can increase their status through contributions to the federation, completing quests, bounty hunting, investment in businesses etc.

The benefits that a 1st class and 2nd class citizen receives are different.

A 1st class citizen can choose more variety of quests and their credit rating when trading will also increase. In addition, they can also own land and housing in the areas owned by the galactic federation. When going through the proper procedures, they can also operate a business.

+Your rise in social status means that you can enter 3~4 class areas.

+ Your status rise means a 5% discount is applied to all dealings.

- + Your status rise gives you the right to own real estate in the city.
- + Your status rise gives you the right to manage private businesses.
- + Your status rise means you can use the Star Gate at a general rate.

“Please welcome the new hero of the galactic federation, the 1st class citizen Ark!”

“Waaaaahhhh!”

The crown cheered at Marquis Martin’s words and flashes went off. The front page of the newspapers were plastered with the rise of a federation hero.

New Goal

“Nice to meet you.”

A man wearing a robe bowed to him.

“My name is Idun. I am the leader of the bioengineering team in the Nephelim branch of the galactic federation.”

“Ah, yes. I.....”

“I already know. You are Ark-nim?”

Idun responded to his introduction with a smile.

“It is impossible for me to not know. You are the hero Ark who led the Beltana war to victory! I’m been shut inside the research centre yet I still managed to hear your name.”

“That just happened by chance.”

“You are too modest.”

“No, that.....it’s not being modest but.....”

Ark scratched his head with an awkward expression. Once again, the federation had poured large amounts of money into the war in the Bellin constellation so every day the media was focused on it. Therefore it was necessary for the federation to reverse the situation. That was the existence of a war hero.

‘The federation wanted to make Valencia the hero.’

That’s why Ark was arrested as soon as he returned to the base on Beltana. It was a secret plot to get rid of his achievements and make Valencia a war hero. This was another instance of things becoming complicated after starting Galaxian. But Ark wasn’t a beginner pioneer anymore. While he hadn’t exactly expected this problem, Ark had filmed a video as a security measure to ensure that he received the proper compensation. Fortunately Ark made a

deal with Marquis Martin and managed to get the same rewards as a regular soldier would. However, that privilege wasn't for free.

–I need a hero.

That was the condition Marquis Martin required. Of course, Ark didn't exactly like the conditions. No matter what happened, the existence of a war hero was necessary for the galactic federation. It was difficult to make Valencia one so they decided to chance to Ark.

'I expected something like this but.....'

It had been 4 hours since the federation formally announced Ark as a war hero. During those 4 hours, the name Ark poured from virtually every monitor playing Galaxian. The contents of Ark's fight was being played by reporters in Nephelim as well as broadcasted on the internet. The galactic federation's manipulation of public opinion had started. And the federation's plan was a great success when looking at the results. However, the result wasn't 100% due to the federation's efforts. This was the first hero since Galaxian was commercialized! That was enough to draw the attention of the public. But there was a separate reason for the explosive interest. It was the name of the hero the federation was promoting!

–Ark?

–It must be that Ark.

–The legendary gamer from New World who appeared on the TV!

–It that user really Ark? There are many users with the same name.

–Still, to become a hero in a game that is only several months old.....

–But the systems between New World and Galaxian are completely different. There is no guarantee that he will do well in Galaxian. But the user has the same name and a similar face.

–If the person called Ark has such great skills.....

–If that person really is Ark then it is amazing!

Tens of thousands of posts were written on the Galaxian community sites during those 4 hours! The explosive interest from users also influenced the NPCs. The video was repeatedly played on the monitors in the federal cities. This was how an NPC staying in the research centre knew his name. But Ark wasn't thankful for the situation.

'This is why I didn't want my name involved with the video.....'

Don't draw attention. That was one of the absolute principles in Ark's head. The world was full of strange people and some of them just dislike a person because they were famous. They were the people who would create anti-cafe's for celebrities and spread malicious rumours. It would be tiring for the famous person involved. Therefore he had been slightly offended and relieved when he heard that hundreds of people could use his name. This meant he wouldn't draw unnecessary attention in the game. Yet he became a hero out of the blue. At the same time, the situation he wanted to avoid had already begun.

–If that really is Ark then isn't it annoying? Damn, he already became a director at Global Exos through New World and now he wants to play Galaxian as well?

–That unlucky guy, is he that excellent?

–If I ever meet him at a hunting ground then I'll prove that guy's fame is nothing.

Not only that.....

–I had to quit New World because of that Ark bastard. If that user really is Ark then I'll use this chance to get revenge. I'm recruiting any other users who also feel like me. Please leave a memo on the bulletin board in Tatuine. It was no joke.

There were even organizations to track Ark's movements and kill him.

'Damn, how can I do anything in such an uproar?'

Part of it was due to his actions. Back in New World, Ark wasn't

exactly a 'nice' character. He annoyed other people for no reason and if someone took action against him then he would repay it several times. Of course, even now Ark didn't doubt that everything was 'unavoidable.' It was common sense that those people wouldn't consider it 'unavoidable.'

'I wanted to live a bit more gently this time.....'

Therefore Ark wasn't exactly pleased about being a hero. Ark's face fell at the thought and Idun stared at him. Ark scratched his head and said.

"It was just by chance. Like I said in the interview, I'm not the only one who played a role in the victory so it is a slight burden on me. The mass media keeps on talking about it so I can't go anywhere without being crowded."

He never knew when someone would stab a knife in his back. No, it was the future so it would actually be a bullet shot in the head. It was dangerous but a NPC couldn't understand those circumstances.

"This is surprising. You took care of a Gigantic by yourself so I thought Ark-nim was full of confidence."

"I'm full of confidence but that doesn't mean I can protect my stomach every moment."

"Huh?"

"No, it's nothing."

Ark sighed and shrugged. Then Idun pushed up his glasses and laughed.

"This is the first time I've seen someone who received the title of hero sighing. But please don't feel too depressed. It might be a burden but Ark-nim's existence is comfort to people like me in the galactic federation. I don't know why you feel burdened but you've become a hero so just enjoy yourself."

"Of course I will."

Ark smiled and nodded. He wasn't going to reject the fame because

of some worries. He also wasn't in the position to complain. If he didn't make the deal with Marquis Martin then he would lose his achievements accumulated and sent to another disputed planet. This situation right now was better.

However, that wasn't his only compensation for being a hero. Ark also had some conditions in exchange for becoming Marquis Martin's hero. In other words, it was the promised compensation for the 22,230 achievements. He received three different types of rewards. The first was the title of hero that Marquis Martin announced at his public appearance. Ark received the 1st class citizenship at the same time but this wasn't the major compensation. All pioneers started off as a 2nd class citizen and they could be promoted to 1st class when contributing to the federation through quests or other methods. In other words, reaching a 1st class citizen was like a rite of passage. But the title of hero was different.

-You have received the <Beltana's Hero> title from Marquis Martin.

This title is given to the user who participated in the war on the disputed planet and gains the most achievements. Therefore it is a unique title due to the different names of the disputed planets. Only one person can receive this title so it is different from the general titles.

The user who receives a title with the name of a disputed planet would be given huge compensation from the galactic federation. You will be given priority in investing on Beltana when development stats. You will also receive preferential treatment compared to the average citizen.

<Title Effects: Beltana's Hero (All Stats +3)>

+ 1,000 additional fame.

+ 3,000 galactic federation contribution.

+ Acquired 200 Adventure points

He wasn't just a hero. He had literally received the title of a

hero. The 'Cleaning Foreman' title he received from R-14 gave him +3 agility, while the 'Ignorant Destroyer' gave him +7 Stamina and Strength but decreased his Wisdom by 10. However, the 'Beltana's Hero' title gave him +3 points to every stat! That was a total of 18 bonus stats. He also received 1,000 fame and 200 Adventure points. The purpose of the Adventure points was still unknown but it had to be used somewhere. Anyway, the bonus was a different standard from his previous titles. But that wasn't the true value of the 'Beltana's Hero' title. The important thing was the privileges attached to the title. It gave him priority if he wanted to invest in Beltana. The core of Galaxian was space pioneering. The pioneers would adventure in wastelands or unexplored planets. Users who participate in the disputed planet war or pioneer new areas can gain the right to invest based on their contribution.

This was why the corporations needed a pioneer to sponsor. Investment rights could be given to the sponsor of the pioneer. If they supported a promising pioneer then they could secure many investment rights. This was the required prerequisite for a space company to grow. That's why small, medium, the 4 large businesses and even junkyards poured huge amounts of funds into sponsoring pioneers. However he only acted as Tori's servant. Like stated in the information window, users with the Hero title were allowed the maximum investments within the scope of the galactic federation's laws. In other words, he could invest in the maximum amount on Beltana. He soon knew what a big privilege it was.

Ttiring! Ttiring! Ttiring! Ttiring!

His Nympe started flowing with incoming mail.

—I am Heris the director of the human resources department of Laius.

I know that your previous sponsor contract was destroyed. If Ark-nim is willing to sign a sponsor agreement with Laius then you will receive the best treatment. Among the 4 large companies, we hold the largest number of patents so Ark-nim will become a leading pioneer if you join with us.

Please get in touch.

*-I am Kirian, the director of the Nephalim branch of Hell Lion.
Hell Lion is a company formed by the former governor of Kurim. It
is a company that values tradition and trust and has developed
various special equipment, with a long and constant focus on
quality improvement. We were moved by Ark's heroic actions on
Beltana and feel that your abilities will be useful.....*

It was scouting offers proposed by various companies. Dozens of mail came in after the interview ended. Normally the 4 large companies and the galactic federation had an entrance examination to join. A user with the Hero title had their pick of companies.

'But.....'

Making a contract with the junkyard was 120% a mistake. Ark had also previously received an offer from the federation but he told them he wanted more time to think. That's because he knew that sponsors had a large impact on the game and he wanted more experience knowledge before deciding. His decision now was still the same. It had already been 4 months since he started Galaxian but he spent most of his time on R-14 and Beltana so he was still lacking knowledge.

And there was another part that weighed on his mind.

'I don't need to be too hasty about it. My Hero title won't disappear so I can find a sponsor at any time. It won't be too late when I make a decision.'

Ark decided to postpone the sponsor problem for a while. Right now he had a more urgent issue to deal with. This was why he came to visit Idun.

"That.....by the way....."

Ark studied Idun's face and said. Idun stared with blankness before remembering and blushing with embarrassment.

"Ah, I just remembered. This isn't the time....."

"Did you receive the notification from Marquis Martin?"

"Yes, then please follow me."

Idun smiled pleasantly and turned around. This was the future so science and technology was one of the core resources. The research centre was where the science and technology were developed so the security was very tight. Ark followed Idun for 200 metres. Meanwhile he had passed a few security equipment like fingerprint, voiceprint and retinal scanners. The place he arrived was filled with various equipment.

“This machine is what truly opened up the space frontiers.”

Idun looked around the room with sparkling eyes. He then looked back at Ark and boasted.

“The machine that Ark-nim sees now is something that the genius scientist Lucian developed to rearrange the DNA. This is the body coating machine that modifies flesh.”

Body coating! This was the second compensation he received from Marquis Martin. Generally two things were required for users to receive the body coating. One condition was to obtain an ‘IC card for body coating’ with the data of the type they wanted. This IC card wasn’t difficult to obtain.

They could obtain it from the 4 big companies, the galactic federation or buy it in stores. Prices ranged from 50~100 gold but level 30 was the minimum required to obtain the body coating so it was a high price. The other condition was the sponsor’s guarantee. As mentioned earlier, most users who started the game were 2nd class citizens. Their status was similar to foreign workers entering the universe. Therefore a sponsor was needed to guarantee their identities. That’s why a sponsor was necessary to receive the body coating. It was impossible for a level 30 user to receive a body coating with a guarantor. However, Ark was promoted to a 1st class citizen and also received the Hero title.

This was the reason Ark could postpone the sponsor problem. Users normally hurried to sign a sponsor contract at level 30 to receive the body coating. However, Ark could receive the body coating without a sponsor so there was no reason to rush. Besides, he didn’t need to purchase an IC card.

“Have you brought the IC card?”

“Yes, here it is.”

Ark pulled out something that looked like a USB. Idun examined it with an interested look and nodded.

“As expected, this is a 3rd generation IC card.”

“3rd generation.....”

“Not all the IC cards for body coating are the same. When body coating was first developed, the technology was still lacking so the functionality wasn’t perfect. The IC cards were improved and distributed as the 2nd generation IC cards. The one Ark-nim received from Marquis Marin has improved even further and is known as the 3rd generation IC card. But the 3rd generation card is difficult to produce so it can’t be mass-produced. It is a type of limited edition card.”

Ark also knew this information. He had heard the condescending lecture when Marquis Martin gave it to him.

‘The 3rd generation card is far superior to the 2nd generation. This means I’ll get more bonus stats and resistances. Such differences can’t be ignored in a game.....’

There was something more important than that. It was the characteristics of the body coating he would receive. It was already mentioned but body coating wasn’t the same as a profession. However, the choice would have a huge impact on his profession choices. For example, if he received a body coating focused on strength and stamina then he would be more suited to raising a warrior than a magician. If he received the warrior type body coating then selecting a warrior profession meant he utilize his body attributes by 100%. It wasn’t that different from a career choice. Of course he couldn’t choose it lightly. So he had been worrying about it since he received the IC card.....

“I would like to receive the right for body coating.”

“Have you decided what type of body coating to get? Once it stops then it can’t be stopped in the middle.”

“Yes, I decided.”

“I understand. Then let’s begin. Please wait a minute.”

Idun went out of the room holding the IC card. He went over to a glass wall and connected the IC card to the computer. The unidentified machines started working and different lights filled the room. The light tangled together and formed a 3D image of a double helix. DNA!

-The body coating has started.

Your DNA information is being scanned prior to the body coating.

Body coating is a special type of technology that extracts DNA from alien species with special abilities and synthesis them in your DNA.

However, there is a limit to how many new DNA can be combined and not all the abilities can be obtained. Typically if you strengthen strength or stamina then mental aspects will weaken and vice versa. If you cancel an old body coating and receive a new one then the amount of DNA manipulation will become limited. It is possible to receive 100% of the bonus with the 1st body coating. Meanwhile there is a 20~50% loss after the 2nd body coating due to the physical burden.

Make your decision carefully so you don’t regret it.

Lists containing information about the body coatings available appeared with the message. There are four types of body coating. Body reinforcement, concentration reinforcement, mental reinforcement and willpower reinforcement.

Body reinforcement strengthens the flesh, allowed users to wear heavy armour as well as using heavy weapons like greatswords or heavy artillery. It is suitable for warriors. Concentration reinforcement allows the user to easily capture the enemy’s weaknesses or focus for long range sniping. Mental reinforcement strengthens the DNA involving the brain, allowing users to develop psychic powers or use ancient magic. And willpower reinforcement meant they could develop recovery powers similar to a priest. The

four types of body reinforcement could also be concentrated on attack, defense or both. The four body coatings were then subdivided into three types so there was a total of 12 choices!

‘But I won’t even look at 9 of them.’

The first ones Ark deleted was mental reinforcement and willpower reinforcement. When he first read the information about mental reinforcement, he thought it was similar to X-men like powers. However, this was the same power as a magician. Ark enjoyed close combat so these body coatings didn’t fit him. This also applied to willpower reinforcement.

‘In order to display 100% of the ability, I need to understand my own pros and cons. My fighting style is quick and irregular attacks. Maintaining that combat style is impossible if I choose a body coating focused on stamina and strength. Then the only possible option is concentration reinforcement. The problem is that I have to choose one of the three types of concentration reinforcement.....’

But Ark’s worries didn’t last long. The different types floated in front of him and one of them caught his eye.

‘The thing I desired most when wandering around Beltana! The reason I grabbed my starving stomach in the -50 degrees weather!’

He wanted to survive.

‘The biggest trap in Galaxian is the death penalty. No matter how much I raise my level or gain powerful skills, it is useless if it isn’t registered on the Fairy. If I spend several days at a hunting ground then it could be a deadly death penalty. So the most important thing in Galaxian is to survive! I need to survive no matter the circumstances!’

The body coating that caught Ark’s eyes matched with that idea. The name was Survivor! Survivor! What more needed to be said?

“Body coating start!”

Woong woong woong woong. Woong woong woong woong.

A fluctuating noise filled the room. The double helix DNA image repeatedly disassembled and reassembled. Finally another blue line was added to the double helix, changing it into a triple helix. The triple helix then plunged into Ark!

-Body Coating: Survivor

Survivor maximizes your survival ability through the combination of DNA extracted from alien species living in harsh environments. The biggest feature of the Survivor is the awakening of potential to overcome a crisis. The crisis would turn into an opportunity.

* The abilities of this body coating will fluctuate.

Character Information Window

| | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 52 |
| Species | Human | Occupation | Pioneer |
| Fame | 1,000 | Adventure | 300 |
| Health | 1000 (+90)+250 | Mental Power | 500+250 |
| Strength | 125(+23)+5 | Agility | 175+20 |
| Stamina | 195(+18)+20 | Wisdom | 15+5 |
| Intelligence | 95+15 | Luck | 15+20 |

* Title

Cleaning Foreman (Agility + 3)

Ignorant Destroyer (Wisdom -10, Strength +7, Stamina +7)

Beltana's Hero (Strength, Agility, Stamina, Wisdom, Intelligence, Luck +3)

* Galactic Federation Contribution: 3,000

*Body Coating: Survivor

+ Environmental adaptation increases by 50% due to the Survivor coating.

+ The Survivor coating reduces the drop rate of Satiety by 30%.

+ The Survivor coating will reduce fall damage by 50%.

+The 'Clairvoyance' effect of the Survivor coating is applied.

-A new skill (Survivor ☆) has been learnt.

Binding Sword (User, Active): Danger! Escape! The moment the sword hits an enemy, a mental wave will be fired and the enemy briefly paralyzed. Using Binding Sword will reduce your attack by

50%. But if the attack succeeds then there is a 30% chance to stop the enemy moving for 2~3 seconds. This technique can be an advantage when trying to escape but the situation could get even worse if it fails. So please use it carefully.

<Attack decreased by 50%. 30% chance to paralyze the enemy for 2~3 seconds>

Mental power consumption: 50>

-A new skill (Survivor ☆☆) has been learnt.

Mind Shield (User, Active): Your health has reached the bottom! At this rate you will die! If you focus your mental power in moments of crisis then you can create a shield. This shield is created with mental power so the melee penalty of general shields doesn't apply.

The durability of the shield depends on the concentration and can vary between 50 to 500.

If captured by Rama then concentrate your spirit. You need to stay focused if you want to live.

<Mental power is consumed and a shield with 50~500 durability is produced>

Mental power consumption: 100

Cool down time: 30 minutes

-A new skill (Survivor ☆☆☆) has been learnt.

Stealth (User, Active): Do you want to check it quietly if it looks dangerous? This will often occur when going on adventures. Stealth is the best choice in situations like that. When using Stealth, the light will bend around the body and you will become invisible to the enemy. However, a large amount of concentration is needed to maintain the stealth state. If you see a cockroach and lose concentration then you could die if an enemy detects you.

<The visible light will refract and you can move around while invisible>

Mental power consumption: 200>

“This is.....”

Ark sighed as he walked out. He had selected the Survivor coating after much deliberation.

Gaining 1 million experience or 1 million special skills meant nothing if he couldn't register with the Fairy before dying. So the most important thing in Galaxian was living. Thus he chose the Survivor coating.

“The bonus stats aren't bad.”

Ark muttered as he looked at the character information window. When he browsed the internet, he found that the bonus stats normally given was between 65~75. However, Ark had received a total of 85 bonus stats. Marquis Martin gave him a 3rd generation IC card that gave 10~20 extra stats.....

“Of all things, why did my luck stat increase by 20?”

Of course, luck wasn't a useless stat. No, it was a terrifying one.

-Luck: Luck can influence the behaviour of the character.

Luck has an influence on critical hit probability, evasion probability and increases the chance of receiving better rewards from NPCs as quest compensation. In addition, the probability of getting good loot also increases.

This was the role of luck in online gaming. At first glance it was a good stat. However, luck was all related to probability. In other words, it didn't always turn out well. And even if something worked, there was no way to connect it to his luck value. Yet his luck stat had increased by 20. It was like those points had been thrown away. However, Ark's uncomfortable expression wasn't due to his stats.

“What the hell? These skills?”

He had learnt 3 skills along with the Survivor coating. Binding Sword,

Mind Shield, Stealth.....the effects seemed quite useful. The enemy being bound for 2~3 seconds meant he could escape, the shield could stop several attacks and the stealth technology meant he could hide while moving.

They were all techniques that could be used to escape from a crisis. The problem was that the effect wasn't fixed. The effect changed depending on the users' concentration. If he couldn't concentrate properly then the attack damage of Binding Sword would decrease without any other effect while the durability of the shield would also decrease. And if he lost concentration in a hostile area then he would be in danger.

"Can these techniques be used safely? Damn, how can I be assured using these skills in a crisis? Is it luck of the draw?"

He thought it was appalling when he first saw the skill information window. Therefore he had angrily thought about cancelling the body coating. Even if the user was level 100, it was possible to cancel the body coating and receive another one. But cancelling the body coating cost a lot of money. And they also needed to buy an IC card to receive the body coating again. However, that wasn't the penalty that weighed on his mind. Separating the DNA of an alien species and adding new one placed considerable burden on the body and decreased the stats. It wasn't possible even if he had enough money. So Ark reconsidered.

"Yes, the skill description is uncomfortable but I won't know until I try it out. There are many variables but the effect isn't bad if used properly. No, like its name it is a skill to escape from suitable situations. It was too early to discard it. He had to try it out. The effect wouldn't truly be known until he learnt it with his own body. Yes, I'll try it once. There is no meaning in complaining now."

He thought about trying it out. He wanted to leave the city right now to fight. But Ark wasn't in a situation to do such things right now. At least in the future.....

Ttak!

Ark was walking down a hallway while thinking. He felt a sudden pain and stars spread in front of him. He stepped back holding his

forehead and saw someone else doing the same thing. He was too busy meddling with the skill information window that he bumped into someone after turning the corner.

“Wah! I’m sorry. I wasn’t looking.....eh?”

Ark lowered his head after grasping the situation when he suddenly flinched. Surprisingly Ark knew the person. It was Irina. Ark stared at Irina blankly because he never imagined bumping into her. He noticed Irina frowning and laughed awkwardly.

“I mean.....this is a shocking reunion. I’m seeing stars.”

“Are you joking? Or do you want me to be angry?”

“No, that.....”

“It’s okay.”

Irina spoke coldly with a deadpan voice. Ark hesitated after seeing her attitude and scratched his head. Irina was about to turn around when Ark suddenly remembered and quickly started talking.

“W-wait a minute. I wanted to see you once. So I can say thank you.”

“Thank you, why are you thanking me?”

“I heard about it from Leader Clem. Irina ran around trying to help me when I was imprisoned on Beltana. There was no time after I was released so I couldn’t greet you directly. Thank you for your regard.”

Irina was startled by Ark’s words. She thought for a while before shaking her head and saying.

“I didn’t do it for your sake.”

‘Heh, she must be shy.....’

Ark inwardly thought after hearing Irina’s reply. A young woman wouldn’t run back and forth helping a man she had no relation with. Then it was clear. When he heard Clem’s words, Ark was 100% sure that Irina had a crush on him. When he thought about it, there

was no other option. Ark had saved Irina from humiliation at the charity party. He was also dressed up in nice clothes so he was looking handsomer than usual.

'I barely spoke with Irina on Beltana. If Irina tried to help me so much then the answer is obvious. Although she pretended not to know, it is clear that she remembers the incident.

'Huhuhu, this is slightly okay. But why is she acting cold? Ah, is that possible? Isn't the cold character the trend these days? Hmm, this is also surprisingly charming?'

Ark arrogantly misunderstood. He mistook Irina's cold attitude as a strange charm.

"Anyway, it is a fact that I received your help. I am thankful."

"Then I guess I have to say thanks to you as well."

"Huh?"

"I was actually on Beltana because of Valencia. I was dispatched to Beltana to investigate rumours that someone was taking bribes from the prisoners. It was hard to gather evidence at first but it became easy after you provoked Valencia and I could file a complaint."

It was the first time he heard this. Ark became embarrassed by the unexpected words.

"But you should be careful. Valencia lost his achievements, was released from his position and reprimanded. It is a weak punishment compared to his violations. But Valencia might still be harbouring a grudge."

"I already know that but....."

Ark laughed and shrugged. Ark had noisily returned to Istana as a war hero with a lot of enemies. What did one more person matter? The more important thing was that Ark thought she had a crush on him. He couldn't show his weak side! Ark deliberately put on an easy going expression and said.

"I've believed that justice would win since I was young."

“And does it?”

“Sometimes. Especially when money.....”

Ark made a circle with his finger and showed it to her. Irina stared at it blankly before laughing. Ark was caught off guard by Irina’s reaction to his joke. Ark had seen her many times on Beltana. She was in charge of the prisoners’ supplies so he couldn’t help seeing her. But this was the first time he saw Irina smiling. That wasn’t the only reason why Ark was caught off guard.

‘What? This woman.....is pretty.’

He had thought she was quite good earlier. However, he has always seen her with an expressionless face. But after seeing her laugh, she was an unexpectedly pretty girl?

And it wasn’t just a pretty looking woman. Ark misunderstood that a pretty woman was interested in him! His chest felt strange after being conscious of it.

‘Just once.....’

Ark hesitated as he looked at Irina before opening his mouth.

“Hyung-nim!”

A bunch of guys flocked from behind him. They were the Silver Hand and Royal Guards. In fact, the Royal Guards were from different areas of Istana before being sent to Istana. When the war ended, they asked Marquis Martin to be allowed to return to Nepalim. There was a reason he brought them together.

‘But I wanted to talk to Irina.....’

Ark turned back around.

“Eh?”

She wasn’t there anymore. She had disappeared just like at the charity party.

“W-was she embarrassed? Yes, that must be it. She must be embarrassed.”

Ark thought like that.

“Hey, are you okay? Why are you muttering to yourself in a place like this?”

Mellin approached and asked with strange eyes. Ark blushed as he scratched his head and turned.

“It’s not a big deal. Did things turn out well?”

“Of course. Even if we’re not heroes, we also took part in the victory. Look at this. Isn’t it good? The other members and I received interesting weapons.”

Mellin tapped the machine gun on his shoulder and laughed. It wasn’t just Mellin. While the Royal Guards didn’t receive the Hero title, they received rewards according to their achievements. Of course, they were prisoners so they wouldn’t receive rewards for the achievements left over after they were pardoned. However, Ark made a deal with Marquis Martin for the detachment to be treated like regular troops. Therefore the Royal Guards and Silver Hand were able to receive awards corresponding with their achievements. Now the Royal Guards were carrying new equipment. The equipment were all visibly magic items!

“This is all thanks to you.”

“Yes, we were pardoned and even received new equipment thanks to you!”

The crew burst out around him. If this was the usual Ark.....

“Is that right? It is thanks to me? I’m thankful for those words.....”

He would try to get something for it. But now wasn’t the time. Ark had grander goals than some petty cash.

“The items? Is it all under control?”

“Well, Leader Clem knew the owner of the store so we got a decent price for it. It added up to 17,400 gold once everything was sold. I’ve never seen or touched so much gold before. My hands trembled while holding it. It isn’t good for my heart so you should receive it

quickly.”

Mellin passed him a heavy purse. This was the money from disposing of all the items they picked up from the pyramid and the Rama base. The total was 17,400 gold! Of course, that money didn't belong to Ark alone. The proceeds were evenly split up among the 30 members of the Royal Guards and Silver Hand. Of course, Ark had already filled up his bag before the detachment joined him. This was Ark's personal income. After calculating his personal income, Ark ended up receiving 1,160 gold. 16,800 gold remaining after subtracting Ark's personal income. This was then split among Ark, the Silver Hand and the Royal Guards. $16,800 \div 30 = 560$! That was 560 gold per person.

‘17,400 gold seemed like a huge amount but now it is split between 30 people.’

But they also received compensation from the federation and new weapons so it was a type of bonus. Each member received a bonus of 560 gold. Ark also took 1,160 gold so he couldn't complain.

‘The combined amount is still insufficient!’

17,400 gold was insufficient if Ark wanted his plan to proceed. This was the reason the members hadn't divided the proceeds and handed it all to Ark. He would now explain his plan.....

In fact, Ark had half forgotten about Lucifer while on Beltana. He had to stop it of course but there were other users taking part in the government's ‘Lucifer obstruction plan.’ But he had changed his mind while wandering around Beltana. The real estate slump in the Taek Mountain area! Ark thought it was highly likely that Lucifer was behind it. Ark was still a common person despite being a legendary gamer. He hadn't really felt anything about the country's crisis but now he was impatient.

Ark had realized what an important issue it was.

‘But how can I stop Lucifer?’

Ark hadn't thought about it deeply until then. Of course, there was the condition that Lucifer proposed.

–The first person to achieve the ultimate goal in Galaxian will win.

.....He didn't know what that meant. Galaxian was an online game. Each game had different endings. So there was no way to know what the ultimate goal was. The game publisher of Galaxian, Successful Future hadn't released the ultimate goal to the public.

'The ultimate goal in Galaxian.....is it to become the strongest warrior? Or to reach the highest position in the galaxy? Perhaps pioneering the most planets? Or maybe finding an amazing item?'

He thought of various things but the answer wasn't clear. But there was one obvious thing.

'I don't know what Lucifer considers the ultimate goal but there is one way to reach the target first. I have to become stronger than Lucifer!'

However, Galaxian was an online game. Numerous users were competing to reach the goal. In such a game, a user couldn't just rely on individual strength. The ability of an organization was inevitably required. He needed an organization filled with users and NPCs to help him. That was the conclusion Ark reached. But Ark decided to narrow it down to two goals. The first thing was the growth and support of his organization.

'And the starting point of my organization.....'

Needless to say, it was the Royal Guards. The idea of his organization was based on the Royal Guards. It was thanks to this idea that Ark gathered the Royal Guards together. An opportunity to meet NPCs in the game that would sacrifice their lives for him was uncommon. And unlike other online games, some NPCs in Galaxian could resurrect. The Royal Guards were those NPCs. He could treat his subordinates like users. In fact, Ark had planned to execute it in the far future when he first thought about it. However, now he was the hero of Beltana.

+ Your status rise gives you the right to manage private businesses.

A 1st class citizen had the right to operate a business!

‘A private business! In other words, I can own my own business like Tori. If I have a registered business then I can be a sponsor!’

This was why Ark snubbed the scouting offers of the 4 large businesses. If he created a business then his organization would have a direct goal. However, this plan had a crucial issue.

“Money! Money! Gold!”

This was part of setting up any business. It required a colossal amount of funds. However, most of the money Ark earned in reality was tied up in real estate. He couldn’t invest in a business in the game. So Ark lowered his goal for a little bit.

‘Yes, I shouldn’t become too greedy. Even if my funds aren’t tied up in real estate, it is too risky to build a company. I’ll start with becoming a mercenary organization like the Silver Hand for the moment. If I purchase the agent rights from the government then I don’t need to buy a building.’

But the price of an agent registration certificate wasn’t cheap. It was tens of thousands of gold! Ark only received 1,160 gold after the payout. This was why most users never thought of creating an establishment and looked for a sponsor. The agent right was necessary to establish an organization and most users couldn’t afford that amount. However, an organization was essential to Ark so he had no choice. So he devised one method.

“You are now free. But I still want to be with you guys forever.”

“Of course! We will follow Hyung-nim until we die!”

“Thank you. But our current situation is limited. We’ve truly become colleagues who faced death together so I want to make it official. After much deliberation, I decided to make our own organization. Of course, building a decent business right now is realistically impossible. But it is different if we become a mercenary company like the Silver Hand. The money needed to buy an agent registration certificate is large but if we join forces then I think it is possible. Then you will become a founding member with a stake in the organization.”

This was the method that Ark thought of. It was collecting member from the Royal Guards under the pretext of 'establishment funds.'

'10 NPCs together should make a fast profit.'

There was no opposition. Ark's agenda unanimously passed. The income they earned from Beltana was added to the 'establishment funds.' There was one question. The spoils from Beltana were shared between the members of the detachment. Based on the number of people, the Silver Hand had received approximately 60% of the total income. However, just then Mellin had handed all the money to him. The reason why.....

"Leader Clem-nim, please take care of my younger brothers."

"Understood. We will make them work to make up the amount of shares originally belonging to us that we gave to you."

Clem laughed and looked at the members of the Royal Guards. This was why the income from Beltana entered Ark's pocket. In the past Ark got a job with the Silver Hand because of Tori and he got the Royal Guards the same job. However, this wasn't just to finance the business.

'The Silver Hand has more experience and better skills than the Royal Guards. They grew just from a few days together on Beltana so they will noticeably improve when hunting with the Silver Hand. Besides, now it is possible to receive thousands of gold.'

It was a plan to eat pheasant and egg. Clem also knew Ark's expectations.

"Really, using a tactic to use a rival group to raise your subordinates while earning money. You shameless guy."

But Clem accepted Ark's proposal without any complaints. In the meantime he had steadily raised his favour with them.

"Now we have to separate for a while."

Ark summarized the general situation and said. Hegel sent him a regretful look and carefully said.

“What will Hyung-nim be doing in the meantime?”

“Me?”

Ark turned his head as he suddenly remembered. After being lost in thought for a while, he sighed and muttered.

“I’m going to sell my body.”

Incomplete Quest x3

'I've received the body coating!'

He'll explain it once again. Istana was the capital planet of the galactic federation. Some planets in the galaxy were frozen lumps, thousands of degrees hot or filled with deadly gas. Therefore those planets weren't suitable to live on for humans. When looking at it from the galaxy's perspective, humans were a fragile species. If the temperature changed even a little bit then they would die like the fragile flowers in greenhouses. This was why humans had to develop environmental modification techniques when settling on planets thousands of light years away from earth. This was Terraforming. However, even Istana that was considered the heart of the federation was only 10% terraformed. The remaining 90% was still like it had been for billions of years. Pioneers risked their lives in this unknown world. In order to adapt to the harsh space environment, pioneers were given the privilege of combining their DNA with aliens to increase their bodies to the limit. They would only truly be called a pioneer once they received the body coating from Istana. Ark could now obtain that qualification.

'I got 3 bonus skills!'

He obtained 3 different skills from the Survivor body coating. But there were too many ambiguous points for him to blindly rejoice. It was difficult to calculate how useful the skills would be in an actual fight by just reading the description. His shoulder shook from the urge to run outside and test the newly learnt skills. Any user would feel like that. However.....

"As I mentioned before, Beltana's victory wasn't achieved by myself. There was a commander who believe in me and colleagues who risked their lives fighting. Even now a large number of federation soldiers are confronting the Rama. They are the people who deserve to be called true heroes."

“I have a question!”

“I heard that you were the Rama’s prisoner in an interview the other day.”

“Did you encounter any harsh actions?”

“Harsh actions.....of course there were. It was only for a short time but I had to endure some difficult pain. But I think it was a valuable experience. Before entering that battlefield, I thought there might be a way to coexist with the Rama. I soon realized over time that the Rama isn’t a species we can coexist with. They don’t acknowledge us as a species. Therefore it isn’t an exaggeration to say the humanity is at stake with this war.”

“What do you think about the 3rd alien alliance, the Aschulat?”

“Currently the federation is having a hard fight in the Bellin constellation because the Aschulat didn’t keep their promise to help us and withdrew from the battlefield. Many people are blaming the galactic federation’s diplomatic power. What does Ark-nim think?”

“That.....”

“This isn’t a question that he can answer on the spot.”

A middle age man jumped in when Ark hesitated.

“There will soon be an official announcement from the galactic federation about that question.”

“Then we’ll ask other questions.”

“Ark-nim became a war hero after you were conscripted and sent to the disputed planet as a prisoner. But there are a lot of opinions that prisoners dispatched to the battlefield aren’t guaranteed the basic human rights. What do you think?”

“There will also be an official announcement about that issue.”

The man interrupting the reporters was Marquis Martin.

“As everybody knows, Ark has been touring around various cities. Moreover, Ark just returned from a fierce battlefield a while ago.

Even a war hero won't be able to withstand such an unreasonable schedule. So I would like to give him some rest. We wouldn't want a war hero to die from overwork."

Marquis Martin laughed and looked at Ark. But Ark's mood was unpleasant.

'He is as cunning as a raccoon. His mouth talks a great game.'

Ark bit his lip to stop himself from glaring at Marquis Martin. Once again, Ark only got the body coating four months after starting the game. Right now he wanted to test the bonus skills received. It was inevitably that he would want to go to the hunting ground. However, Ark couldn't get near the hunting grounds despite returning from Beltana for several days. This was due to his deal with Marquis Martin.

"I will accept your conditions. For you and the prisoners who follow you. The Silver Hand won't be punished for going AWOL and I promise that all of you will get the same compensation as regular troops. But I have one condition."

"Condition?"

"Of course. Because a deal involves give or take."

He won the war! What more did he want? He wanted to exclaim but he firmly resisted. If he made a high ranking NPC angry then he might not get the compensation.

"I want you to travel with me once we return to Istana for a few days."

Ark listened with a half stunned and half worried expression.

"Huh? You want me to travel with you?"

"You are a hero. No, soon you will be made into a hero. It is a bit irregular but do you know what it means that a prisoner achieved such merits on the battlefield?"

Of course Ark was familiar with this. The Aschulat were absent from the battlefield so the federation struggled. The public supported

them once the war started but started criticizing them once the situation deteriorated. A war hero was the best way to take care of this criticism. The public would be more interested in the war hero than the situation on the battlefield. The galactic federation didn't care who it was. They just needed someone. They wanted Valencia who was a regular soldier but he stole Ark's Carrier MR-II data and there was the gold corruption scandal. They couldn't hide Ark's success thanks to the videos uploaded onto the internet so Ark became Valencia's replacement.

In other words, Ark became the galactic federation's promotional hero. Marquis Martin knew this and clamoured.

"Yes, you are a promotional hero. And repetition is important in propaganda. One interview would have no meaning. Regular communication with the media is needed to turn around the public opinion. Anyway, you've suffered quite a bit on the battlefield for two months so you should rest."

Ark eventually accepted the offer. That's why Ark said he was selling his body. At first he didn't mind Marquis Martin's offer. He had no room to rest while trying to obtain the Iridium and then he was chased by the Rama. In reality, he also needed to deal with his duties with Global Exos. But the main problem was the real estate land in the Taek Mountains.

'Taking a couple of days off to act as the federation's billboard might be nice. Doing some interviews for the compensation isn't that bad.'

That was a mistake.

'What? Did I really think I could relax?'

It had been a few days since he returned from Beltana. Ark was dragged to each broadcasting company to do dozens of boring interviews as well as government related events. Once again, Ark was the galactic federation's promotional hero. Every time he did an interview, he was forced to praise the galactic federation. No, these things weren't that bad. It was the parades that he couldn't bear. He had the title of 'Beltana's Hero' and was forced to travel around to different cities. The curses from the users flowed every time.....

Anyway, Marquis Martin's words about a break were false. Once an interview ended, he would move on to another interview and another event. Since returning to Istana, his schedule was as murderous as an idol. The chores piled up and fatigue also piled up.

"He doesn't want a war hero to die from overwork?"

Marquis Martin's words were a joke. But Ark steadily assimilated to the schedule. The development of a country wasn't infinite. Although he started this because of the contract with Marquis Martin, Ark also gained some things from it. The first thing was awareness!

"This interview is finished."

Marquis Martin cleaned up the atmosphere and got up.

-You have appeared on a galaxy broadcast and became more famous.

<Fame +100>

The message appeared on his Nymph. If he participated in interviews and events then his fame would increase.

-You have helped reformed the galactic federation's image through your diligent publicity campaign.

<Galactic Federation contribution +150>

He could also raise his contribution to the galactic federation by giving a speech. In fact, previously Ark had no interest in fame and contribution. Well, he had been a criminal so he didn't need to worry about fame or contribution on the battlefield.....

Anyway, gaining fame and contribution were an important part of Galaxian. High fame would increase the number of sponsor offers from bigger companies as well as more quests from regular NPCs. If the user managed a business then the fame would be applied to the business and various collateral effects could be applied. And federation contribution meant that he could get special questions

from the government.

'My first task is to buy an agent registration certificate so I can create a mercenary group!'

Gaining fame and contribution could help him achieve his goal. That was why Ark endured the murderous schedule silently. His fame had climbed to 2,700 after the last few days. And his galactic federation contribution was 3,300! It was a number that showed how difficult Marquis Martin's schedule was. It wasn't just the fame and contribution. If that was the only compensation then Ark couldn't endure it. Ark also obtained a second income. It was that he could travel to each city for free.

The method of transportation in the future was the Star Gate. The Star Gate could move tens of thousands of lights years in an instant and not everyone could use it. The pioneer ID meant he could travel to the government's authorized area in each city but it wasn't available for a lot of 2nd class citizens. Even 1st class citizens needed to pay 30~100 gold to travel between other cities using the Star Gate. That's the reason why after selecting a city on R-14, it wasn't possible to move to other cities for a long time. If they couldn't use the Star Gate then it required the user to walk hundreds or thousands of kilometres. But Ark was different.

"This is your schedule."

Marquis Martin had handed him a piece of paper after reaching Nephalim. The name of every city on Istana was written on it.

"This is the order of the city you will be travelling."

Ark's promotional activities wasn't just taking part in Nephalim. Marquis Martin had planned everything once the deal was made. As soon as the transaction was completed, a schedule involving the broadcasting stations of Istana's 20 cities were set.

.....If he worked as a manager then he would've been highly successful. Anyway, Ark was able to use the Star Gate for free due to the public relations activities. Of course, Marquis Martin's schedule meant there was no time to go sightseeing. Sometimes he

would take the Star Gate three times a day! Nobody would envy that type of travelling. Then Ark had a thought that flashed through his head.

‘Yes, the quest!’

His Nymphe had 3 incomplete quests. Once again, Ark had originally gathered 15 prisoners on Beltana. At that time, the Royal Guards that Ark gathered by handing out food didn’t have any teamwork. In order to gain a sense of kinship, Ark had pardoned 5 prisoners. Two people repaid him by giving him the Withdrawal skill and a pistol. And the remaining 3 gave him quests.

It was a repayment quest where he would be given compensation if he visited them.

‘If I visit them then I can obtain something!’

The quest was like free food. The problem was that those prisoners were in different cities. Once again, on Istana even the closest cities were hundreds of kilometres away. It would take many days just walking on foot. Of course, he was a 1st class citizen so he could move using the Star Gate. However, it cost 30~100 gold.

‘If the quest reward is below 30 gold.....’

He would receive damage even if he completed the quest. The fee for the farthest city was 100 gold so even if he received 30 gold then he would have a loss of 70 gold. So he had placed the quests to the side in his Nymphe and postponed it.

‘But now I’m going around all the cities thanks to Marquis Martin. Julius, Sidellin and Tatuine are on the agenda. I can go to the quest destinations for free. This is my chance. If I miss this opportunity then I don’t know when I’ll finish this quest.’

This was the reason why Ark didn’t complain and went around on the publicity campaign. Therefore he rearranged the tight schedule to give him time to clean up the quests in Julius, Sidellin and Tatuine. The first person he visited was Hamad.

| |
|------------------------|
| <Hamad’s Compensation> |
|------------------------|

Hamad once operated a large store before he got caught on tax evasion and sent to Beltana. He was a merchant and suffered on the battlefield. He was even worried about starving but Hamad was able to return to his hometown with your help. Hamad promised to return the favour if you ever visited him in the city Julius.

Difficulty: –

Hamad was a similar age to Mellin and managed a considerably large store in Julius. However, he was caught in tax evasion and conscripted.

‘He is a merchant so the compensation should be decent.’

Ark was full of expectations as he visited Hamad.

“Oh, this is larger than I thought.....”

After visiting the GPS information Hamad gave him, the store occupied quite a large piece of land.

“If the store is this large then I can expect better rewards.”

Ark laughed and murmured. From the beginning he had no idea about what he could get. The amount wasn’t recorded in the quest information. So he had tried to control his expectations.

But his expectations collapsed the moment he entered the store. The store was significantly large. It was the same inside. Yet there were only 10 shelves inside. But the products on display were just cheap items. It smelt like a bare shop. It was the smell of a store dying.....

Ark looked around the store with bemused eyes.

“Quickly.....heok! Y-you!”

The person running around stopped with a surprised expression. The old man with a moustache was Hamad. Hama stared with shocked eyes before exclaiming.

“Oh, it’s really you! Yes, I heard on the news broadcasts that you’ve returned. Awesome! You entered the war a prisoner and returned a

hero! I knew you weren't an ordinary person but I didn't think you would succeed to this degree!"

"Thank you. Then....."

Ark looked around. He was grateful but Ark didn't make time in his schedule to chat with Hamad. It was to receive the compensation for getting Hamad pardoned. But judging by the store, there was no way to extort money in this atmosphere. Even if there was a quest, he couldn't just talk about the compensation.

"Why is the atmosphere of the store like this?"

Hamad's face hardened at Ark's question. He sighed before answering.

"This is due to my previous staff."

"Huh? Your previous staff?"

"I had 30 employees before being sent to Beltana. The two store near here were also originally my property. When my tax evasion was caught, I was conscripted and slapped with a huge fine. In order to decrease the penalty, I moved those stores into the name of some reliable employees. And I thought the employee would return the shop when I was pardoned....."

The store employees he trusted bit him in the back.

"They betrayed me....."

Hamad couldn't endure it and grinded his teeth together. Once again, the NPCs who followed Ark on Beltana were criminals. They were people who committed different types of crimes. He received the conscription for tax evasion so Hama wasn't a good NPC. And before he was dragged to Beltana, he wasn't shy about using his money to be the leader of a gang. Those delinquents were Hamad's employees. In other words, Hamad was like a gangster boss leading some delinquents. Hamad was able to obtain the surrounding stores due to that. He never thought his employees would betray the organization. However, the reason they originally followed Hamad was his money. Hamad had handed over the store so that money

shifted to the employee he left it in charge of. At the same time, Hamad's followers shifted to the new person with money. Thus Hamad couldn't take it back from his employee anymore. The subordinates of the organization had betrayed Hamad. This was something that often appeared on gangster movies.

"This is the only store left in my name."

That wasn't the only problem. Subordinates who betrayed their boss always had a clear conscience.

It was impossible for the subordinates to be happy about the boss appearing next to them.

"I'm the person who built up 3 large stores using my own hands. My business sense is incomparable compared to them. So once I returned and started the business, those guys used every method possible to interfere with my business. My cleverness couldn't withstand daily harassment.....I've also been pardoned but the fine is still remaining. In this situation it is impossible for me to run a business. Therefore I can only obtain cheap products like this."

This was why there were blank shelves.

"But now I'm at the limit. At this rate, it will only be a month or two before my store is seized by the court. I'll soon become a beggar."

What the hell....he didn't understand but.....

It was clear that he wouldn't be getting compensation for the moment. No, there was no guarantee that he could get a worthwhile reward at all.

'But it is too early to give up.....'

Ark wasn't the type to give up over something like this. He wouldn't give up on even 1 copper coin. It was too early to abandon a potential merchant. He still owned the store. If there was no interference by the previous subordinates then couldn't Hamad somehow recover? But Ark would soon have to leave to another city. No, it wasn't that simple. This wasn't something that could be fixed in a day or two. He had no choice but to wait a considerable period of time before receiving the compensation.

“I understand. But I have to leave Julius soon. I’ll also think of a way so please endure it.”

Ark arranged things for the moment and parted from Hamad. There was nothing he could do here.

However, he found the clue to solve the problem in an unexpected place. After leaving Julius, Ark visited many cities as the ambassador of the galactic federation before arriving at Sidellin. Sidellin was the place where Asuran lived.

<Asuran will Return the Favour>

Asuran was the former leader of a bandit group dispatched to the disputed planet Beltana after being arrested and you’ve saved him and allowed him to be pardoned. Asuran is impressed by your favour and wants to pay you back. If you visit Asuran in the city Sidellin on Istana then you will get a special reward.

Difficulty: –

This was the quest he received from Asuran. However, the result from Asuran was also disappointing.

“I’m sorry Hyung-nim.”

He smelt like alcohol and looked like a beggar.

“You wouldn’t believe it when looking at me know but I was the boss of a moderate sized bandit group. I thought once I returned to Sidellin then we could return to what it used to be. But the group has been placed on the blacklist after the previous incident and watched by androids. I wanted to repay Hyung-nim’s favour but.....I heard that Hyung-nim became a hero so I didn’t dare contact you.”

.....This guy had thought he could give stolen good as compensation. Asuran continued complaining.

“It really seems dead. I’m an ex-thief and my appearance makes it so I can’t find any other jobs.”

Asuran was an alien of the Belkin clan. The Belkin looked similar to

humans but their facial features were extremely ugly and scary. It gave him considerable bonus stats as a thief but it acted as a penalty when trying to find a different job.

“So I’m currently a beggar. I might even die of starvation. If I die when I have no money then I can’t resurrect. Ha, now my life on Beltana seems rather good. At least I could resurrect even if I had no money.”

Once again, resurrecting with the Fairy wasn’t free. Prisoners on Beltana paid through achievements but others had to pay money. Pioneers resurrecting with the Fairy were immortal but that only applied if they had money. If they didn’t have money then it was the end. The thought of it was dreadful.

‘Damn, this guy isn’t okay either?’

He chose Hamad and Asuran because he thought they had money and would give him the most rewards. Now that he actually visited them, they looked shabby and he had to help them instead of receiving compensation. Ark watched Asuran and sighed. Suddenly an ‘!’ popped into his head.

‘Speaking of Hamad.....that guy can’t engage in business because of interference and his situation is deteriorating. And Asuran’s subordinates didn’t betray him but they can’t find any work. What if I combine these two?’

Asuran wasn’t an ordinary NPC. He was a thief that had climbed onto the blacklist of the galactic federation. In other words, he was a real rogue.

‘Bullies vs. thieves!’

There was no reason for Asuran to be intimidated by a group of hooligans. Furthermore, he was a beggar but didn’t he still have a lot of subordinates left?

“Asuran, how many people are in your group?”

“Well, they aren’t my subordinates now.....but if I call them together then I can gather 20~30 people.”

“Perfect.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Asuran, do you remember Hamad ajusshi from Beltana?”

Ark grinned and explained Hamad’s situation. Asuran burst out with rage.

“Those damn bastards! We might be hooligans or thieves but shouldn’t we be loyal to our colleagues? Not only did they betray their boss, now they’re trying to obstruct his business?”

“Then would you like to help Hamad?”

“Me?”

“Yes, if your group helps Hamad then they won’t interfere anymore. Hamad is quite resourceful so he should be able to recover with those guys out of the way. It might be difficult now but won’t you be able to eat once Hamad recovers? How about it? Will you think about it?”

“Yes, I’ll go! I’ll call them together now!”

Asuran jumped up when Ark said something.

“The problem is.....Julius is 800 km away.”

Asuran and his henchmen couldn’t use the Star Gate as they were 2nd class citizens. Even if they were 1st class citizens, they could barely eat at the moment so there was no way they could pay the fees. But Asuran answered like it was no problem.

“It doesn’t matter if it is 800 km or 8,000 km. I will quick go and help Hamad!”

He summoned his followers and immediately left for Julius.

“Hopefully.....”

Hamad needed to restore his store. Asuran and his henchmen needed work. Hopefully. Yes, hopefully he could resolve two issues at the same time.

“And I’ll be able to get the compensation from both of them.”

He liked the idea but there was no guarantee that it would work. However, the chances of getting a good reward if he waited a long time was 0%. On the other hand, this meant that he could see the results sooner. Of course, the compensation would still take a while even if his plan was successful. However, wasn’t waiting a while better than giving up?

“Please turn out well.....”

Ark sincerely prayed as he watched the departing Asuran. Ark continued travelling through several cities promoting the galactic federation before finally arriving at Tatuine.

<Milan’s Proposal>

Milan is a treasure hunter in Tatuine. In exchange for your help on Beltana, he promised to find a treasure to repay you once he returns to Tatuine. If you visit Milan in Tatuine then it might be possible to receive a special reward.

Difficulty: –

It was the destination of his final quest. In fact, he didn’t expect that much from this quest. Hamad was a shop owner while Asuran was the leader of a bandit group. His expectations were high when he went to visit them. However, Milan was just a treasure hunter. The name sounded good but it was no different from being unemployed. Furthermore, Hamad and Asuran’s quest so he just needed to visit to be given the compensation. But Milan’s said he would find a treasure to give to him.

‘If this follows the same pattern.....’

It was likely that Milan would be suffering as well. He found some time to visit him but naturally the answer was disappointing.

“I’m sorry Hyung-nim. I’ve finally returned to Tatuine but so many pioneers are exploring the ruins that I couldn’t find anything.”

‘Damn, in the end 3 different quests were worthless?’

Ark sighed with frustration. Milan studied his face and tried to explain.

“But this doesn’t mean I have no income.”

He searched through a pile of junk in the corner of a room and pulled out a slab.

“I visited some ruins based on information from a tavern. But other pioneers had been there and it was empty. However, I still searched around and found this item. Do you know what is recorded on here?”

“What?”

Ark answered in a voice that displayed no interest. Milan had received information from a tavern but pioneers had already taken away most of the items. Yet he wanted Ark to be interested in the contents of a slab found in that place?

‘This isn’t right. It is the same with Hamad and Asuran. Dammit, this is strange. It is strange that there are so many quests like this. I shouldn’t have believed the promises of starving prisoners on Beltana.’

He had 99% given up.

“It is information about the Murat.”

Ark raised his head as Milan’s talk continued.

“A lot of pioneers still don’t know this but the Murat were a legendary species who controlled the Bellin constellation. They disappeared suddenly but their advanced technology was spread among the Rama and galactic federation. In particular, the Murat.....”

Milan thought Ark didn’t know anything about the Murat and started babbling about them. However, it was impossible for Ark to not know about the Murat. Ark was able to become Beltana’s hero thanks to the Murat pyramid found deep underground. He raised his level, found a rare sword and was able to raid the Rama’s main base using it.

‘And I got the special 5 star rated skill Rune Carving from it!’

The Murat’s pyramid on Beltana was truly like a treasure box to Ark. Now Milan had found something related to the Murat. He couldn’t just ignore it.

“Milan, show me that slab!”

Ark took the slab and examined it. The characters engraved on the slab was the same as the Murat letters he previously saw. The Nymphe’s translation function automatically started as his fingers skimmed the slab.

-The great lords.....Murat’s lineage.....

The place where the day rises and the sun sets.....praise the Murat.....

Pilgrims, the Murat will receive a selection.....to reach there.....

The slab was broken. The Murat had also disappeared a long time ago so not many records remained. It would’ve been strange for a slab made by the Murat to be perfect. A considerable amount of the slab was damaged so it was difficult to grasp the entire contents of the slab. Furthermore, the contents seemed ambiguous like a riddle. When he thought about it, the style of writing in the pyramid was also like this.

‘And weren’t the Murat a species known for their wisdom?’

But he couldn’t assume that all sentences were written like that. Still, he felt like the some phrases were truly mysterious. What the contents pointed to in the game.....

‘It is highly possible the contents leads to a hidden Murat ruin!’

He could find new clues about the Murat. Ark’s eyes flashed at the thought.

‘If these Murat ruins are similar to the pyramid on Beltana then the treasure should be similar. And I might be able to find a new rune!’

According to the information obtained, the Ikram rune wasn’t the only one the Murat used. Ikram was only one of the runes used by the

Murat. Rune Carving required mana so he needed to wear the battle suit. But it was a skill that could be utilized in quite a few ways. If he found it then it would help him grow. The problem was the lack of translated contents.

“Where the sun rises and sets.....does this information point to the place?”

Ark muttered to himself as he tinkered with the slab. Then Mellin’s eyes widened and he asked.

“Eh? What are you saying?”

“What am I saying? It is the sentence written on the slab.”

“Huh? W-wait. Hyung-nim can read the contents?”

“What about it? It is natural to be able to read the parts not damaged with my Nymphé.”

“It isn’t natural for the Nymphé to translate the Murat letters!”

Milan shouted with an absurd expression.

“The Murat is an ancient species that disappeared before humans appeared in the galaxy. Therefore humans only discovered things about the Murat through other alien species. Sometimes Murat relics are discovered on planets in the Bellin constellation but it is difficult to research because the scholars can’t read Murat letters. So it is impossible for the language to be included in the Nymphé’s automatic translation function.”

“Your Nymphé doesn’t translate these letters?”

“Of course!”

“Then how did you know this slab is related to the Murat?”

“I recognized the letter shapes. But knowing the shapes and translating it is different.”

Ark was confused by Milan’s answer. The characters were automatically translated for Ark while wandering through the Murat pyramid. But the language translation function isn’t included on other

Nymphes?

'Come to think of it.....'

It was the same with the Rama language. The Nympe automatically translated the languages of the alien species associated with the federation. That's because the language of the alien species were included on the Nympe. The language of hostile alien species like the Rama weren't registered on the Nympe's OS so it couldn't be automatically translated. That's why a separate translator was needed to talk to the Rama. However, Ark's Nympe was able to simultaneously translate the Rama's language. And that applied to the Murat's language because the galactic federation hadn't fully grasped the writing system.

'My Nympe isn't normal.'

It was clear where it came from. The data downloaded from the airplane toy! His Nympe became weird because of that data. His Nympe returned to normal once he received the Prisoner coating. That was the reason why Ark's Nympe was different from other users. Some other data was registered on the Nympe in the process.

'My Nympe didn't work properly because of the data. There is no reason to complain about the increased functions of my Nympe but.....'

He made an uncomfortable face. This wasn't normal so it might cause some problems. However, it wasn't possible to repair it since it was behaving normally. He would also have to explain that he received the data from hacking to the galactic federation. And the results meant his Nympe would become the same as other users. The extra function would disappear.

'It's clear this isn't normal but I can't inform the galactic federation. Fortunately no problems have formed yet while using it.'

While Ark was busy thinking.....

Milan began to talk with an excited expression.

“If Hyung-nim can decipher the Murat letters then there might be a way to clear them up.”

“How?”

“Huhuhu. Hyung-nim, do you remember my job? Treasure hunter. In the past, treasure hunters carried shovels and dug at the land but this is the 24th century. This is an era where no calories are wasted. Treasure hunters have some high-tech equipment. This equipment is one of them.”

Milan laughed as he tapped a machine in the corner.

“This is a 3D restoration machine.”

“3D restoration?”

“For example, let’s say I found a statue with a detached arm. Couldn’t I guess the form based on the other parts of the statue? The 3D restoration machine repairs damaged parts by looking at the basic structure. It is impossible if it is completely broken but the 3D restoration machine has no problem restoring compromised parts. This slab isn’t that damaged so it can restore 70~80% of it.”

Ark had only decrypted 30% of the contents. If the 3D machine could restore 70~80% of the slab then he could obtain crucial information from the Murat’s letters.

‘There is a way to find it!’

Ark’s chest jumped.

“How long would it take to restore the slab?”

“This model is slightly old but the slab shouldn’t take that long to be restored.”

“Okay, call me as soon as it is done. Do you know my recognition code?”

“Yes, I’ll start right away.”

That conversation had finished two days ago. Ark continued to be dragged around by Marquis Martin for the publicity campaign and

checked his Nymphe's mailbox. And he discovered a mail from Milan yesterday afternoon.

From: Milan

Hyung-nim, the restoration of the slab has finished!

Ark's body was shaking for that reason. He wanted to test the skills obtained from the Survivor coating but he really wanted to check the information on the slab Milan discovered. But he had only travelled around 12 cities so far. 8 cities still remained.

'It took 5 days to wander around 12 cities so do I have to continue for 3 more days?'

Ark sighed as he left the interview room. The Marquis Martin who had disappeared somewhere came in and spoke to him.

"There has been some fluctuations in the schedule."

"Huh?"

"The publicity campaign will stop now."

.....His long promotional journey was over.

Over the Border!

‘Why.....’

He naturally made an uncomfortable expression. It wasn't a waste of time to promote the galactic federation. He gained fame and federation contribution and it also allowed him to use the Star Gate to meet Hamad, Asuran and Milan for free. Every time he completed an interview, he would gain fame and federation contribution. He also travelled around the cities to meet old friends but the compensation quest wasn't neatly completed. Interview, moving to another city, interview, moving, event, moving to another city.....he worked for an average of 18 hours a day for 5 days without any breaks.

‘I have to continue doing this for 3 more days.....’

A sigh naturally emerged. But that would stop soon. Ark had been suffering but he felt uncomfortable now that it suddenly sopped. So he asked.

“There's still some parts of the schedule left so why are we suddenly stopping?”

Then Marquis Martin answered.

“The effect fell faster than I expected.”

He immediately understood that he meant. When Ark had first appeared through the Star Gate, the reporters had gathered like vultures around the new hero. The hot coverage continued as he started his PR journey. However, the coverage noticeably decreased every time they went to a new city.

When thinking about it, it was the inevitable result. This was the age of information. New news poured in everyday so the same words couldn't catch the attention of the public for a long time. Besides, every time was always about the war and repeating the federation's PR words so the viewers found it tedious. There was no need to check the audience ratings.

-Your face has become known after appearing on the broadcast.

<Fame +20>

-The galactic federation's image has improved due to your public relations.

<Galactic Federation contribution +30>

In the beginning his fame had increased by 100 and the contribution by 150. However, 5 days had passed and that number had decreased to 20 fame and 30 contribution. The messages also stated that the effect of his interviews had decreased. It meant the public was losing attention.

“The degree of exposure over the last few days has become too excessive. You were the hero of the first victory against the Rama recently so I thought I could use the media a bit more. But the public interest has cooled so if we continued then it might have an adverse effect. We should discard food before it reached the expiration date.”

He felt like a wash-up celebrity. Marquis Martin just continued talking like he had no concerns about Ark's feelings.

“And these days I'm a little busy.”

“Ah, yes.....”

Ark's face looked like he had smelt a rotting cow.

‘This bastard! He's suddenly busy? He dragged me around like a dog for five days without any breaks and now he is busy?’

Once again, Martin was a marquis. Although having a rank like marquis in an age where ships were flying around was funny, he was still nobility. He was also a councillor of the galactic federation. There was a reason the high ranking NPC had volunteered to become Ark's manager and accompanied him for five days. There was no way a manager would drop a celebrity just because of a possible expiration date. The reason Marquis Martin accompanied Ark during that

time.....

-Once again, the war was won thanks to Marquis Martin's support.....

He was mentioned every time Ark did an interview! Marquis Martin was a politician. Politicians and celebrities had some similar aspects. Popularity would become power. Marquis Martin accompanied Ark to raise his stock price until there was a potential decrease in popularity. Then here was a question. Ark wasn't a stupid human being. He could guess Marquis Martin's purpose when making the deal on Beltana. However, there was one reason Ark didn't protest the murderous schedule and parroted everything Marquis Martin told him to. The settlement between them wasn't completed yet.

Marquis Martin promised three rewards if Ark became the galactic federation's promotional hero. Two of them were the 1st class citizenship and the 3rd generation IC card. There was one more compensation. This was based on a confidential talk between Marquis Martin and Ark on Beltana.

"The same treatment as the regular soldiers. You desire the award the regular troops would receive if they gained as much achievements as you. That is your condition in order to be set up as a hero?"

"That's right."

"Of course that isn't difficult."

Marquis Martin said.

"No, you might even be given superior items to the ones normally handed out."

"Huh? Really?"

"Of course it's not for free. The condition is that you need to go on a publicity campaign for the galactic federation. An additional prize will be given if you become our advertising model. What you will receive depends on you. The price would change depending on how sincerely you promote during your activities. That incentive should be enough."

There was a condition before he could receive his 3rd reward. And he endured the tiring promotional trip because of it.

'My original agreement was to tour all the cities on Istana. But I've only travelled to 12 cities. That means only 60% of my target was achieved. I don't have to do the boring interviews anymore but the stopped publicity campaign might be used as an excuse so I don't receive my exclusive item. This situation is different. I should make sure first!'

Ark opened his mouth to ask that question.

"There is no need to look uncomfortable. I made the decision to stop the publicity campaign. You've faithfully participated in the interviews so I will keep my promise. Aren't I a marquis? I have no intention of being cheap because of a problem like this."

Marquis Martin was a surprisingly cool guy.

"Besides, your popularity might've fallen but you are still a war hero. If you go around accusing me of fraud then it will be troublesome.

.....He was also calculating. There was a contract so he had to pay properly. Marquis Martin had no interest in the compensation promised to Ark. But he used the compensation as bait to lure his prey and became a vicious manager. Ark kept making an uncomfortable expression and twisted his hands.

"Is there such a thing? If it wasn't for Marquis Martin then I would still be rotting in the jail on Beltana. Even if I don't receive the promised compensation, how can I possibly say bad things about Marquis-nim? Ah, of course Marquis-nim did work me like a dog so it is basic human decency to reward me for it. Obviously Marquis-nim will give me suitable compensation for my work."

He spoke flattering words but there was a veiled threat. If he didn't give good rewards then Ark would say bad things! Marquis Martin clearly caught the threat. But he didn't seem to be offended. He actually looked fascinated and laughed.

"What a funny guy. I don't dislike it. No, I prefer humans like you. Because I can trust you as long as the give and take relationship is

strong. Speaking of that.....how is it? Do you remember what I said the other day? Have you thought about it?"

Marquis Martin leaned towards Ark and asked quickly.

"Yes, you've received the Hero title to promote the galactic federation. Despite being a prisoner, it can't be denied that you did some heroic actions. I estimate that you will reach a high height. More than anyone else."

Marquis Martin looked at Ark seriously.

"The war with the Rama started again after a long armistice and it is centred on the Bellin constellation. The federation has been stagnating for hundreds of years so it is natural for the public to dislike it. Aristocrats like me can't avoid it. We need power to survive in such change. That is, we need someone like you to secure our positions. I want to buy the ability that you showed in Beltana. If you come under my banner then I will give you exceptional treatment."

-You've received a scouting officer from councillor Marquis Martin of the galactic federation.

If you accept then you can make Marquis Martin who is a power aristocrat of the galactic federation as your sponsor.

If you accept the aristocrat's sponsor then you will automatically receive the 'Private' occupation.

Do you accept? Y/N

This wasn't the first time he saw that information window. He received the same suggestion after meeting Marquis Martin on Beltana. The conditions were exceptional. Their standards were better than the galactic federation or the 4 large companies. Unlike other users, he received the war hero title so his treatment had already changed. If he accepted Marquis Martin's offer than Ark would receive even more privileges.

'But my competitors aren't those users. It is the strongest AI Lucifer.'

Ark wasn't simply playing the game. If he died inside the game then it would affect reality.

He needed to stop the Taek Mountains real estate slump. It was meaningless to be slightly better than other users when fighting against Lucifer. He needed to achieve the ultimate goal in Galaxian. Only one person would occupy that spot and the fight would end.

'I don't know what the ultimate goal is yet. So there is only one thing I can do now. To become the best player like Ark in New World. I don't know what the ultimate goal is but occupying the best position was no different from ending the game. No, Lucifer wants revenge for New World so he might think that is the ultimate goal.'

He needed to rise to the top spot! Then he could also accomplish his goal in reality. This was the reason Ark wanted to establish a business. Therefore he never considered the suggestion no matter how enticing it was. However, there was a problem when rejecting the offer.

"Perhaps.....will the reward vary depending on my answer?"

Marquis Martin looked surprised at Ark's question. Then he laughed and shook his head.

"Yes, I was too careless and didn't think about your position. The timing is bad. I mentioned something like that after discussing compensation so naturally you would misunderstand. I was too short-sighted."

"It is unrelated to compensation?"

"I would be a really lousy human being if I involved compensation in that issue."

Marquis Martin boldly laughed and took something out. It was a metallic disc around 1 metre in diameter.

'Heok! T-this is?'

| |
|-----------------------|
| -Air Board (Property) |
|-----------------------|

| |
|--------------------|
| Item type: Vehicle |
|--------------------|

A hover type air board that moves using electronic power.

The hover board uses electromagnetic force to float objects in the air. It is an energy-efficient and light weight, medium-sized vehicle.

However, steady development has made a miniature version with the movement speed improved.

The air board only goes up to 60 km/hr. This is 1/5 the speed of a bike but the advantage is that you can carry it with you. If you become familiar with the operation then you can easily navigate through narrow and complicated topography. But there is no safety device so there is a chance of fatal accidents.

* This item isn't for sale.

<Maximum Speed 60 km/hr>

'Heok! This is real! A real air board!'

Ark's mouth opened as he read the information window. In fact, Ark had been worried about a serious problem over the last few days. It was the existence of a vehicle. New World was set in medieval times so he never had to worry about vehicles. The hunting grounds were close to the villages and other towns were only 2~3 days away. It was a game where hunting was comfortable.

However, the scale of Galaxian was different from other games. Even Istana that was one planet in the galaxy was 2~3 times earth's size. The hunting grounds were also on the boundaries of Istana. Sometimes people would have to travel a minimum of 100 km after leaving a city to find monsters inhabiting an unexplored region. Anybody walking on foot would understand. It was a waste of time and calories. That's why Ark suffered when travelling 532 km on Beltana.

'If I earnestly start adventuring.....'

Like always, the problem was money. Typically users in Galaxian moved using a bike. However, even an old model that moved a maximum of 100 km/hr cost at least 200 gold. He didn't understand it when on Beltana but the 300 km/hr hover bike that he rode cost 700 gold.

‘Although it is necessary to live.....’

There was also a fatal weakness with the bikes. The bike couldn't be placed in the bag so they had to park it outside the ruins. This was a problem that wouldn't occur in medieval games. Ark wasn't worried about the discomfort of parking but security. If someone had a hacking skill like Ark then they could steal his bike! Of course, hacking wasn't a common skill.

‘But there is enough!’

Thieves were common enough that he was worried about it. Now he could feel relieved. Marquis Martin had solved two problems at the same time. Not only did he get a vehicle for free, the air board could be stored in his bag unlike the bike. It only travelled 60 km/hr but the speed wasn't a problem. Above all it was free!

‘Amazing! The deadly schedule is worth it in the end. This is the compensation I need!’

“How about it? Are you satisfied?”

“Of course. It is the best!”

Ark answered without thinking about it. Then Marquis Martin smiled bitter sweetly and said.

“I'm glad you are satisfied with your compensation. But to ask if the reward would change depending on your answer.....that means you are rejecting my suggestion. Am I correct?”

He was satisfied with the compensation received. This meant he had no more reason to need Marquis Martin. But Marquis Martin was a powerful aristocrat of the federation so there was no reason to offend him. He generously gave him an excellent item so couldn't he pretend to be grateful?

“I'm thankful that Marquis Martin appreciates my ability. But I'm just a pioneer who appeared in the universe 4 months ago. I luckily became Beltana's Hero so there is still too much I don't know yet. I have no confidence that I can return Marquis-nim's expectations. If I gain more skills then I might work for Marquis-nim in the future.”

“Don’t tell me that so simply.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“No, I can’t do anything if you don’t want to.....”

Marquis Martin closed his eyes and became immersed in his thoughts. After a couple of minutes, Marquis Martin opened his eyes and said in a low voice.

“Then can I request a favour?”

“A favour?”

“The explanation might take a while so I’ll try to make it simple. As you know, Nabe is the northernmost city of Istana but there is actually one more there. You might have heard about this. Our ally is the 3rd alien alliance the Aschulat. Apart from Nabe, the other city in the northern wasteland called Charem belongs to the Aschulat.”

“Huh? Isn’t Istana a planet of the galactic federation?”

“It is a planet of the federation. Even if the Aschulat are allies, it isn’t possible for them to have a city on Istana. So the Aschulat claim that they have nothing to do with Charem. But the Aschulat’s reason for denying involvement with Charem has nothing to do with avoiding the federation’s suspicions. That’s because the entire city of Charem is a huge smuggling organization.”

“Smuggling organization?”

“Yes, there are a number of items restricted by the galactic federation. Charem is the city where people smuggle those things through. Of course, even the Aschulat and members of the galactic federation smuggles things through Charem.”

Marquis Martin sighed and continued talking.

“The reason the galactic federation has tolerated Charem is because it was useful. Like I said, Charem is officially a stateless city. Therefore some Rama are also associated with it. The federation were able to get information about the Rama through Charem so they overlooked its existence.”

“.....But a problem has formed.”

“Exactly.”

Marquis Martin nodded.

“The Aschulat used the excuse of internal conflicts to leave the Bellin constellation conflict against the Rama. Now all the information from Charem has been blocked off. At the same time, the federation’s contact within Charem also cut off contact. The federation’s line of contact has been cut off but there is no confirmation that the Charem cut off contact with the Rama. In that case, there is a possibility that all the information from Charem is going to the Rama.”

Marquis Martin spoke with a serious expression. It was obviously a serious problem just by listening.

A city situated in the heart of the federation was selling information to the enemy. The problem was more serious than a war. However, Ark wasn’t entirely convinced.

“Is Charem officially a lawless city? There is no evidence that Charem is secretly communicating with the Rama. Even if the city is used to smuggle illegal goods, can the federations’ troops be mobilized without any evidence? Won’t the Aschulat be able to complain?”

“That is why I want to ask a favour from you.”

Marquis Martin replied in a low voice.

“Charem isn’t a normal city. It is camouflaged with a few layers of advanced shields and is equipped with devices to detect movement. Charem is also 1,000 km from the nearest city so it is difficult to find with a radar. The federation might’ve overlooked Charem’s existence but to be more accurate, they have no way to handle it. If we move troops large enough to capture Charem, their information network will detect the movements. They will escape and the situation would become worse.”

The galactic federation had no confirmation that the Charem were secretly communicating with the Rama. If they rallied the troops and failed then Charem would 100% ally with the Rama.

Furthermore, they might've officially denied it but the city still belonged to the Aschulat. If the federation mobilized troops for a sudden attack then it could adversely affect the alliance with the Aschulat. The galactic federation weren't brave enough to take such risks.

"The federation won't throw away troops when there is no guarantee they can control the situation."

Marquis Martin's voice became even lower.

"You will create the conviction for me."

"I'm not sure what you're talking about....."

"It is simple. You must sneak into Charem and use this."

Marquis Martin took out a bag-sized machine.

"This is a GPS transmitter connected to the federation's military. This is the most advanced GPS transmitter able to send extremely long range signals and the radio waves can't be interfered with. The problem is the shield. The transmitter can't penetrate the layers protecting Charem. This transmitter needs to be used when the shield is turned off or connected to Charem's communication antenna that isn't shielded. If it succeeds then the federal troops can overpower Charem."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to be in charge."

"But aren't there other people who know where Charem is?"

"I specifically asked for you."

Marquis Martin smiled and answered.

"Didn't I tell you? I have a high expectation of your abilities. But it isn't your combat power that I rate highly. If it is simple fighting power then there are more reliable guys. I need someone who isn't simply a strong warrior. I need a warrior like you."

"A warrior like me?"

“Do you know why I was in charge of your mass media campaign? I only heard the situation from Haman. And I saw the videos you took. I came to the conclusion that you are a pioneer strong in improvisation. You’re a wise and cunning fellow. From what I know of this situation, this talent is needed more than anything else.”

‘That’s right. I can understand the situation now.’

This was definitely the reason why Marquis Martin suddenly cancelled the schedule. He didn’t understand every point but it was possible to know Marquis Martin’s aim. Ark’s visibility started to fall a few days ago. But he didn’t dare cancel the schedule until they arrived at Nabe because it was the closest city to Charem. This was the best place to spring the plan on Ark.

‘That’s also why he gave an item like the air board as compensation.’

This was the nearest city to Charem but it was still 1,000 km away. If Ark accepted the task then he would need a method of transportation. Marquis Martin’s behaviour was to make it easier for Ark to accept the mission.

‘If I think like this then it feels like.....’

It had a smell. The smell of a main quest. The quest involved playing a decisive role in helping the federation take control of a smuggling city. If he succeeded then he could guess that Marquis Martin’s reward would be tremendous. It might even be equal to the compensation received when becoming Beltana’s Hero. High-risk, high- return. If the risk was high then he would also receive a lot back. In other words, the larger the risk the larger the prize.

‘What intelligence personnel would be able to find the city, break into it, infiltrate the main facilities and connect the GPS transmitter to the communication antenna?’

It was indeed a mission impossible! He couldn’t fathom the probability of success for this quest.

There were many chances for Ark to get caught and killed. This was a burden so even Ark couldn’t accept the quest blindly. He wasn’t just worried about the degree of difficulty.

‘Milan said he restored the slab.....’

Ark had been waiting several days for the slab. Then he was contacted a few hours ago that the slab was restored. If the slab matched Ark and Milan’s expectations then he could get considerable income from the Murat ruins. There was also more security than Marquis Martin’s quest. He could also discover a new rune. Of course, it wasn’t so urgent that he had to go running there immediately.

But he couldn’t think about relaxing. The Murat ruins were hidden but there were many pioneers on Istana so there was no guarantee that they wouldn’t find it. The place Milan found the slab had been discovered by other pioneers so the ruins might’ve already been taken away. The first person who found it would take the treasure. He didn’t know how long the quest would take so it was a burden to accept. However, he could expect a colossal reward if the quest was successful. Not anyone could receive a quest like this. He couldn’t bear to decline it.

‘The most worrisome thing is if Milan’s slab is different from my expectations. If he refused Marquis Martin’s quest and the slab turned out to be nothing then he would’ve blown off a rare quest. But he couldn’t blindly accept the quest. Besides.....eh? Wait? Come to think of it.....’

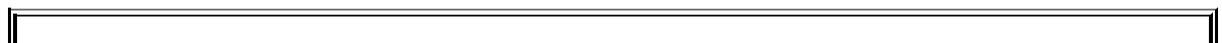
Ark finally realized something strange.

“But haven’t I been played over and over on the media as a war hero over the last few days? If Charem can grasp the movements of the federation army then wouldn’t they know me? How can I take on this duty?”

This was the problem.

Marquis Martin’s quest was a type of spy work. But Ark was a celebrity thanks to the interviews over the last few days. It would be impossible for him to infiltrate Charem. Marquis Martin laughed like he expected it and took something out.

“I’ve already thought about that.”



-Hyde Helmet (Quest Items)

Item type: Helmet

Wearer Restriction: Level 31 (Body Coating Required)

Defense: 5 Durability: 30/30

A helmet that covers the entire face.

This looks like a normal helmet but a special feature has been added. There is a special coating on the glass front so the opponent can't see your face. It also prevents all infrared scopes from detecting your name by setting a different character name. If you want to do bad things! If you want to hide your name! The Hyde Helmet is the best choice for a coward like you.

* If you commit a crime then the chaotic value will be applied to your original name.

<It is possible to change the name the opponent can see>

"T-this?"

Ark eyed the blue helmet with astonished eyes.

"A former informant who infiltrated Charem bought this item. It can be used by the galactic federation, Aschulat and Rama. A lot of people who want to hide their identity will buy this helmet. I will lend it to you for this mission."

'There is a way with this helmet!'

Ark's ears didn't hear Marquis Martin's words anymore. Ark became the ambassador of the galactic federation and he became a celebrity. But becoming famous was something Ark wanted to avoid most. Ark had no choice but to unintentionally receive attention from other users. In addition to his name, his face and appearance became known. When visiting Hamad, Asuran and Milan he had heard quite a few people whispering about him. That situation would continue for a while. If it was just interest then it wouldn't matter that much. He was willing to receive requests for pictures or signatures.

The problem was the guys with evil intentions. It was a world where many people hated celebrities just because they were famous. A lot of them would approach Ark under false pretences and then stab him in the back. It was to the extent that his head throbbed when thinking about it.

‘If I use this then it is possible to hide my face and name?’

His problem would be settled. It might only have 5 defense but the unique properties of the helmet made it beyond value! However, the item was leased so he would have to return the Hyde Helmet when the quest was over.

‘But.....’

Ark thought for a while before speaking with a serious expression.

“I understand. I will accept Marquis-nim’s request and install the GPS transmitter in Charem. But Marquis-nim knows better than anyone that there is no guarantee this mission will succeed. If I fail then I will lose my life and a lot of time. So I would like a minimum compensation promise.”

“Say it.”

“Please give me the Hyde Helmet.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Of course, I know receiving compensation beforehand seems slightly stubborn. But Charem is 1,000 km from here. And I’m by myself.....”

“So I will give it to you.”

“No, that is.....eh? You’ll give it to me?”

“How many times are you going to say the same thing?”

Marquis Martin frowned and muttered. Ark was dumbfounded by Marquis Martin’s reaction. The defense was low but the helmet’s special function meant it was quite rare. At least in Ark’s view point. And the item couldn’t be obtained through a normal route. He got a

bit of help from Marquis Martin but he was still a NPC. He played the game for several years but he never heard of a NPC that would just give an item to the user. Especially Marquis Martin who had squeezed all of Ark's fame in the last five days? Marquis Martin declared in an unpleasant voice at Ark's stupid expression.

"Don't look like that. This is an urgent problem. You know that too. Isn't that why you shamelessly pushed the conditions? I noticed your expression when receiving it so the conclusion is clear. Your mouth is babbling on for no reason."

'Well, I guess but.....'

The words were coolly spoken so he felt even more uncomfortable. Normal users wouldn't think that deep but Ark wasn't a normal user and he felt uncomfortable. He was a user who had experienced a lot of aerial combat!

'He is a NPC. Unlike users, he won't act based on his feelings.'

Ark knew that. NPCs normally behaved stingily. If the NPC was willing to settle so easily then it meant they wanted something. His experience with cheap tricks meant there was something fishy. But the circumstances involving Marquis Martin were different. It was a virtual reality game but a NPC was a NPC. They were part of the game. Intimacy was calculated as a numerical value and affected the behaviour of the NPC. Intimacy was also the cause behind the Royal Guards and the Silver Hand's loyalty. If a NPC accepted an impossible request then it meant the request wasn't impossible in the first place.

'Yes, it isn't a stretch to think this situation is different.' In fact, the air board wasn't his compensation for his achievements on Beltana. Marquis Martin just gave him the item required for the mission. The Hyde Helmet was the same. Anyway, now he had a chance to sneak into Charem to proceed with the quest. And the level restriction of 31 wasn't high. If he thought like that then Marquis Martin wasn't actually that generous. Then.....'

He might be able to get even more! Of course, he couldn't be too excessive. Once again, a NPC's behaviour was affected by various

numerical values. His request wouldn't be granted if it went beyond the threshold. This was an absolute rule! If he became too greedy and crossed the limit then there was a risk the quest would be cancelled and intimacy decreased. So Ark.....

"I'm grateful to Marquis Martin in many ways. I could become Beltana's Hero thanks to Marquis-nim. The reason I didn't grumble about the promotional trip without any breaks was because I'm thankful to Marquis-nim. If Marquis-nim requests something from me then I can't refuse no matter the dangers. Yes, I'll dedicate my body and heart to your request."

The reason he spoke like this.....

"The thing I'm worried about is how to complete the mission despite the dangers. I'm not afraid to die. But the thing that concerns me is betraying Marquis Martin's expectations and failing the mission. I heard that the northern region is infested with considerably high level monsters. I might be Beltana's Hero but I'm still inexperienced as a pioneer! I only have equipment of this standard. I don't know if I can accomplish my duty like this."

His words were true. The area to the north of Nabe was filled with level 60~70 monsters. He also needed to travel 1,000 km. On the other hand, Ark was level 52. Entering the northern area alone was a significant risk. Of course, Marquis Martin's quest didn't require him to catch monsters. It was a quest to find the hidden city of Charem and infiltrate it. The reason Ark was discussing monsters and levels.....

'Now take something out! Bring out an armour with large defense!'

Ark stared at Marquis Marin with that meaning in his eyes. Fortunately Marquis Martin wasn't a stupid NPC and he understood Ark's intention.

"Indeed....."

A meaningful smile floated on Marquis Martin's mouth.

"I understand what you're saying. And I admit that I hadn't thought of that point. Well, even if you can avoid them on the air board.....yes, I

should reduce your burden. If you get in trouble and die then you won't be able to reach Charem."

"Huh? Then?"

Ark asked with eager eyes. Marquis Martin thought for a while before taking out a small, square case. Ark had expected an armour piece and disappointment appeared on his face. However he changed his mind once he saw the information window.

-STK-VII (×3)

Item Type: Special Grenade (Older Generation Relic)

A weapon where the development and production is prohibited so few exist. It is based on particle decomposition theory and is called the TK technique. The TK weapon decomposes the target and is a fearsome destructive technology able to evaporate the target. It is an unstoppable weapon with ultimate destructive power. The TK technology was used as a weapon in the 1st Space War and both the galactic federation and Rama suffered countless damage.

The scientists of both nations soon realized the danger of TK technology. The TK technology generated a type of black hole that distorted the area. When both nations signed the special treaty, one of the clauses was the prohibition of the TK technology. The STK-VII was something the galactic federation personalized before the treaty was signed. It is a hand grenade that will destroy all particles within 20 metres when thrown.

* Not for sale

<All targets within 20 metres will receive 1,500 damage and ignores defense>

A destructive weapon where the development and production were prohibited! Naturally Ark had no interest in the contents of the treaty. The important thing was the enormous destructive power of the hand grenade!

'1,500 damage and defense is ignored.....'

Ark was level 52 and his health was lower than 1,500. A level 100 magician with low health would die in one shot!

It was a destructive power that would throw off the balance of the game. This grenade meant that levels didn't mean anything. The destructive power was so large that any further research into the grenade was different. It was a consumable supply but the grenades had a colossal value.

'I really could get another item by acting like that! As expected.'

Ark drooled as he looked at the destructive grenades.

"This grenade isn't a weapon that can be abused. I'm giving it to you because this is an important matter. But bear this in mind. You shouldn't use it in cases where your identity might be revealed. If you are discovered using the STK-VII then even the galactic federation won't be able to protect you. Do you understand why?"

It was a weapon banned by the special treaty. However, Ark now possessed the Hyde Helmet. If he used the Hyde Helmet then he didn't need to worry about his character being revealed. Maybe these items were supposed to be a set from the beginning.

"Of course. Please don't worry.

Ark smiled as he placed the STK-VII in his bag.

"You said that you are willing to risk your life for me. I'm also taking a risk by giving you the prohibited STK-VII. So I have two more conditions. The first is that you don't abandon the mission no matter what. And the second is a personal favour."

As expected, Marquis Martin wasn't an easy NPC. He was a politician who would only give something if he received something else in return.

"The mission requested by the galactic federation is to install the GPS in Charem. Now I will tell you my personal favour. It is a favour but it might help you with your mission. In fact, I personally sent an intelligence agent to sneak into Charem a while ago. His name was Kara. But he cut off contact the moment Charem hid itself from the

federation's surveillance network. He is probably locked inside Charem and can't get out. If your infiltration succeeds I want you to find Kara and give him this. Then he will help you.

Marquis Martin handed him a sealed black bag. When Ark received it, an information window popped up.

<Charem's Infiltration>

You have received a secret mission from Marquis Martin, an aristocrat of the galactic federation. The lawless city Charem has hidden itself in the area 1,000 km north of Nabe.

Charem has hidden its location using state of the art equipment and the galactic federation fears that it is communicating with their enemies the Rama. You have to sneak into Charem and send the approximate GPS location to Marquis Martin.

Difficulty: A

+ Sub Quest: <Intelligence Agent Kara> +

<Intelligence Agent Kara> is a separate mission received from Marquis Martin. Before this situation had occurred, Marquis Martin had sent an intelligence agent to Charem. If you find Kara who is already in Charem then you will be able to receive a lot of help to complete the mission. If you can find him.

-You have acquired the quest item 'sealed bag.'

"This is just a precaution. I want you to have this as well.

Marquis Martin handed him a small capsule.

-You have acquired the 'tiny bomb for suicide' quest item.

"I wish you luck."

Marquis Martin smiled and said.

"Ouch, damn! There isn't anywhere on my body that doesn't hurt."

Ark rubbed his arms and legs. Ark had immediately started

preparing after receiving the quest from Marquis Martin.

-TO: Milan

Something came up and I can't come for a while. I'll finish it as quickly as possible so please gather information about the Murat and wait for me.

He first sent a mail to Milan. <Charem's Infiltration> quest was good but he couldn't miss out on the Murat related slab. He then bought various supplies for a long adventure like food, basic consumables, bullets and various other equipment. Ark was already a celebrity within Galaxian.

He felt concerned about attracting the attention of users and NPCs. However, there was no problem if he used the Hyde Helmet. There were many people in the shipping district but none of them were interested in Ark. Once again he thought that the Hyde Helmet was truly good. Anyway, all his preparations were finished.....

"I'm departing! Let's go Super Board!"

He got on the board that he already nicknamed and shouted.

Hwiiiiiii-! Kutang tang tang-!

Ark ran into the wall of a nearby store. The same situation repeated for a while. If he started the air board then it would start circling the same spot or it would go in an unexpected direction until he crashed into a wall!

"What, what the? Why is this so hard to operate?"

The air board was a ridiculously difficult vehicle to operate. By default, the air board was just a round disk floating in the air. There was no handle and the direction or speed depended on the weight. If a lot of weight was placed on the front the speed would increase and moving the weight from left to right affected the direction. But it was an incredibly sensitive sensor! If he flinched even a little bit to the back then it would stop! If his body shook then the air board would fluctuate. And the problem was that the air board didn't have any safety equipment!

Tteok! Kung! Bam!

Every time the air board became unstable Ark would fall, crash into the wall or flew 500 metres. But Ark was patient! He was obsessive! Ark fought with the device for 4 hours before finally accomplishing it.

Bbol bbol bbol bbol.....Bbol bbol bbol bbol.....

He could finally ride it at 20 km/hr. He was able to go out of the city and he wanted to go at the maximum speed to savour the freedom. But Ark was afraid of falling and had to go slowly. After a while, he started to learn tips to use the air board.

‘Yes, skiing. It is similar to skiing!’

Ark grasped the feeling and started to raise his speed little by little. He started at 20 km and increased to 30, 40, 50.....and finally 60 km! Turning was still difficult but it was possible for him to move at the maximum speed without falling.

“Oho! This feels different from what I thought.....”

Ark had ridden a 300 km/hr bike on Beltana. Therefore he wasn't interested in 60 km/hr but it felt different once he actually tried it out. It was smaller than a car but the bike was still a large machine. However, the air board was just one small disc. The experience of moving on the disc wasn't inferior to going at 300 km/hr.

The landscape started catching his eye once his posture became stable. An endless grassland stretched out in front of him. Terraforming made it hard for monsters or plants belonging to the old environment to survive. So areas around the city had a lot of mechanical creatures and few monsters. Ark was already level 52 so he wasn't interested in the Nakuma anymore. So he skipped it and immediately travelled 120 km away from the city! The grassland gradually changed to a red earth. He had reached the boundary between the terraformed land and the wastelands.

‘This border is where the real game begins!’

On Istana there were still numerous secrets and dangers that

humanity hadn't experienced yet.

Ark could finally truly begin the game after four months. And finally he entered a place with dark red earth.

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

The space started to vibrate as there was a roaring sound. The earth and sand flew and a huge object soared up. Ark lowered his speed as the air board became unstable and rolled onto the ground. The huge object that broke through the earth dropped towards Ark. Once again there was a roaring sound. Ark quickly rolled his body to avoid it and saw a 5 metre earthworm like monster.

-Hakerion-

Category: Space Monster

Danger: C

Combat Power: D

Hakerion is a monster commonly found on Istana. Pioneers who received the body coating and have suitable equipment can easily deal with it. However, it possesses the habit of hiding its body in the ground so beginner pioneers should pay attention.

* You can gain additional information if you face the same type of monster many times.

That was the information that appeared when he looked at the monster. When he received the Survivor coating, he had obtained the basic skill 'Clairvoyance.' It had the ability of an Infrared night vision scope and he could check the information about the monster that was stored in a database. Furthermore, if he faced the same monster many times then he could learn their special skills, hidden attributes and the loot normally dropped.

Grrrrrrr!

Green saliva dripped from the mouth of the Hakerion! It was a formidable monster that appeared when Ark first stepped into the

wastelands! It was a creepy looking monster.

“Yes, this is also part of the game.”

Ark grinned as he took out the Impact Blade.

Hospital Incident

“Um.....um.....”

A middle aged man's leg shook and trembled. He pinched his collar, twisted his plastic cup, pinched his collar, stood up while grabbing his hair, sigh and sat back down, bit his lips, twisted his plastic cup.....

“Father, please!”

“Ah? Uh? Me? Why? What?”

The middle age man raised his head like a surprised chicken and restlessly looked around

“Please sit down politely. Why are you so anxious? Please take a deep breath and calm down. Does Father also need to be examined? Calm your spirit.”

“What are you saying?”

The middle aged man snapped angrily. He snorted and hit his thick chest with his fist.

“Don't you know me? I am Gwon Hwa-rang who was called invincible in the Gangnam area. My mind, body and indomitable spirit makes me healthier than anyone else.”

“The Gangnam area? Doesn't that mean you're not invincible in other areas? And if you lose your healthy body then you'll be a corpse.”

“Why is my child questioning me so closely? The main point is that I'm healthy.”

“You look excessively healthy.”

Hyun-woo laughed and muttered. Anyone who say the man would think he wasn't excessively healthy. His arms, chest and leg muscles were bulging through his jacket and jeans. His darkly tanned

exposed skin really seemed like iron. With the exception of his face, it was hard to imagine looking at his body that he was 50 years old. The middle aged man was Gwon Hwa-rang.

This was a brief biography of Gwon Hwa-rang.....he graduated from the police academy with honours and became a greatly admired hot blooded detective until he retired due to a gun accident. Many years were spent in a gloomy mood until he married Hyun-woo's mother! Now he was Hyun-woo's stepfather. After spending so long in the hospital, Hyun-woo's mother and Gwon Hwa-rang became interested in social movements and spend half a year helping in places like South Africa That's why Gwon Hwa-rang's skin was darkened.

The reason Gwon Hwa-rang was acting so strange was due to Hyun-woo's mother. Hyun-woo had actually opposed his mother's overseas relief efforts. He like helping people in difficult situations. Hyun-woo also experienced difficulties times so he made donations when he could. But the problem was his mother's help. His mother had spent several years living in hospital so he was still worried about her health. However, his mother was very stubborn and he was forced to give in with some conditions. She had to come back at least 2 times a year to receive a comprehensive examination. That was the reason Gwon Hwa-rang and his mother returned home after 5 months. Then.....

"Will it be okay? Huh? Hyun-woo, it's not a big deal right?"

"Indeed."

"I mean.....if something was wrong with Park So-mi.....really.....?"

"It's going to be fine. Mother isn't as weak as Father thinks. She had such a big accident where even the doctors gave up but his efforts helped her recover."

"Yes, that's right. She is strong. Park So-mi is strong. Yes, really."

Gwon Hwa-rang nodded at his words. His mother had been burning up when Hyun-woo met them at Incheon Airport. And she had collapsed at the airport. This was the reason for Gwon Hwa-rang's

crazy actions. In fact, this was the good part. Hyun-woo had fallen into a state of panic when rushing to the hospital in the emergency vehicle. Then Hyun-woo realized something again.

‘Now I’m not the only one worrying about my mother…….’

He felt like it was truly fortunate but he also somehow felt lonely. She was his mother but Hyun-woo felt like a father sending off his daughter.

‘But this isn’t what I’m talking about.’

Hyun-woo soothed Gwon Hwa-rang who had started crying.

‘It’s a fact that he is my father but this is the first time I truly felt it!’

That’s why he was able to appear calm. Hyun-woo’s thoughts were then interrupted.

“The family of patient Park So-mi, please come in.”

“Yes! We’re here!”

Hyun-woo and Gwon Hwa-rang jumped up. They felt anxious as the doctor kept on looking at a chart on the computer. After a moment the doctor smiled and began to talk.

“You don’t need to be worried.”

“S-she is okay? Are there any big problems?”

“Yes, the check-up revealed that there wasn’t any special problem.”

“Then why all of a sudden”

“The cause is due to fatigue. Her fatigue has accumulated. And she seems to have received a lot of stress recently. Her built up stress and fatigue made her temporarily collapse but she should feel better after some rest.”

‘Stress…….’

A sigh naturally emerged from Hyun-woo’s mouth. He could guess why his mother was so stressed. In all likelihood, it was 100% due

to the real estate slump of the Taek Mountains property. Hyun-woo had received a shock when he heard that the price had fallen to 1/10th of the original. It was natural since his money was invested in that land. But he was more worried about his mother's health. The person who bought the real estate through Yoo An-gook was his mother. His mother was thinking that she wasted the money her son had earned and the mistake had been eating at her. His mother would naturally feel a sense of responsibility so he was worried it would harm her health. The money was fine. Hyun-woo had gone through some ups and downs and now he was living well. However, he wouldn't be able to bear it if his mother was back in the hospital. It wasn't surprising that he was anxious after her collapse.

'Fortunately there isn't any big problem but.....'

Once again anger welled up at Korea's politicians. He hadn't told Yoo An-gook, the rehabilitation hyung-nims, Gwon Hwa-rang or his mother but Hyun-woo already guessed the culprit of the real estate slump. It was probably Lucifer. It was highly possible that Lucifer was controlling the nuclear power plant near the Taek Mountains. He felt angry but he couldn't blame the people selling the real estate. It was directed at the politicians who knew the information in advance. The politicians were the ones talking about being devoted to the common people while making their lives harder. But now wasn't the time to think about that.

"What should we do now?"

"Stability is important for the moment. There are still a few tests left so she should stay in the hospital for a few days. And she needs some nutrients. Her age doesn't mean she'll have trouble in the early stages of pregnancy but it is better to be careful."

"Ah, yes....."

Gwon Hwa-rang sighed with relief and nodded. And he blinked a few times before stuttering.

"Early stages of pregnancy.....what did you say?"

"Didn't you know?"

“No, that.....pregnant....I mean.....a baby is going to be born?”

“You should know what the word pregnancy means.”

The doctor said with a smile.

“Congratulations.”

“H-Hyun-woo!”

Gwon Hwa-rang turned around and stared at Hyun-woo. But Hyun-woo’s spirit had already flown away to Andromeda.

‘Mother is pregnant? Pregnant? Then I’ll have a younger sibling? Sibling? Sibling? Sibling! Ohhh! A boy! No, a girl! Eh, I don’t know! Anyway, a young sibling! A younger sibling!’

Hyun-woo who had fallen into a state of panic shouted back at Gwon Hwa-rang.

“Father, I’m going to be an older brother!”

“Yes, Hyun-woo! I’m going to be a father!”

“Damn, I’m also your son!”

“What are you saying? Don’t worry! I’ll raise you both with no discrimination!”

“What? Of course you have to discriminate! This is my younger sibling!”

“Ohhh! Life is good! Hyun-woo!”

“Father!”

Hyun-woo and Gwon Hwa-rang yelled and embraced each other. The doctor and nurses stared as Hyun-woo and a 180 cm tall Gwon Hwa-rang embraced while crying.

“I understand your feelings but please calm down. If you do this here then it can cause problems.”

“B-but.....”

How could they calm down when they suddenly heard such news?

The two men's excitement didn't subside so the doctor scratched his head and continued talking.

"Park So-mi has been moved to the hospital room. If her husband and son don't know then it is likely that Park So-mi is also unaware of her pregnancy. She already has experience giving birth but I'll have a nurse instruct her about what to do during early pregnancy. I'll also prescribe some nutrient supplements that will be helpful in early pregnancy."

Hyun-woo grabbed the doctor's hand and said.

"Will it be a younger brother or a younger sister?"

"No, the pregnancy is still too early to tell....."

"I don't care if it is a boy or girl but please make sure my younger sibling is born healthy. My mother too! Mother has to be healthy as well! Yes, please give her the best nutrients! It doesn't matter how much it costs!"

"No, expensive nutrients aren't necessarily better....."

"Hey, you fool!"

Gwon Hwa-rang hit the back of Hyun-woo's head and shouted. He pushed Hyun-woo away and grabbed the doctor's hand. "Is it one shot? Please give her shots with the best stuff!"

"No, that is....."

The doctor muttered with an awkward expression. Then the nurse next to them burst out laughing and said.

"They are happy. Park So-mi ssi will be glad. The two men can barely stand it."

"It is like that....."

The two men were shocked by the pregnancy news and were excited for a while. But they made ignorant noises about giving the

most expensive supplements or shots. Meanwhile So-mi just stroked her stomach and smiled when she heard the news. Her calm attitude had a sedative effect on the two men. It was quite fortunate from the hospital's viewpoint.

"My body felt different these days but I never thought I would be pregnant."

"You mean, this body....."

Gwon Hwa-rang tried to say something but closed his mouth. He grasped Mother's hand and cried out.

"Thank you."

"You're worried about being a burden for no reason."

"W-what nonsense are you saying? A burden? I have to say, I.....so far I've been living alone. During the days I was fighting against criminals, there were times I thought I wouldn't come back alive. I had no family. This might sound weird but I made a son. I was already full of happiness from that. Now that happiness has increased. I.....I really am happy....."

Tears started to flow down Gwon Hwa-rang's face. Then he buried his face in the bed and started crying.

"Now now, I understand. I don't want to hear a sound like that so calm down."

His mother laughed softly and stroked Gwon Hwa-rang's back. She looked up at Hyun-woo and asked.

"Are you okay?"

She was asking if he wanted to be an older brother. It was an absurd question. Wasn't it impossible for him to not like it? It was an amazing situation.

"Do you want me to cry too?"

"Please don't. Having two grown men cry like babies will be embarrassing."

“Am I embarrassing?”

Gwon Hwa-rang pouted with face soaked with tears.

“By the way, why are you acting like a kid? Soon you’re going to be the dad of two people.”

“Yes yes. Now I’m the dad of two people. Hyun-woo. You may call my Father as well.”

Gwon Hwa-rang wiped away his tears and laughed. Hyun-woo was really worried about leaving his mother and younger sibling to this person. When thinking of the future, he had help raise them. Just as Hyun-woo was thinking this. His mother sighed with a depressed expression.

“By the way I’m really sorry.”

“Mother!”

Hyun-woo interrupted his mother’s words.

“Don’t talk like that. This isn’t something for Mother to be concerned about. I’ve been talking on the phone with An-gook hyung and he says the drop is temporary. So you don’t have to worry and just continue recovering.”

“Really?”

“Would I lie to Mother?”

“I remember so many instances that I can’t count.”

“T-that.....this time I really am telling the truth. Do you want to call An-gook hyung and ask him?”

“I believe that your words are true.”

“It is true so don’t look at me like that. So Mother doesn’t need to worry anymore. Mother is pregnant now. The doctor said you have to be careful during the early stages of pregnancy so please relax. That will help me and Father.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Huh?”

“In fact, I actually returned this time because of you.”

“Me? Why?”

“Aren’t you getting older now? I told you many times but a man needs a home to become a dignified adult.”

“I’m only 26.”

“Age is not important. If you have the ability to be responsible for a home then you’re of marriageable age. Aren’t you the director of a large enterprise? It is ridiculous for someone like you to be alone. Father and I will often be abroad in the future so the fact that you’re alone is weighing on my mind. However I came into contact with an old friend not long ago who told me about a good girl.”

“Are you really trying to find someone for me to marry?”

“What’s wrong with that? A lot of people do blind dates these days.”

“Still.....”

“Mother’s only request is that you meet a good person. If you meet a good person then I can concentrate on giving birth.”

“Hah!”

Gwon Hwa-rang suddenly raised his head. He grabbed Hyun-woo’s shoulder and shouted.

“Don’t be a troublemaker and get married like Mother said! Otherwise Mother can’t confidently give birth to her child! So get married! Go meet the woman Mother is introducing you to and get married!”

“You, why are you joking about marriage?”

“.....Do I sound like I’m joking?”

Gwon Hwa-rang stared at him with roaring eyes.

“If something happens to my child because of this then I will burn out

your eyeballs!”

Hyun-woo had nothing to say after seeing that.

“I understand. I’ll think about it seriously.”

“Good. If he marries the woman you introduce him to then you can concentrate on managing your health.”

“What marriage? I said I would think about meeting her!”

Hyun-woo shouted at Gwon Hwa-rang. His mother laughed and nodded.

“Yes honey. Now I’m relieved.”

His mother and Gwon Hwa-rang seemed intent on pushing him. Anyway, his mother was fatigued and soon fell asleep. Hyun-woo and Gwon Hwa-rang exited after confirming that Mother was deeply asleep. Hyun-woo and Gwon Hwa-rang sat down in front of a coffee vending machine.

“Are you going back to South Africa?”

“Well I should go. There is still a lot of work left to do.”

Gwon Hwa-rang nodded and replied.

“But Park So-mi is pregnant so we should stay here for a bit. Fortunately we don’t have to return for a couple of months.

“Honestly I’m slightly worried. Based on the news, the situation there doesn’t seem good these days.....of course I don’t object to the idea of you helping refugees. But even if you’re doing something good, it’s still dangerous. I see on the news that some kids are even carrying guns around.....it didn’t matter before but now Mother is pregnant.....”

“It’s not like that.”

Gwon Hwa-rang stared bitterly at a coffee cup.

“In fact, I’m not the one who wanted to go in the first place. I just followed Park So-mi. But now it is different. My outlook on life has

changed. In that place there are people who can't even buy a cup of coffee. Someone has to help them. Your mother is helping people like that. I'm proud that someone like that is my wife."

Hyun-woo also felt proud as well. However, his pride was separate from his worry about his mother. Hyun-woo made a sombre expression and Gwon Hwa-rang knocked him on the shoulder before smiling.

"Don't worry. I told you, the place where Park So-mi is helping isn't as dangerous as you think. Actually, I was visiting a refugee camp last time and I met an officer of the government. I was invited by the FBI to become a martial arts teacher. There are several conveniences and no danger."

Gwon Hwa-rang casually talked about something that would appear in a movie. Gwon Hwa-rang was a special human. There was no criminal gangs who didn't know Gwon Hwa-rang's name. His power was the reason the rehabilitation members submitted to Gwon Hwa-rang. But Gwon Hwa-rang had no interest in his fame. When Gwon Hwa-rang moved in with his mother. Hyun-woo helped move his luggage and found a thick pile of paper in a corner. Various certificates of appreciation and commendations for catching criminals were piled up like a thick encyclopaedia. Gwon Hwa-rang casually replied after Hyun-woo asked him about it.

—Ah, just put it with the recyclable waste.

All the awards that would've normally be hanging up ended up in the trash. But Gwon Hwa-rang treasured the letters of thanks sent by people he helped. This was a person who couldn't even put on his socks correctly. He was such a man. He was an honourable existence to Hyun-woo and his mother. Thus he had been able to let his mother go in peace to South Africa.

"But what happens if she gives birth to the child? You can't bring up a newborn baby in a place like that."

"Well.... Anyway, the doctor said that stability is important right now so we don't need to worry about that for a while. I will discuss the matter with Mother. You just worry about Mother's wish for you to

get married.”

“Is Father really acting like this? You expect me to get married alone? There needs to be a partner.”

“Then go on the blind date. If you go on the blind date then won’t Mother stop complaining for a bit? Anyway, have you decided yet?”

Gwon Hwa-rang said before standing up from his seat.

“I have to go back to the airport. Park So-mi collapsed so our luggage is still at the airport. I’ll move the luggage to the house and come back in the evening. Will you be in the hospital until then?”

“I should be.”

“Okay then I’ll see you soon, son.”

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed before leaving the hospital. He stayed at the hospital but his mother was asleep so there wasn’t a lot of things left to do.

‘Should I start my hacking practice?’

Hyun-woo sat down in front of the hospital room and took out his phone. Hyun-woo’s hacking skill was very important in Galaxian. The way to use this skill was to clear mini games. Fortunately he had been familiar with the games so it hadn’t been difficult so far but that would change in the future. So Hyun-woo sometimes used his phone to train his hacking skill.

Pico pico! Byong byong! Ddiridiri! Byong byong!

Hyun-woo was immersed in his games.

“Nurse, nurse, please come here!”

A desperate voice was heard near him. The nurses and doctor ran towards the room of the person making a fuss. Hyun-woo wondered what was going on but he wasn’t going to join the crowd swarming the hospital room. When his mother was in the ICU, Hyun-woo had also called for the nurses in desperate voices a few times. And each time people flocked to the hospital room.

Some were curious while others were worried. But Hyun-woo just felt like they wanted to watch other people's misfortunes. No patient or family would welcome the attention. Hyun-woo recalled that memory.

"Like I said before, even if the patient is unconscious their reflexes means their fingers or toes sometimes move. I checked and it seems to be the case this time. But don't be too disappointed. The results have improved since the previous check-ups. If you spot a change then call a nurse."

'The unconscious patient is just like my mother.'

Hyun-woo sighed and turned away. At that moment, Hyun-woo felt his heart drop.

"Yes, thank you."

A young woman appeared at the hospital room door and bowed. Surprisingly she was someone Hyun-woo knew. She was dressed in baggy clothes unlike the last time but he could recognize her face immediately.

'.....Irina?'

Irina who he saw at the charity party! In the game she was the officer in charge of the prisoner's supplies on Beltana.

'What? Irina also know someone in this hospital? This is.....'

The last time Hyun-woo saw Irina was shortly after his return to Nephalim. At that time, Hyun-woo heard that Irina had helped him while he was imprisoned and jumped to the conclusion that she had a crush. But they had no time to talk and he forgot about her. He never thought he would see her again in a place like this. Hyun-woo couldn't concentrate on the game anymore. He got up and stealthily sneaked behind the people around the room. He looked through the crack in the door and saw a room full of medical equipment. She was sitting down in the same place Hyun-woo always sat. She also had the same expression as she held the patient's hand.....

"Mom....."

A bitter voice was heard through the door. A drop of water fell down her chin as the woman lowered her head. Long forgotten feelings surged through Hyun-woo as he saw the tear. He forgot the pain and desperation.

And he forgot.....

A dark room was filled with cigarette smoke. 10 people were sitting around with heavy looks. One of them was the owner of the building. Several members were frowning and the room had a heavy atmosphere. The 10 men gathered in the room while smoking. Suddenly a guy jumped up. He broke the serious atmosphere as he bowed and shouted.

“Hyung-nim, I committed a sin! Please kill me!”

“Shut up!”

The middle age man frowned and declared sharply.

“What is this about killing? Are we gangsters? I’m 50 and enjoying my honeymoon yet you want me to kill you? And what is with this atmosphere? Has a raccoon been caught? Why are you smoking in such excessive amounts? Are you trying to commit suicide? Get it together. You’re going to live a long time. Because soon I’ll be a baby daddy!”

“Huh? A-A baby daddy?”

“Heok! T-then Hyung-nim.....”

“Yes that’s right. This hyung-nim is going to be a dad.”

“Sister-in-law is pregnant?”

“Then? Do I look like I’m pregnant?”

The man rolled his eyes as he replied. Then the crowd cheered with joy and started making noises.

“Wow! Hyung-nim, you succeeded!”

“I never would’ve expected it from someone who a bachelor just recently!”

“A man is still a man. “It is wonderful!”

“You really are having a child....no, that’s it. Anyway, we have to live a long time! Turn on the lights. We’ll now live slightly brighter. Huh? Brighter.”

Someone else quickly turned on the lights and opened the window. The middle aged man’s face was revealed as Gwon Hwa-rang. The remaining people were the rehabilitation members. Hae Gyeol-sa was the one who turned on the lights and Ma Chorung said after studying Gwon Hwa-rang’s face.

“Hyung-nim, did you come find us to inform us about sister-in-law being pregnant?”

“No that’s not it. Haven’t you heard? A pregnant woman shouldn’t worry. Don’t you know what she’ll be like is you shoulder the responsibility?”

“That would be a problem.”

“You understand me.”

Gwon Hwa-rang’s expression tightened.

“That is the reason but.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang stared at Yoo An-gook and said.

“Park So-mi is worried about the Taek Mountains real estate issue. The accumulated stress caused her to collapse at the airport. That’s why I decided to visit you. I don’t feel good not seeing you guys before departing but it also reminded me of the real estate problem.”

“I know.”

The rehabilitation members scowled at Yoo An-gook. Yoo An-gook’s image had changed because of this problem. But Gwon Hwa-rang shook his head and said.

“That’s it. This isn’t An-gook’s fault. You don’t have to act like he committed a sin. But didn’t you call Hyun-woo and say that the real estate problem was solved?”

“No. I never.....”

“I can guess. That brat, he wants to take care of everything.”

Gwon Hwa-rang grunted with a faint smile on his face. But he soon scratched his head with an irritated expression and said.

“Anyway, that means there is still no way to fix this. Is that right?”

“Yes, so far.....”

“So? Do you know the reason behind the real estates’ price plunge? Why did people who bought the land at an expensive price rush to sell it so suddenly?”

“I don’t know. The value of the land originally rose because the government announced they were building a major building there. I assumed the value dropped because the people heard that plan was cancelled. But my sources told me the government hasn’t made any decision yet.”

“So you still haven’t figured out the case?”

“That’s right.”

Yoo An-gook hung his head and replied. Then Gwon Hwa-rang spoke in an unconcerned voice.

“Is that why you’re all gathered here looking so worried? The solution to the problem is simple. If you’re not sure why then ask.”

“Huh? W-who do I ask?”

“Didn’t you get the names of the owners when trading with them? Then look for the original owners.”

“B-but Hyung-nim.”

“Many of the real estate transactions involve politicians.”

“What about it? Are you joking?”

“No, that’s not it.....”

“Do I look like I’m laughing now?”

Gwon Hwa-rang interrupted the rehabilitation members' words. And he muttered in a low voice.

"Just ask them why they sold the land. If they don't answer then something is suspicious. In other words.....my Park So-mi would've received stress because of something they did. My woman! My wife who is having a child! Now, I'll ask again. Do I look like I'm laughing?"

"Ah, no."

"I told you many times."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke with eyes gleaming like a wild beast.

"Justice will always win. I've proved that to be true. This is for my child."

He was filled with a wild, vibrant streak.

Outlands

A forest covered with vines. However, it wasn't the vines that needed to be watched carefully. It was the black, viscous liquid pouring down that seemed like the skin of a slime creature. The vines weren't the only strange thing covering the forest. There were mushrooms that grew like thorns in the corpses of monsters, luminous moss that glowed in the dark and cactuses that released electricity when touched. Everything that caught the eye in the forest was bizarre. But that was just from the perspective of a human.

These bizarre life forms were native to Istana that was located thousands of light years away from earth. They had been growing in Istana's environment for millions of years. But this environment was fatal to humans. Humans had no immunity against it so touching alien plants could cause unidentified diseases or genetic mutations. No, the constituents of the atmosphere were different from Earth so humans couldn't even live there. Therefore humans had to terraform the environment to become similar to Earth's. This was an area that hadn't been terraformed yet. This was the 24th century so pioneers who received the body coating where their DNA was remodelled could survive in these areas called the Outlands.

".....But."

It wasn't a safe place even for pioneers who received the body coating. The body coating was the minimum conditions needed for survival in the Outlands. The Outlands were infested with monsters that transcended the imagination and the pioneers were food for these monsters. Naturally they weren't friendly.

Kuaaaa!

There are also monsters here!

Woooooo!

Monsters here as well!

There were creatures everywhere as soon as the Outlands were entered. The monsters weren't the only threatening ones. Once again, body coating was the minimum needed so ensure survival. There were toxic substances emitted from some plants to still poisoned pioneers despite them having the body coating. The cactus that caused electricity was particularly dangerous.

-Electric Tia-

Category: Space Plant Danger: C

Combat Power: –

Electric Tia is a plant commonly found on many planets in the galaxy.

This plant contains a very unique nature as it uses energy gained from photosynthesis to create electricity and release it outside. The electricity has a significantly high voltage and can have a fatal result for pioneers using electronic equipment.

He knew the information about the Electric Tia through his Clairvoyance skill. And he had experienced the deadly result talked about in the information window already. The earthworm like Harkerion was the monster that he encountered the most in the Outlands. During the battle he had stepped on an Electric Tia by accident and the information window appeared.

-You have been shocked by the electricity released by the Electric Tia!

<All stats and attack reduced by 10% for 10 minutes and you will become shocked every 5 seconds>

The capabilities of the Nympe will also be paralyzed and all skills blocked>

Skill blockage and 10% reduction in stats! He was dumbfounded when he received this penalty in the middle of battle. He couldn't fathom the surprise attack from unidentified animals and plants. It was the perilous Outlands where it was impossible to be careless for even one moment! Ark's state of mind when he first entered the Outlands.....

‘How fascinating!’

R-14 was a tutorial. When he arrived in Nephelim where the real game would start, he had been tricked by the hamster and sold to the Silver Hand. As a result, Ark’s relationship with the Silver Hand was tremendously helpful to him. But it wasn’t something he had personally chosen to do.

Then he was caught as a criminal and sent to Beltana. When he returned from Beltana he was caught by Marquis Martin and became the billboard of the federation. Ark still tried his best in every situation and got a good result but he had been feeling frustration throughout. He was playing the game but he had no freedom. That situation changed once he entered the Outlands.

‘Of course, I came here because of a quest but I have my freedom!’

He could go in any direction! There were unidentified dangers with every step! It was the type of adventure that all gamers liked! And Ark’s ability was exerted 120% in such a world. At first he had difficulty fighting the monsters. He wasn’t adapted to the unfamiliar surroundings and made significant mistakes. Now it had been 6 days since he entered the Outlands and Ark was showing his ability to adapt. He began to grasp what was needed to survive in the Outlands. He wasn’t just receiving surprise attacks from monsters but was actively ‘hunting.’ That was his idea when walking.

‘.....I’ve found it!’

Ark’s eyes brightened as he looked at the monster on the other side of the vine. It was a raptor like monster similar to dinosaurs in Jurassic Park called the Bellos. Level 65. On the other hand, Ark was currently level 61. He had been level 52 when first leaving Nabe. He gained 9 levels in a mere 6 days. He encountered the Harkerion as soon as he entered the Outlands and reached level 60. Continuously hunting high level monsters meant it was natural for him to gain levels quickly. But there was a decisive reason why he could gain 9 levels after only 6 days. It was.....

‘Ouch! It is painful just thinking about it!’

Ark couldn’t be completely happy. This was because there was

something he had to give up to achieve such results. Ark became lost in his memories before shaking his head.

‘Damn! Forget it! There is no point dwelling on the past. Anyway, thankfully I’ve reached the level where I can hunt the Bellos. Yes, I need to think like this. Right now I need to concentrate on the Bellos. If I make a mistake like last time then I’ll be left bleeding.’

Anyway, the Bellos was 4 levels high than Ark. However, the bonus he received from the Survivor coating meant it was possible for him to win. The problem was they always went around in a pair of female and male. This was why the Bellos were able to occupy an area full of level 70 monsters. Two level 65 monsters.....

He honestly felt lucky. The experience earned was equivalent to fighting 1 level 80 monsters. But.....

‘I can’t just live on experience.’

This was the reason he went looking for the Bellos. Ark wasn’t hunting the monsters for combat but for the loot. And the Bellos was the Outlands creature that Ark could get the most loot from. If he saw items then of course he would want to get his hands on them!

‘Now shall I get started?’

“Stealth.”

Ark murmured in a low voice. And it felt like his body disappeared at the same time. The light refracted around his body was one of the Survivor coating skills, Stealth! It was the same skill as other online games but this Stealth was more difficult to use. If he lost concentration when using Stealth then he would become transparent or hazy like a ghost. When he first tried to use Stealth, his body was blurry like a ghost and was still attacked. But he became accustomed after using it several times. He practiced his concentration through repetition over the past 6 days and he could maintain his transparency. Yet he still couldn’t rest assured. Stealth was easily removed.

Sneak, sneak.

Ark carefully crept closer to the Bellos. It was only 40 metres but it took him 3 minutes to reach the Bellos undetected. A black light shot out from the Impact Blade.

Sakak-!

-The Bellos has received a sudden blow!

<The Bellos was caught off guard and receives damage x4. The Bellos is shocked by the blow and its power and willpower will decrease by 20%>

-The message flashed after the hit. This was the biggest effect of maintaining the Stealth status and approaching the monster. If Ark approached the monster from behind and dealt a sudden blow then he could deal x4 his base damage to the monster. The 'fear' effect also made its strength and willpower decreased by 20%.

'The extra damage and effect from the surprise attack is amazing.....'

That was the valuable part. It was possible to use skills in the Stealth state. However, his proficiency wasn't high enough to maintain the Stealth state while using attack skills. Stealth would be turned off the moment he attacked. That's why he always tried to combine 'Backstab' with 'Sudden blow.'

Backstab gave an extra x2 damage. The 'Fear' effect was an added benefit. And that effect alone was enough.

Kaack! Kuaaack!

The Bellos bled heavily and its health was reduced by 30%. He had shaved away 30% of the monster's health before the battle even began. This meant it was an easy win despite the 4 level difference. However, there wasn't just 1 Bellos.

Kiyak! Kiyak! Kuaaah!

There was always a male and female together. Anyway, the other Bellos shrieked and rushed forwards as its companion started bleeding heavily. It flew forward with sharp claws. But Ark didn't

even turn his head.

'If I try to deal with 2 at once then this will never end. I have to concentrate on only one!'

"Mind Shield!"

A round shield appeared around Ark's body. It was the Mind Shield skill received from the Survivor body coating! It was a defense shield but it was different from other shields. Like all skills received from the Survivor body coating, it also depended on concentration.....

-The Mind Shield has been activated.

<A shield with 180 durability has been generated around the body. The shield will reduce all damage by 40~60% until the durability falls to 0.

In addition, the effect of Backstab or Sudden Blow will be nullified by 100%>

'Damn, that's not even half of the maximum durability possible.'

Ark was disappointed as the message appeared in front of him. Depending on his concentration, the durability of the shield could vary between 50~500. Stealth was a skill used before battle so the concentration was easy to maintain. But Mind Shield needed to be used while battling so it was difficult to concentrate. The first shield had 200 durability but the average was 50~70 at the most.

Therefore the shield normally broke after a few attacks. After a few practices, he managed to get it over 100 and was working towards 250 durability. 180 was only an average amount.

'It should take approximately 3~4 shots.'

He had initially questioned the Mind Shield but there was a large advantage when he actually used it.

Ark's current shield absorbed approximately 1,000 damage! Mind Shield actually possessed twice the maximum durability. Bhurad's shield only had 25 defense and blocked the enemy's attacks. While it could stop long range bullets that directly hit it, it was vulnerable to

close combat hits in areas not covered by the shield. Even if the shield had 1,000 defense, it could only block 2~3 shots!

However, Mind Shield covered the whole body. In other words, it acted like an armour rather than a shield. Mind Shield gave him the same defense but he didn't need to worry about long or short distance attacks. But the best part about it.....

Snap! Chwajijijijik!

There was the sound of something hitting his back. Originally if he received a blow from behind then he would obtain x2 damage. The Bellos would deal Ark 180 damage. However, that changed once Mind Shield was applied. The shield absorbed 40~60% damage so Ark only received 36~54 damage. That was nothing to Ark who raised his health to 1,500!

'But if the shield breaks then I will receive damage. Even my 1,500 won't be able to endure 1 minute of being attacked from behind!'

It wasn't a situation where he had plenty of leeway.

"Sonic Sword!"

Ark furiously attacked the Bellos. The blade broke through the speed of sound and caused a shockwave that dug into the Bellos' neck. At the same time Ark pulled the trigger attacked to Impact Blade's handle.

"Impact Shot!"

The Bellos stumbled and retreated. This was the convenient part about the Outlands. The gun was a basic equipment necessary to deal with mechanical life forms like the Nakuma. But savage monsters couldn't use shields. Therefore he could mobilize both guns and swords while attacking.

Seokeok! Pepepeng!

The blade separated and made a bellowing sound! The bullets jammed into the wounds continuously. The Bellos was struck by a series of gun and sword attacks. But that didn't mean Ark had a surplus of time. Mind Shield didn't block 100% of the damage. Even

if it was reduced by 40~60%, damage was still damage. It would steadily accumulate. Moreover, the shield only had 180 durability so if he lost concentration then he would die in a few hits.

‘But.....’

Cheolkeok, chwaruru.

While the Bellos was stumbling, Ark quickly opened a cylinder in the Impact Blade. 4 bullet casings fell down.

‘I’ll settle it with this!’

He filled the cylinder with 4 more bullets. Ark finished reloading in an instant thanks to all his practice while the Bellos started attacking him again. While the Bellos was trying to bite his head off, Ark placed the tip of his sword against its jaw. The knife blade broke through the jaws. His finger that was on the trigger pulled it quickly.

“Set Bullets Shooting!”

Cheolkeok, cheolkeok, cheolkeok! Pepepeng!

3 bullets were fired at once! But the bullets he loaded this time weren’t ordinary. It gave 150% additional damage!

-Headshot!

<You have inflicted a serious blow and the enemy will receive additional 150% damage>

-The flame effect has been applied thanks to the Fire Bullets hitting skin.

<Bullets will deal additional x5 damage. It will give 50 fire damage for 1 minute>

At the same time the Bellos’ head was engulfed with flames.

Kuaaaah! Kiaaaahhh!

The Bellos shrieked and gave out a weird glow. But after a few

minutes, the Bellos that was already in a critical condition took a few steps forward before collapsing. Then Ark's shield broke and a red warning message popped up.

-You have received backstab damage from the Bellos!

His health was sucked out! In the end his Mind Shield was broken. The backstab damage caused him to lose 40% health straight away. But Ark just turned around with a pleasant smile.

“Now you're the only one left!”

Greed gleamed from Ark's eyes! The Bellos flinched from the outpouring of attacks and retreated. However the Bellos was also one of the predators of the Outlands! Ark didn't know whether it was the husband or the wife but it had just seen its companion die.

Grrrrr! Kuaaaah!

Bellos growled and rushed towards him. Unfortunately the Bellos wasn't very good at maths. Despite the two monsters attacking him, Ark's health had only decreased by 40%. Of course, Ark's shield broke but there was only one Bellos left. Even if the Bellos receive spiritual enlightenment that increased power by 2, the odds still weren't in its favour. It was also blinded by rage and just ran wildly up to him.....

“Sonic Sword! Impact Shot!”

Seokeok! Tang! Tang! Seokeok! Tang! Tang!

The sword sliced through the bullet hole.....The Bellos became ragged as soon as the 1-on-1 battle began. Unfortunately the Bellos hadn't received any spiritual enlightenment. But it wasn't smart and kept on rushing towards him to be beaten. The Bellos' health decreased to 10%.

Grrrr....Kuang! Kuang!

The Bellos studied his face and tried to retreat without him noticing. Then it shrieked and ran away.

'It will be troublesome if I miss!'

This was the part that caused him a headache when dealing with the Bellos. If 1 Bellos was cornered then it would sometimes run away. Ark hadn't expected it when he first fought the Bellos so he left it while it was in a critical condition. And he searched the body of the monster he already defeated.

Kuwaaaah!

Kaack! Kaack! Kaack Kuoooh!

Dozens of red eyes flashed between the vines. That's right. To be exact, the Bellos wasn't running away. It was in order to summon the other Bellos in the area to kill Ark. At that time Ark had used the battle suit to escape. Once the mana of the battle suit disappeared, he drank an ampoule and kept on running away from the chasing Bellos. But he had something to escape. If he was surrounded then he would inevitably die. And.....

-Your level has risen!

-Your level has risen.....

Ark went up 6 levels at once. That's how Ark managed to gain 9 levels in 6 days. But it wasn't for free. In that situation he had to give up something in order to survive. That was.....

'Damn, I hadn't considered something like that! If I miss then I'm screwed!'

Ark caught up to the Bellos and swung his sword.

"Do you think I will miss? Take this, Binding Sword!"

It was a skill that decreased his damage by 50% while binding the enemy for 1~3 seconds! If it was tied up for 1~3 seconds then he could somehow dispose of it. However.....

-Your attack has hit the target!

<You lacked concentration and failed to bind the Bellos>

“Dammit! Binding Sword!”

-Your attack has hit the target!

<You lacked concentration and failed to bind the Bellos>

It was the 3rd skill he received from the Survivor coating. He worried about Stealth and Mind Shield at first but it was 100% effective and worth it. He was satisfied with all except for one! The only exception was the Binding Sword. The other skills were used relatively early in battle so it was easy to focus. Although Binding Sword decrease damage by 50%, it allowed the enemy to be bound for 2~3 seconds. It could be used in situations like this when an enemy was running away. The problem was that he didn't have time to focus like when he used Stealth or Mind Shield. He needed to chase the enemy so it was natural for his concentration to drop. The probability of the skill causing binding was only 30% so the result was clear once his concentration fell.

Miss! Miss! Miss!

It was a skill he learnt after a long time. In order to learn how to use it, Ark tried it at least once or twice in a battle. But so far he had only succeeded 5 times in 6 days. The probability was 30% but the actual success probability was 1%. If the binding wasn't triggered than Binding Sword was just a skill that decreased damage by 50%.

‘There is a reason it was a 1 star rated skill!’

The damage was cut by 50% even when he used Sonic Sword. Using that skill in rapid succession.....

“Binding Sword!”

-You are unable to use the skill because you don't have enough mental power.

<Either rest or use a recovery ampoule to restore your mental power>

Ark currently had 800 mental power! However, he had consumed 200 using Stealth and Mind Shield. He had also consumed 400 mental power since the battle started. He persevered and used Binding Sword that consumed 50 mental power until it was depleted.

‘Damn, what is this.....’

Instead of Binding Sword, it should be called Stressful Sword. Anyway, he wasted time and mental power while the Bellos increased the distance to 10 metres. The Bellos was a wild monster so it naturally moved faster than Ark. The forest was also tangled with vines so he couldn’t use the Air Board. But Ark hadn’t believed in Binding Sword. It was natural. What user would believe in a skill when the success rate was only 1%?

‘I saw it in this area when I scouted.....there it is!’

Ark smiled while chasing after the Bellos.

‘The distance is 10 metres. If it is this degree.....’

Ark grabbed his Impact Blade with both hands.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The ensuing four shots rattled the forest. The Bellos that was 10 metres away was hit by a blue light. It spasmed and fell down. The blue sparks was coming from a cactus near it. It was the Electric Tia! The strange cactus emitted electricity whenever it received an impact. When he first came to the Outlands, he often touched the cactus during battle and became bloody. But 6 days had passed since Ark came to the Outlands. Now he was accustomed to looking around and noticing any risk factors before the battle. This was why scouting was important in the Outlands. Anyway.....the Electric Tia caused electrocution for 5 minutes, the stats would be decreased by 10% and all skills blocked. But the deadly penalty was that the body was paralyzed for 10 seconds. Thus the Bellos couldn’t run away.

Kuoh, hek hek! Grrrr, hek hek!

The Bellos panted as it lay on the ground. The dinosaur like monster lying on the ground looked slightly pitiful. But Ark had no time to look

at the circumstances of the dinosaur. The Bellos still had 10% health remaining. And it had escaped to a pretty far away place. There may be other Bellos in the area. He couldn't relax even when it was paralyzed!

'It is dangerous!'

Kyakak! Kyakak! Kyakak! Kyakak!

Ark quickly hurled attacks at the panting Bellos. The Bellos quickly fell to 4% health! His mental power also recovered enough for him to use a deadly skill.

"Now, this is the last shot! Set Bullets Shooting!"

Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok!

'Whoops!'

Panic appeared on Ark's face. Set Bullets Shooting was Ark's knockdown technique!

If Set Bullets Shooting hit when the Bellos only had 4% health left then it would die straight away.

However, there was one thing his head hadn't considered. It was possible to reload bullets in the Impact Blade. The Impact Blade could have 4 bullets loaded at a time. And he had used 4 bullets to hit the Electric Tia.

Kuaaaaaaah-!

The Bellos shrieked as it escaped from its paralysis. The monster immediately died as Ark's sword hit it but.....

'.....T-they came!'

Ark winced as he withdrew and looked around.

Beoseok! Beoseok!

The forest shook with the shrieks from other Bellos. The surrounding bushes shook and dozens of red eyes appeared in the darkness. The Bellos had heard the shriek of its kin and came running. There were dozens of level 65 monsters! His health was already low so it

Ark was surrounded then he would die instantly.

“Dammit! Armour armament!”

Ark wore the battle suit and ran away. However, the area was thick forest so he couldn't outrun the Bellos even while wearing the battle suit. And they had already surrounded Ark. He was hit by claws and fangs and his health dropped to 20%.

‘Impossible! I'll end up dying like this! But.....but.....’

Ark bit his lip and struggled. However his worries didn't last long. If he died then he would lose the 9 levels he gained. There was no meaning if that experience disappeared. He had to survive! At all costs! That was his ultimate priority inside Galaxian!

“Dammit!”

Ark cursed and threw a small object. And he threw himself flat on the ground!

Snap! Chwajijijijik!

The small object exploded and black air currents swirled in the area. The dozens of Bellos were wrapped in the black air currents and their bodies crumbled to sand. However Ark had a gloomy expression on his face.

“Dammit, that is already 2 STK-VII.....”

A few days ago Ark was surrounded by the Bellos and used it to survive. The STK-VII! It was the destructive grenade that dealt all enemies within a 20 metre diameter 1,500 damage. It even ignored defense! In other words, it was a weapon that could kill monsters with less than 1,500 health in one blow! Naturally the STK-VII was Ark's trump card. But he inevitably used one when surrounded by the Bellos. The result was devastating. Dozens of Bellos disappeared in an instant!

‘This is more than I imagined! This power would be enough to wipe out dozens of level 60~70 monsters. In other words, the STK-VII made him invincible as long as he possessed it! He was carrying

around something that could save his life. ‘Oh my god, what a tremendous waste to use the grenade on the Bellos!’

He could confirm its power. It was the same on this occasion as now.

| |
|----------------------------|
| –Your level has risen! |
| –Your level has risen..... |

The message simultaneously appeared with the Bellos’ death. He had gained 4 levels! But Ark couldn’t be pleased. He survived a situation where he would’ve 100% died! And he managed to save the experience he gained from several days of hunting! It was equivalent to exchanging one STK-VII for his life. Now he had only 1 STK-VII remaining in his bag!

“Damn, was I too greedy?”

Regret surged like a tidal wave but he had used the item already. Moreover, wasn’t there a reason he had the STK-VII in the first place? If he used it then his goal.....

Even the might STK-VII had a downside. Everything caught in the explosion would disappear without a trace. So he couldn’t get any loot from the Bellos when he used the STK-VII. There was only the first two Bellos that he killed. Ark sighed and went back to the place where he killed the first Bellos.

He managed to obtain a few ‘Bellos Leather’ when examining the dead body. It was a basic leather product but there were still a lot of low level users so he could get a decent price for it. However, the reason he attacked the Bellos and risked danger wasn’t for some leather.

“The Bellos was a pair so it shouldn’t be far away.....”

Ark looked around for a while. He finally found a nest under some thick, overgrown vines. Ark’s target wasn’t the Bellos but this nest.

“Sheesh, are my efforts also in vain this time?”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured as he checked the nest. There were two reasons why Ark was looking for the Bellos' nest. The monsters in the Outlands rarely dropped equipment. Most of their loot was leather, bones, meat or ores. The Bellos were the same but they also gathered various things from other monsters and left it in their nest. Sometimes pioneer objects dropped in the Outlands would also be mixed within. The shoes Ark was wearing was one such equipment.

-Pioneer's Boots (Magic)

Item Type: Shoes Wearer Restriction: Level 50

Defense: 15 Durability: 8/50

Shoes widely used among beginner pioneers. These boots are made from the leather of a monster so they are suitable for most environments. These boots in particular are made from luxury leather and allows the pioneers to walk in the Outlands on Istana without being poisoned.

<When exposed to a natural toxic environment, damage is reduced by 5%>

Magic item! The defense and option was decent but the shoes matched Ark perfectly. Ark barely had any equipment so he was grateful to find it. Therefore Ark concentrated on finding the Bellos' nests but his income hadn't matched his expectations yet. He sometimes found equipment but they were generally level 30 items. This time he only found a rusty sword when searching the nest. However, that wasn't the only thing he obtained from the nest.

"There are 5 eggs?"

Ark gave the eggs in the nest a warm look. In fact, the second reason Ark risked hunting the Bellos was to obtain the eggs.

Usually nests contained 2~5 eggs.....

"My satiety decreased quite a bit so shall I eat one?"

Ark quickly picked up an egg and placed it in his mouth.

-You have eaten a Bellos' egg.

There was a slight toxicity but Steel Stomach means that you digested it with no problem.

The Bellos' egg has high nutritional density and eating it will give you additional stats.

<Satiety +60%, Health and Mental Power will recover by 800 for 3 minutes>

* Your resistance to various abnormal stats has increased by 30% for 1 hour.

This was why Ark wanted the Bellos' eggs!

It increased his satiety by 80% and recovered health and mental power by 800. Furthermore, it was a high protein and low calorie food so it increased his resistance to various states by 30% for one hour! The pioneers were exposed to various dangerous states in the Outlands so this was a necessary ability.

Over the past 6 days, he had eaten various types of meat in the Outlands but the Bellos' eggs gave the best bonuses. The only thing that weighed on his mind.....

"This is the Bellos' child....."

It was similar to killing the parents and eating the child. He hadn't thought like that in the past.

However, Ark just heard that his mother was pregnant so he couldn't help feeling uncomfortable. But if he thought like that then he couldn't eat chicken or boiled eggs. Humans inevitably took away the lives of others to survive.

'And why should I worry about monsters? I have to stop Lucifer quickly. What would happen to my younger sibling if my money is gone? The growth fees? Tuition? Father and Mother don't have a good grasp on economics! Yes, I have to become like a demon for my little sibling!'

Ark thoroughly firmed up his spirit. Therefore Ark had gathered 70 Bellos' eggs over the last few days from the nests. He didn't need to worry about food for a while.

"But....."

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark's mouth. He went through all this because he was lacking in information and experienced a large number of trials and errors! Now he was perfectly adapted to the environment of the Outlands after the past 6 days. His efforts meant he gained 13 levels and he gathered quite a few items. But was that all? He also obtained 70 Bellos' egg full of nutrition so he didn't need to worry about food for a while. Despite all of that.....

"What good is it if I used the STK-VII?"

He had also used 2 STK-VII.

"Damn, now I should stop hunting the Bellos. If I become too greedy and dozens of monsters swarm again then I might have to use the last STK-VII. Besides....."

Ark hadn't come to the Outlands to gain experience and items. He had received a quest from

Marquis Martin to infiltrate Charem.

"I thought I would be able to find it somehow if I went to the destination of the hidden city....."

Charem was 1,000 km from Nabe. If he walked then it would take a month but Ark had the air board.

However, he often received surprised attacks from monsters while travelling on the air board after entering the Outlands. But Ark kept his eyes open to surprise attacks and managed to reach the quest destination in a few days. However, Marquis Martin hadn't given him the exact location of Charem. No, he didn't know Charem's exact location when he gave Ark the quest. Marquis Martin told Ark that Charem was hidden in a 100 km diameter around the coordinates he gave Ark.

'It is amazing but Charem is still a city. It's not like finding a needle and I have the air board so I should find it in one day. I should worry

about how to enter the sealed city.'

At least that's what Ark thought. It had been 4 days since he arrived at the destination. Yet he still couldn't find the city on the 4th day. He was also distracted by hunting. Ark would sneak out of the designated area for 3~4 hours to hunt. The remaining 5~6 hours was spent searching on the air board. But over the last 4 days, he hadn't met any users or NPCs let along a city. He had no choice. The place that Marquis Martin specified.....

"It is a good thing I bought that gear. If Marquis Martin gave the information correctly..... I should go back to that place."

Ark packed the eggs and ran across the forest. He pulled out the air board as soon as he left the vines area.

"Let's go! Today I will definitely find it!"

Wiiiiii!

Ark rose while on the air board and crossed the Outlands.

Fishing Reel!

“Huhuhu. These guys!”

Ark smacked his lips together with a pleased smile. Ark was looking at a fish from his air board. The size was 50 cm and the large fish jumped up towards the air board. The bottom part was somewhat strange as it looked like a centipede but that was an unrelated problem. Istana was an alien planet. Wasn't it understandable that the shape of the fish was strange? It was all the same once it entered his stomach.

“This evening is sashimi!”

Ark grinned as he took out the Impact Blade. And seokeok, seokek. The unique fish was instantly cut up.

“Heh, first the Bellos and now this. Isn't the wasteland a heaven filled with food? Does that mean I filled up my bag with Space Food for nothing? Yes, next time I should buy soy sauce or wasabi.”

Ark muttered as he chewed on the alien fish. But Ark was here to play around. And Ark wasn't feeling relaxed.

“Today is the 10th day with no results. Not including the 2 days of travelling time, I've wasted 8 days here. Well, the hunting grounds are nearby so I can't complain but.....”

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark's mouth. He looked around and sighed again. A sigh naturally emerged every time he saw it.

Bbol bbol bbol bbol, bbol bbol bbol bbol.

The air board was flying over water. Was it a huge lake? The sea? He tried to drink some water and it had a bitter taste but wasn't poisonous so he didn't know whether to call it a lake or the sea. Anyway, the water stretched out everywhere he looked. This was the reason for Ark's sigh.

Ark travelled 1,000 km to Marquis Martin's GPS information only to arrive at a huge lake. Marquis Martin guessed that Charem was hidden in a 100 km range of the lake. Of course there was also some land. However, the land was only 10% of the entire area. No matter how complex the terrain, Ark could investigate the area in a few hours when using the air board. So Ark searched the land first. He spent 2 whole days precisely searching but he didn't even find a shadow of the city Marquis Martin mentioned.

"In the end it must be somewhere on the lake....."

His eyes returned to the lake that took up 90% of the search area. In fact, the lake was a high possibility when he remembered Marquis Martin's information about Charem.

-Charem isn't a normal city. It is camouflaged with a few layers of advanced shields and are equipped with devices to detect movement.

The shield might have some unknown state of the art functions.

"This is key information. It would be strange for a city the scale of Charem to be on land and not be detected. So I wasn't convinced until I arrived here and saw the lake. If Charem is on the lake then large aircraft carriers could move freely. It would be possible to quickly escape from Charem if there are hostile federation soldiers nearby."

Ark was sure of his reasoning. A city like Charem couldn't be easily moved. Nevertheless, they didn't leave the area that the federation had already identified. If Charem was a city in the form of a ship then that would settle two questions at the same time.

"Then the problem is simple. On the lake is different from the land. The shield might have state of the art functions but the trail can't be completely erased. Especially if it can't move. Huhuhu, finding Charem should be surprisingly simple."

In fact, he wasn't worried about looking for Charem before. The range to look for the target was 100 km. But it was still the size of a city. Therefore he thought it wouldn't be more difficult than finding a

lost puppy. Not to mention there was no place to hide in the lake. It was the problem afterwards that he was worried about.

“Charem is a smuggling city that turned its back on the galactic federation. The federation had been allies with the Aschulat and Charem was useful so they left it alone. I don’t know why they’re acting like this now but Charem is now under attack by the federation. Naturally it would strengthen its defences.”

That’s why the secret agent Kara couldn’t leave. That meant it was difficult to enter and leave. Therefore Ark thought the main purpose of the <Charem’s Infiltration> quest was to sneak in

‘But.....’

Ark had Stealth. The security couldn’t stop him if they couldn’t see him. If he had Stealth then he could somehow find a way. Ark hid his body using Stealth and started to actively search the lake. Now he just had to find Charem and break in. However.....

It was useless. The electromagnetic power on the surface of the water made it difficult for the air board to move quickly. 15 km/hr was the limit even when he firmly stepped on the accelerator. Thus ark spent two days riding the air board around the wide lake. But the result was a total failure. He checked everywhere and didn’t find a small sailboat let along an aircraft carrier the size of a city. That’s why Ark stopped and spent 6 days hunting the Bellos. He thought it was easy but now he had reached a deadlock. So his mind was preoccupied while wandering around collecting the eggs. And Ark’s worries started then. Although he searched for a few days, Ark couldn’t find the quest destination.

“Did the city fly somewhere else?”

He had that idea but he soon shook his head.

“No. It is impossible for Marquis Martin to not anticipate that. If there was a possibility of the city flying away then he wouldn’t have given the quest. Marquis Martin is still confident that Charem is someone on this lake. He wouldn’t give the quest if he isn’t certain. Yes, Charem is definitely somewhere within this 100 km area.

Nevertheless, if I can't find any traces on the land or on the lake.....”

There was only one place remaining.

“Is it underwater?”

Ark hadn't checked that place yet. The water underneath the lake shone with a brilliant maroon light.

“Charem might be a submarine city moving under the water.”

This was the conclusion Ark reached after a few days of searching. If Ark thought like that then it explained how the federation didn't know the location or find it on the radar.

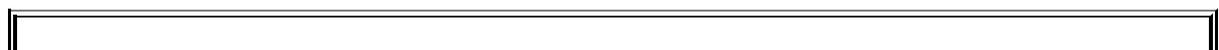
“Yes, there is no doubt. Charem is a submarine!”

Ark was convinced. And his expression instantly darkened. Even if it was only 15 km/hr, he could still search on the air board when it was above the surface of the water. It wasn't difficult even if the search range was 100 km. But that changed if the search place was underwater. ‘Swim’ or ‘dive’ wasn't something that required skills. Once again, users going to the Outlands required a body coating to cope with the special environment. There were quite a few places filled with toxic gases or no air at all on the planet. One feature of body coating was that enough oxygen was stored in the body to last for 24 hours. In addition, Ark had specifically received the body coating focused on survival. There was a 50% added bonus to environment adaptation so Ark could last for 36 hours with no air. He could easily investigate under the water.

“It is good up to this point.....”

The problem was the air board. The air board couldn't be used underwater! He needed to search 100 km without the air board. Rather than a few days, it might end up taking a few months. Of course Ark had no intention of spending a few months on one quest. So he continued to worry for a while.

“Yes, there is that!”



-Wire Camera

Item Type: Search Camera

When wandering around there are often ruins. Fearful monsters might be hiding behind those doors. Or great treasure might be hidden in crevices. There was no way to check beyond the door or inside the crack so pioneers often suffered. Thus the Wire Camera is the best choice for those pioneers. The Wire Camera is a tiny camera attached to a 30 metre long wire. It is an equipment that can fit in spaces only 5 mm wide and allows ULTRA HD image quality. If the related application is installed on the Nymphe then operating it is easy! Recording is also available.

* Using it in places like the women's restroom is difficult! You will be caught!

This was an item he found in Nabe's shopping area.

'But the price is a little.....'

70 gold was the price attached to the tag. However Ark closed his eyes and bought it. Of course, it couldn't be used in women's restrooms like stated. In fact, Nabe wasn't the first time that Ark saw the Wire Camera. Tori had used a similar tool in Nephelim when robbing the federation's museum. The one Tori used was illegally modified through hacking but the normal Wire Camera was still useful. Ark had the thought after receiving the <Charem's Infiltration> quest.

'This equipment might be helpful when I'm trying to sneak in.'

The Wire Camera wasn't only useful for the infiltration quest. The information window meant that it could also be used for ruins investigation. So he endured it! 70 gold!

"But I never imagined that it could be used on this way."

Ark took out the Wire Camera and connected it to his Nymphe. And the image from the camera appeared on the Nymphe.

"Testing OK. The image quality is better than I expected?"

Ark laughed and dangled the wire underneath the lake. Once he released all 30 metres of the wire, the image of the lake bed appeared on his Nymphe. This was the method Ark came up with. Ark held the Wire Camera and moved around using the air board. He didn't need to search underwater directly. And.....Bbol bbol bbol, bbol bbol bbol bbol.....

The image changed as the air board moved.

“Ha, isn't this quite exciting?”

He sat down on the air board and watched the lake through the screen of the Nymphe. He found the new usage of the Wire Camera interesting. But that was only for a few hours. Watching the bottom of the lake wasn't interesting after a few hours. In addition, this was also hard labour in its own way. His eyes started becoming sore and tired after 4 hours of watching the same screen. So he couldn't remember how many times he fell off into the lake. But the thing that made him more angry was the search speed. He thought that searching underwater wouldn't take that long if he used this method. However, it turned out differently once he started. This was the 10th day after leaving Nabe and now it was 4 hours since he started searching with the Wire Camera. Yet he only managed to search 30% of the whole area. The small camera meant he had to go back and forth in the same area several times so it took longer than expected. It might be faster than jumping into the lake and swimming around but.....

“This is still taking a lot of time!”

He still needed to explore 70% of the area! A sigh emerged as he looked at the spacious lake. If it was a different NPC then he probably would've given up the quest already. But Marquis Martin who gave him the quest was an influential noble of the galactic federation. In other words, he already invested 10 days and received the Hyde Helmet as a reward so how could he give up now? Moreover, Ark hadn't just been wasting time. Once again, Ark was the type to find some benefits and not just waste time. He would find some monsters to kill or dig up some ingredients.

“Let's see.....”

He stopped the air board for a meal. Ark operated his Nymphe and changed the screen to his inventory. When he left Nabe, his bag was filled with essential supplies and now it was full of various japtem.

There were the Bellos' eggs, monster leather, broken equipment and various loot he received from the monsters he killed before beginning the underwater exploration. But there were some items classified separately.

-Rainbow Pearl (x12)

Item type: Jewel

A rare pearl found from giant clams that inhabit Istana. The various colours give it a beautiful shine like a rainbow and it can increase various resistances when used as a decorative accessory.

-Decrepit Axe

Item Type: Hatchet Wearer Restriction: Level 10

Attack: 2 Durability: 2/30

A common axe that has been left in the northern lake on Istana for a long time. The words 'prayer for jackpot' is carved on the handle. Maybe someone believed the legend of the gold axe and threw it? Even the future contains such stupid humans. You shouldn't expect to use this axe as a weapon or tool.

-Stone Doll with an Unusual Shape

Item Type: ???

A stone statue found in Istana's northern lake. There is no way to confirm what purpose the doll was made for but it is very old. You might be able to receive a decent price for it when taking it to an antique dealer or collector.....

A lake larger than 100 km! He found various things when exploring underwater. There were giant clams, various metal parts from the wreckage of ships as well as buildings from ancient ruins. Every time he saw something in the Nymphe, he would jump into the lake and

search every corner. Apart from the Rainbow Pearls, stone dolls or Decrepit Axe, he found 10 other similar items. But it was rarely worth his labour costs. Although the Rainbow Pearl could be made into jewellery, the other items were similar to garbage and would only be sold for a few copper coins. But a few copper coins were still money. Copper would turn into silver and silver into gold.

“My bag is heavy so it isn’t an entire waste of time.”

This was Ark’s unchanging theory. He continued to dive into the lake even if it was only for a few coppers. Ark was sure that Charem was a submarine or underwater city so he spent some time searching for it. It was also possible he might find a crucial clue to Charem when underwater. So he searched the bottom of the lake generously even if it was for a few coppers. Therefore Ark filled his bag with loot, mostly junk, from the lake. He changed his mind when he got the opportunity for such unexpected income.

“Yes, I can kill some time while looking for Charem. It isn’t a lot but I can get money by searching through the lake. If I continue looking through the lake then I might be able to get some unexpected profits.”

Then something caught his eye. Fish were swimming lazily on the Nymphe screen.

“Oh my god! I’ve been bored for the last few hours so why didn’t I think of that?”

The fish scattered around! There were ingredients right underneath his air board. Of course, Ark was able to obtain food from semi-regularly hunting in the forest. But the more food he had the better. It was good to save it for emergencies. The fish might even give additional effects like the Bellos eggs.

“The fish in the lake aren’t monsters. They will run away the moment they see someone holding a sword. Then.....”

Ark rummaged through the bag and pulled out a sharp tooth. It was a hook shaped tooth from the Bellos. Ark used a simple tool from his tool box and fixed a monster’s meat to the tooth using wire. And.....

-Synthesis: Wire Camera + Bellos' Tooth+ Monster's meat for bait= fishing!

It was the birth of a plausible fishing rod!

Bump!

It was less than 10 minutes before there was a response. He pulled the wire and a spotted fish was dangling from it.

“Hahaha! It came! It came! It is like I expected.”

Ark whipped out the sword and deconstructed the fish. Then an information window appeared in front of him.

-You have discovered a life form not yet reported to the galactic federation!

It is a living existence in the wastelands that no one knows exist. When data about unidentified creatures are registered through the Nympe onto the federation's database, various rewards such as experience, fame or adventure points will be given. The compensation will change depending on the difficulty of obtaining the unidentified creature. In addition, the person who first registers the creature has the right to name it.

Would you like to register information about the life form onto the galactic federation's database? (Y/N)

“Eh? What is this?”

Ark's eyes widened. It was a fish that no users have discovered yet! He never expected something like this. However, Ark started the game immediately after service started so Galaxian was only 4 months old. Most users probably concentrated on raising their level to receive the body coating. Who would head to a lake 1,000 km away from Nabe just for fishing? So it wasn't strange that Ark was the first one to fish in this lake.

“I can receive a reward if I register with the federation's database?”

The information was really unimaginable. Anyway, Ark thought about

it for a while. Of course, this was the first time it happened in Galaxian but other online games had a similar system. If a new dungeon or hidden village was discovered then registering it would give bonuses. But Ark had never registered the information. He thought it was better to monopolize the dungeon rather than earning some experience or reputation. However, the circumstances were different this time. There was no user who would come just to catch fish and Ark had no intention of monopolizing the fish in the lake.

“Register! The name of the fish is Spotted!”

Ark roughly decided the name of the fish.

-A new fish species has been added to the galactic federation's database.

The fish living in Istana's northern lake has been named 'Spotted.'

The pioneer 'Ark' has been registered as the person who first discovered and named it. The degree of difficulty obtaining this unidentified creature has been reported as ☆ and the compensation received.

<Experience +200, Fame +10, Adventure +10>

200 experience! That was similar to killing 2~3 monsters. He also gained a little bit of fame and adventure points!

“I can also raise my fame and experience in this way.”

Then Ark would suck up as much as possible. Anyway, in this situation Ark already had to search every corner of the lake.

“What else should I do? I can raise experience.”

Thus Ark started to earnestly devote himself to fishing. He attached another Bellos' tooth to the wire. But he wanted to gain as much experience as possible so he attached 20 different teeth to the wire. He went around the lake and started to continuously catch the fish. 3~4 fish would be pulled up at once!

-A new fish species 'Sneak' has been registered to the galactic

federation's database.

<Experience +150, Fame +7, Adventure +7>

-A new fish species 'Bark' has been registered to the galactic federation's database.

<Experience +250, Fame +12, Adventure +12>

-A new fish species 'Happy' has been registered to the galactic federation's database.

<Experience +100, Fame +5, Adventure +5>

-Your level has risen!

The experience was no joke. There was almost no traffic here so 90% of the fish caught in the lake were unidentified creatures. He had no time to worry about the name of the fish. Therefore he named the fish after a dog that he used to have and other random thoughts. Ark quickly gained 1 level. But after a few hours, the frenzied fishing slowed down. After a while, the fish that Ark had already caught and registered kept on appearing. Other users would be satisfied and stop at this point but not Ark.

"Isn't it strange? So far I've caught dozens of fish. It might be a lot but it is impossible for them to be the only species considering the size of the lake. When I entered the lake I saw many other types of fish. Why aren't those guys taking the bait?"

The search for Charem had already lost priority for Ark. Registering unidentified fish was more important than finding Charem right now. Ark was completely immersed in fishing.

"Yes, the bait! Change the bait!"

Bingo!

-A new fish species 'Jjong' has been registered to the galactic federation's database.

<Experience +200, Fame +10, Adventure +10>

If he changed to a different type of monster bait then he could catch new fish. Once all the possible fish could be caught, Ark would immediately change the bait. When he used up all the monster meat, he even used nuts and fruits from the forest to catch the fish. He repeated it over and over for a few days and registered dozens of fish species. He also gained some levels.

-Your level has risen!

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆☆☆) has been learnt.

Fishing (User, Passive): Fishing is one of the safest ways to obtain food. In addition, there are many underwater creatures that haven't been registered to the galactic federation's database yet. The federation is always interested in new information so they will give compensation for it. But don't be careless. There is no guarantee that all aquatic organisms caught by the fishing rod will be safe.

<The probability of catching valuable fish species will increase by 20%>

He finally obtained the fishing skill. He combined various materials to make a fishing rod and managed to successfully learn the skill. Ark was truly an innate survivor. But there was no meaning in getting the skill. He received it after he had already been fishing for 3 days. He already used all the ingredients available from the vicinity as bait and was now using fish droppings. There were still many unregistered fish species that he hadn't managed to catch. However, Ark went around with the Bellos' teeth for one more day but couldn't catch any new fish. And now.....

"I still need to explore....."

Ark filled his stomach with the fish called 'Sneak' and looked gloomily at the maroon lake. He had still only explored 30% of the lake. Of course, Ark still dove into the lake sometimes to salvage items but exploration wasn't a high priority for him due to the fishing. But even if he concentrated on searching, he had only explored 50% of the lake. If he calculated then it would take at least

a week to explore all of the lake. It was indeed a gloomy prospect! Ark looked at the screen of the Nymph and felt his breath being clogged up. However he had already invested more than 10 days.

“I have to see this through to the end.”

Ark sighed and was about to move the air board.

Pang!

The wire tightened again. He hadn't caught any new species for one day. Therefore Ark removed all the bait and just concentrated on investigating. Yet the hook was still attached so a fish was caught on it.

“Sheesh, I guess I need to remove the hook as well. Eh?”

Ark pulled the wire without thinking and became confused. The sensation he felt through the wire wasn't ordinary. So far the 'Elephant' fish species was the largest one he caught. The pulling sensation felt a lot bigger than the Elephant fish.

‘This might be a new fish species!’

Ark's face became tense. He had to catch the fish on the hook. If he pulled to excessively then the fishing line or hook would break. He wasn't worried about the fishing line but about the Bellos' teeth breaking if he couldn't control his power. But now Ark had the fishing skill.

“I can't miss!”

Ark vigorously grabbed the wire.

Cheolseok! Cheolseok! Chwaaaah!

A full-fledged tug of war began. Ark could feel the unknown species struggling desperately but he didn't rush. Fishing was patience. If he hurried then it would become disadvantageous to him. Right now the urgent thing was catching the unknown fish species.

“I'm someone who managed to play the game after a long time.

Okay, I won't give up even if it takes several hours!"

Ark moved the air board and regulated his power while pulling the wire. So Ark struggled with the unknown fish for 30 minutes. He suddenly felt an abrupt release of tension transmitted through the wire. Ark had experience in fishing so he could instinctively sense it.

"Now!"

Ark strongly pulled the wire at that moment!

"Huk! W-what is this?"

Ark gaped with confusion. He had struggled for 30 minutes so Ark had expected a huge fish. Yet the body hanging from the wire was 1 m 50 cm! But this wasn't the first time he saw the species. No, this existence couldn't even be classified as a fish species. The species gasped and pulled out the Bellos' tooth stuck in its leg. It fell down and glared at Ark.

–You bastard, what are you doing?

It approached and grabbed Ark's collar.

–Dammit! That hurt! The needle was stuck in me! Damn, do you want to die? Am I a fish?

It definitely wasn't a fish. The person holding onto Ark's collar was.....

"Charenjok?"

He had fished up an unexpected thing.

Under the Black Water.....

'Why in a place like this.....'

Ark looked around with astonished eyes. It was a small swamp surrounded by cliffs on three sides where 100 octopuses were gathered around. The octopuses were the size of a person. Ark had seen octopuses like these before. They were the Charenjok that cleaned the pipes on R-14. Ark had fished up a Charenjok a while ago. He was stunned as Ark never imagined he would see a Charenjok in a place like this.

"A-aren't you a Charenjok?"

–What? What are you saying after pulling at the hook in my leg for 30 minutes? Do I look like a pushover? Kaack, spit! I can't just leave! Compensation! Compensation!

The Charenjok said angrily and spat ink over him. But Ark was thinking about something else. Ark's purpose for searching around the lake was to locate Charem. However he still hadn't explored half of the total area. A week or more was the amount of time needed to search through the whole area. There was also no guarantee that he could find Charem after searching for a week. There were many reasons but the crucial one was that Charem could move. There was no guarantee that Charem wouldn't move to an area that Ark already explored. That was the reason why Ark considered abandoning the quest. It would also take some time to 100% explore the lake. No matter how much time and effort invested, there was a possibility he couldn't find Charem. It would require a considerable amount of luck. In such a situation he had met a Charenjok. The Charenjok were aliens Ark encountered before.

'If the Charenjok live in this lake.....'

The Charenjok might know where Charem was. Ark got the idea and quickly asked.

“Does the Charenjok live in this lake?”

–What? How do you know I’m a Charenjok and not just an octopus? Huh? Is that why you fished me up? I’m 100% an octopus. Anyway, I’m an octopus not a Charenjok.

“I apologize for the incident just now. It wasn’t on purpose. If I knew the Charenjok lived in this lake then I wouldn’t have gone fishing so dangerously. In fact, there is a reason I know you’re the Charenjok. In the past I became close friends with the Charenjok living on a space station. Do you know how happy I am stumbling across the Charenjok in a place like this? If other Charenjok live around here then I would like to meet them.”

–Hah, how funny. Do you think I will be tricked?

The Charenjok spat and declared sharply.

-You think you can trick me so that I would sell out my colleagues? Hah, I already know your identity. You, aren’t you a slave trader? You sneaky bastard! Yes, that is clearly your identity.....long words aren’t needed. Now, bring it on! If you think that I’m a Charenjok then prove it! Bring it one! Bring it on!

The Charenjok raised its octopus like legs and made an X. The octopus seemed to have some twisted misunderstanding. However, Ark’s situation meant he needed to seek help from the Charenjok. He couldn’t take the X personally or turn the octopus into sashimi. Ark struggled on how to remove the octopus’ misunderstanding when he remembered an item.

“Will you believe me if I show you this?”

Ark took out a small octopus and showed it. It was the Charenjok’s token that he received from Burum who was the manager of R-14’s secret hunting ground. The item restored 1 health every 3 seconds for 10 minutes for a total of 200 health. Well he had over 1,000 health so it wasn’t a big help but it was a helpful item. Anyway, now Ark had a way to prove he was acquaintances with the Charenjok. But the Charenjok’s reaction was more than he expected.

'T-this.....

The Charenjok showed their emotions through colour. Now his head turned to the colour of shock.

-Follow me. I will guide you to our village.

The Charenjok worried for a while before nodding his head and replying. The place he arrived was a swamp surrounded by cliffs on three sides and the lake. The bog was surrounded by cliffs and the lake well hidden by the cliffs so it was a tough place to find unless deliberately searching for it. The Charenjok had their own reasons for living in a place like this. While Ark was busy thinking.....

-Um.....

A massive Charenjok 3~4 times the size of a normal one messed with the token and started speaking. And he stared at Ark.

-This is definitely something that only an elder of the Charenjok would have. This is an important token that the Charenjok elder wouldn't give up easily. I can't imagine the deep friendship that must be between you for the elder to give it to a human. You said he was cleaning pipes.....

Burum hadn't hesitated at all when giving him the Charenjok token. Well, he wanted control of the paid hunting grounds quickly but he hadn't felt like the Charenjok elder hesitated at all when giving it to him. No, he only just discovered that Burum was a Charenjok elder. Well he wasn't that interested in something like that.

-Yes, the elder who gave you this token was Burum?

"Yes, that's right."

Ark explained how he met the Charenjok on R-14 and became friends with them. The giant Charenjok called Bakum who was an elder of the Charenjok sighed bitterly after hearing Ark's answer.

-Pipe cleaner.....indeed, a refugee on a foreign planet wouldn't receive that many benefits. It is unfortunate but at least they are still alive. Sometimes I would think. Should we also defect to the

galactic federation like other Charenjok? But it was clear what treatment our species would get as refugees. So I chose freedom rather than safety. I decided to refuse the protection of the galactic federation and lived in the Outlands.

Istana was the planet of the federation but they only had control over the terraformed areas around the cities. Therefore the Outlands which accounted for 90% of Istana was a lawless area and the Charenjok who lived there didn't need citizenship. Burum intended to purchase land to buy this citizenship. The Charenjok who had no citizenship couldn't escape from the galactic federation.

But getting a citizenship didn't mean freedom. Therefore some Charenjok chose to abandon the safety of the cities in order to live a life of true freedom! This freedom meant they didn't need to clean pipes to receive a small salary. They could get any decent paying jobs that were available. That's why the smuggling city of Charem was able to operate in the wilds of Istana. It was a place free of the federation's control so the Charenjok could live openly in Charem despite not having any citizenship. But the circumstances were different for the Charenjok in Charem.

Charem was a city equipped with a shield and many advanced functions. The vast majority of people flocking to Charem were criminals but they still had citizenship with the federation, Aschulat or Rama. In other words, they were part of a civilization. On the other hand, the Charenjok had just lost their home planet and civilization. At one point, they flourished so much that they even toured Earth on UFOs. Then their home planet was taken away by the Kakajok and they were just common octopuses. And living in the Outlands wasn't safe for octopuses.

—Many of us entered the Outlands and were killed by monsters over several years. But the most annoying thing is the slave traders. It took some time to avoid monsters and slave traders to occupy a spot here.....

That was the reason why the Charenjok on R-14 didn't leave the federation despite receiving discrimination. People without citizenship weren't protected by the galactic federation. They were virtually

treated like monsters. Therefore there were many Charenjok in the Outlands who were captured by slave traders. The pioneers also entered the Outlands so the Charenjok were forced to hide. That's why the Charenjok thought Ark was a slave hunter when he first fished him up. Anyway, the octopuses were quite pitiful.

–But I can believe you since you have the Charenjok's token. This token is the proof of your friendship with the Charenjok elder. Throughout the generations, the Charenjok has passed on these tokens to sincere friends. We might've lost our homeland and become refugees but the Charenjok still hasn't forgotten their pride. You should relax here and eat.

The elder octopus pointed to the fish piled on one side. Spotted, Sneak, Bark, Happy.....they were fish that Ark already had in his bag. And the place the elder octopus indicated for him to rest on was a gap in the rocks of the cliff.

‘.....Eh?’

Ark eyed the fish and rock gap with uncomfortable eyes. Some areas that Ark couldn't understand floated inside his head.

‘This lake contained Charem. And Charem is a smuggling city. The city is now sealed off so where are the smugglers coming from? And slaves are one of the smuggled goods. Naturally slave traders would be among those entering and leaving Charem. But Bakum said they settled in this place to avoid the slave traders. Even if the lake is 100 km in size, it wouldn't be entirely safe.’

He also felt such doubts while fishing. A large number of people had to enter or leave the lake to get to the hidden city. There were many fish in the lake yet none were registered in the federation's database. Wouldn't everyone entering or leaving the city be aware that registering an unidentified creature receive compensation? There was no user who wouldn't drool over bonus experience. Therefore he became nervous by the elder octopus' words.

‘Did I make a mistake? Or perhaps Marquis Martin gave me the wrong information?’

“I want to ask one thing.”

Ark said before cutting to the chase. Once again, Ark didn't come here to fish or find items.

“In fact, I came to this lake because I heard that there is a city of alien species here. I can't tell you anymore but there is a reason I'm looking for the city. You've lived in the lake for a long time so you should be aware. Have you seen a city anywhere?”

-City?

The elder octopus' eyes widened.

–Like you said, we've lived in this place for a few years. Although we don't dare go onto land where there are monsters, we know everything about this lake. But I've never seen something like a city. If such a thing was here then isn't it impossible for us not to see it?

Something was strange. Ark's heart started beating quickly and he spoke again.

“Then it doesn't have to be a city. A strange place is fine.....”

–A strange place.....

The elder octopus suddenly flinched and his head turned to a worried colour. There was something. Ark sensed it after seeing the elder's head change colour.

“Anything is fine. If there is something strange then tell me.”

–No, this is unrelated to the city you're searching for. But telling you about it isn't difficult. In fact, in this lake a prohibited area exists.

“Prohibited area?”

–Yes, it is a place that a whirlpool occasionally occurs. When we first came here a young octopus....no, some young Charenjok wanted to test their bravery and entered. But not 1 person returned. The problem is that their bodies weren't found. It was like they just disappeared or evaporated. A search party was sent but they completely disappeared too. It isn't just the whirlpool. Sometimes

people would disappear even when there was no whirlpool. Approximately 50 Charenjok ended up disappearing. So I declared that area prohibited and nobody goes near it anymore.

The elder octopus sighed and looked around.

–That’s why the village’s atmosphere is like this.

In fact, Ark also thought the atmosphere of the village was odd when he first came here. All of the octopuses’ heads were a green colour. At first he thought it was something to do with the lake’s water quality but they seemed to have some worries. Ark had experienced with these colour changes so he knew they were feeling ‘fidgety’ and ‘worried.’ Of course, Ark wasn’t interested in the octopuses’ emotional state. But he was interested in the prohibited area. Sometimes a whirlpool would appear and the octopuses would disappear?

‘Maybe it is connected to why I can’t find Charem.’

“Has something happened?”

–That....you can’t help even if you know.

Right now every bit of information was important to Ark.

“I am someone who thinks of the Charenjok as a friend of the heart. It is because of my sincerity that Burum on R-14 gave me the token.”

Ark wasn’t telling the whole truth. He was the type to distort the truth if it suited his purposes.

“You might not be the ones I shared a friendship with but I consider all Charenjok my friends. If I can then I would like to help. If you have a problem then please tell me.”

–To think I would meet a human who says something like this.

The elder octopus looked impressed and nodded.

-The problem isn’t a big secret. A few days ago a couple of young Charenjok disappeared. We belatedly discovered this and went out

to search. We swept the lake for a few days but didn't find them. The only place we didn't search is the prohibited area. It is obvious that the young Charenjok headed to that area.

“Why would the young Charenjok head to that place?”

-A few months ago there was another incident where a few Charenjok disappeared. They chased after the rare Elephant fish that isn't easily seen and entered the prohibited area.

Ark couldn't understand those words. The Elephant fish that the elder octopus mentioned was one that Ark named directly. It had only been named a few days ago but the NPC mentioned it casually like they had been calling it that for a long time. Once again he realized that he was inside a game.

‘Should I have given it a more plausible name?’

It felt bad hearing the name from somebody else's mouth. Anyway, the elder octopus continued talking.

–The ones who disappeared this time are the family of the Charenjok from the previous incident. We told them that they absolutely shouldn't go to the prohibited area.....in the end things turned out like this. But if we send another search party to the prohibited area then the situation will repeat again and again.....

The heads of the octopuses gathered around the elder turned even paler. Hearing the situation again made them more nervous. But in the next moment their heads simultaneously turned white. It was due to Ark's subsequent words.

“I will look for them.”

-What, what the? What did you say?

“I will go to the prohibited area and look for the Charenjok.”

-W-what....didn't you hear me? You won't come back alive once you enter the prohibited area.

“I will still enter.”

Ark said with a resolute expression.

“I’m a pioneer. A pioneer’s pleasure is to pursue unknown areas! Of course a pioneer has to risk their life for that. It is better for a qualified person like me to go.”

–But they’ve already disappeared for a few days. They probably already.....

“I’ll go check.”

Ark approached the elder octopus and grabbed his shoulder firmly.

“Like I said, the Charenjok is a friend of my heart. I will overcome danger and enter the prohibited area to look for the young Charenjok. How can I say the Charenjok is a friend of my heart when I ignore their plight? Please tell me the location of the prohibited area. I will be happy to enter a place of death if it means saving the Charenjok.”

It was the place where he had to search for Charem. However, if he already needed to enter then he might as well get some benefit from the octopuses. The octopuses had run away from monsters and slave traders and hid various items behind rocks and weeds in the lake. Therefore the octopus might give him something valuable. He also might find a useable item. Anyway!

The octopuses were impressed. Their heads turned such a bright red that it seemed like they were going to explode.

–Did you hear? I brought that human here!

The octopus that Ark fished up exclaimed.

–Awesome! This is the first time I’ve seen such a brave human!

The octopuses spilled ink as they moved their bodies excitedly. The sight caused goose bumps to form on his body.

–You really.....

Their impressed behaviour continued for a while. The elder octopus who also looked impressed finally said.

–I understand. If that is your intention then I won't stop you anymore. I'm truly ashamed but I must respectfully ask for your help. I have my pride but right now I am speaking for the Charenjok. I can't just send you to your possible death while looking for the young Charenjok without anything.

'Is it a prepayment? They're giving me something first?'

Expectation filled his face. Ark's eyes shone like lanterns at the thought. The elder octopus fiddled with the token and nodded.

–It looks like the seal hasn't been released from this token yet.

"Huh? Seal?"

–Yes, a special ancient power is sealed within the tokens given to the Charenjok elders. Of course, this power still has an effect now. But the seal has to be released through a special ritual for the true power to be shown. Elder Burum who gave you this token is probably young and inherited it from another elder.

–Elder-nim, perhaps.....?

The octopuses exclaimed with surprise after hearing their elder's words.

–No! Why is Elder-nim.....

–Yes, Elder-nim we are refugees who lost our home and are drifting through the galaxy. Only a few elders remain in this galaxy. Of course we are thankful to the human but he hasn't found the young Charenjok yet.....

'What the, what is this? Why are they in an uproar?'

The atmosphere was hard to understand. It was obvious that the octopuses didn't like it at all. However the elder octopus was determined.

–It is already decided!

The elder octopus replied in a firm voice. And....all of a sudden he

bit at his legs? Why was he suddenly biting off a leg? Was he telling Ark to bite the octopus leg while searching for the prohibited area? Just as Ark was thinking this. The elder octopus placed his leg and the token on a table. And the leg was attached to the token.

Bbok! Bbok! Bbok! Bbok!

After a long time. The bouncing octopus leg lost its elasticity and fell. Light was then emitted from the chewed off leg.

-The level of the Charenjok's Token (Special) has increased!

Charenjok's Token (Special) Lv 2

Item type: Recovery

The power of the token received from Burum on R-14 was blocked by a special seal. Bakum the leader of the Charenjok hiding on Istana was impressed by your courage and released the seal. The seal being released means that 2 health will be recovered every 4 seconds for 10 minutes. In addition, experience will accumulate every time it is used and it can evolve to a stronger token.

<Recovery from poison, your health will recover by 2 every 4 seconds for 10 minutes

Cool down time: 1 hour>

'What, what the? The Charenjok's Token is a growth type item?'

Ark's eyes popped out at the information window. Originally the Charenjok's Token restored 1 health every 3 seconds for 10 minutes for a total of 200 health recovered. 200~300 health recovered was useful but it became less so once his health increased over 1,000. Now the item restored 2 health every 4 seconds for a total of 300. That was an extra 100 health recovered in 10 minutes. It wasn't a big different but the recovery would increase with each level up. When used steadily it could increase to 100, 200, 300.....it would recover more health. It could grow! There was nothing more exciting for a RPG user. An item that could grow was a jackpot! He was just wasting time when he fished up an octopus and received a jackpot like this. He also didn't understand it yet but he received a

possible clue to find Charem.

‘A big fish! I really fished up something big!’

It was truly a game. But there was a part he didn’t like.

‘Damn that Burum! If he unsealed it immediately then how much would it have grown by now? Ah, I really become mad when thinking about it. I explained everything when handing over the paid hunting ground and he just chucked the token at me! That bastard, are his 8 legs so valuable that he can’t part with one?’

Ark thought casually. Anyway, the elder octopus looked tired after breaking the seal and he said.

–This is the only thing I can give you for entering the dangerous prohibited area. It is only a little bit but I hope the broken seal is useful. So I beg you to search.

The elder said to Ark while his hands were pressing against his wound.

–I’m asking you. The young Charenjok are our hope. It might be too late but I’m not giving up yet. Even finding our children’s body would be good. This is the last request of this old man.

At the same time an information window appeared.

<Under the Black Water>

The Charenjok living in the northern lake of Istana have discovered a fearful secret about the lake. Sometimes a whirlpool would appear in a certain area of the lake and any Charenjok who encounter it won’t return.

Now some young Charenjok who think of it as a ghost story has disappeared in the prohibited area. You have volunteered to investigate the prohibited area and Bakum was so impressed that he released the seal on your token. You have already received your reward. Now investigate the prohibited area and find the whereabouts of the Charenjok children.

Difficulty: ???

Bbol bbol bbol bbol, bbol bbol bbol bbol.

Ark sat cross legged on the air board and looked around. The air board was moving across the lake towards the prohibited area Bakum told him about.

“I feel a little uneasy but.....”

Ark had received the quest to investigate the prohibited area but he actually felt uneasy.

‘I’ve heard various things from the octopuses but I don’t know anything about the prohibited area. And there is no way of discovering what is there.’

Ark only knew one piece of information. The Charenjok frequently disappeared in that area. The Charenjok didn’t have any combat power but their environmental adaptation was excellent. Furthermore, the Charenjok were octopuses so underwater was their home environment. It was difficult to imagine the Charenjok disappearing in the whirlpool. No, even if they were caught in the swirl at least their bodies should be discovered in the lake.

‘There is no doubt that there is something else apart from the whirlpool. I don’t know what it is but it is clearly dangerous if not even 1 octopus managed to return.’

That wasn’t the only problem.

‘Does Charem really have something to do with the prohibited area?’

He kind of wasn’t happy about it. Ark had received Marquis Martin’s GPS information and had to sneak into Charem. So Charem was hostile territory. The city wasn’t a safe place. No, it was difficult to predict what could happen so it might even more dangerous than hunting monsters.

‘There is no doubt that it is dangerous.’

He didn’t have a choice about finding Charem. He knew the risks

beforehand but now he was actually trying to reach it. Therefore he started to worry about the death penalty. Since arriving at the lake, he had wasted 2 STK-VII and gained 15 levels. His worries were endless.

“I don’t know when I will be in a city again.....”

There was no Fairy in the Outlands so the death penalty would be enormous. The longer he spent hunting, the higher the death penalty would be. Especially if there was a lot of danger. The burden increased by 100 times! However, he couldn’t visit a city every time he entered a dangerous area. The resurrection system in Galaxian wasn’t that severe. There were places in the Outlands with a Fairy for users like Ark. They were pioneer villages called Sector.

‘But there aren’t a lot of users yet so the closest sector is 600 km from Nabe. Furthermore, many high level monsters inhabit the area between Nabe and the lake. If I have bad luck and encounter a level 100 monster.....’

GAME OVER! He would be throwing everything away in his attempt to register. But it took 4 days for a round trip to Nabe and back so he couldn’t do that.

‘Yes, it is slightly worrying but I don’t know anything about the situation yet. I haven’t entered yet so even the danger is just my guess. I can’t waste 4 days on danger that isn’t verified. I might encounter similar situations from now on so I can’t run back to a city or sector every time. This is a risk that all users in Galaxian have to take. It is why I selected the Survivor body coating. I decided after investigating Fairy registration.’

That was Ark’s decision.

“Why.....”

In fact, Bakum hadn’t entered the prohibited area so he didn’t know the exact location where the octopuses disappeared. He only guessed that area wasn’t normal when no octopuses returned.

-There is a place 30 km from here where there is a large rock with a tunnel in it. The Charenjok disappeared around that rock.

That was the only information Bakum gave. But it was easier to find the destination than he thought. He could easily find the large rock that Bakum spoke about. Both sides form a tunnel while the maroon water inside was so dark that it seemed black. This was the place where the ghost story originated from!

“Yes, this really gives off a creepy atmosphere.”

He couldn't help feeling uncomfortable again once he saw the place. However, he couldn't run back to Nabe like a frightened puppy. And Ark still had a trump card. He still had one STK-VII grenade with destructive power remaining. Of course, there was only one left so he could only use it in the worst situation but it would stop him from dying.

“Shall I make some preparations? Character information window! Equipment! Skill!”

| Character Information Window | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 67 |
| Species | Human | Occupation | Pioneer |
| Fame | 3,920 | Adventure | 520 |
| Health | 1,600 (+90) | Mental Power | 800 |
| Strength | 170 (+23) | Agility | 225 |
| Stamina | 285 (+18) | Wisdom | 20 |
| Intelligence | 120 | Luck | 35 |
| * Title | | | |
| Cleaning Foreman (Agility + 3) | | | |
| Ignorant Destroyer (Wisdom -10, Strength +7, Stamina +7) | | | |
| Beltana's Hero (Strength, Agility, Stamina, Wisdom, Intelligence, Luck +3) | | | |
| * Galactic Federation Contribution: 3,000 | | | |
| *Body Coating: Survivor | | | |
| + Environmental adaptation increases by 50% due to the Survivor coating. | | | |
| + The Survivor coating reduces the drop rate of Satiety by 30%. | | | |
| + The Survivor coating will reduce fall damage by 50%. | | | |
| +The 'Clairvoyance' effect of the Survivor coating is applied. | | | |
| -Equipment Information Window- | | | |

| |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Weapons:<Impact Blade></p> <p>Armour: <Bhurad's Energy Shield>, <Harkenion Armour>, <Beginner's Leather Pants>, <Pioneer's Boots></p> <p>Accessories: <Charenjok's Token: Lv 2> <Cheksun's Tool Box>, <Battle Suit></p> |
| -Skill Information Window- |
| <p>* Passive *</p> <p><Space Combat (Lv 2)> <Facilities Maintenance (Lv 2)>, <Swamp Walking (+Snow Walking) (Lv 2)>, <Metallurgy (Lv1), <Steel Stomach (Lv 1)></p> |
| <p>* Active (General Common)*</p> <p><Dig (Lv 2), <Withdrawal (Lv 1), <Hacking (Lv 1), <Fishing (Lv 1)></p> |
| <p>* Active (Battle Specialization)*</p> <p><Dagger Mastery (Lv 1), <Sword Mastery (Lv 1), <Close Marksmanship (Lv 2)></p> <p><Sonic Sword (Lv 2), Set Bullets Shooting (Lv 2), <Rune Carving: Ikram (Lv 1)></p> |
| <p>* Active (Survivor Exclusive)*</p> <p><Binding Sword (Lv 1), <Mind Shield (Lv 1), <Stealth (Lv 1)></p> |

It had been 4 months since he started Galaxian. Everything Ark had obtained during that time was shown at once. This was probably the most rewarding moment for users in RPG games. The results of all his efforts could clearly be seen!

“But the skill window.....”

Facilities Maintenance, Hacking, Dig, Metallurgy and even Fishing! He felt like he started off in a strange place. In fact, it wasn't just in Galaxian. During his previous game, he had a lot of curiosity and ended up with a lot of similar skills. These skills were

considered difficult to grow so the majority of users didn't like them. However, Ark became the strongest person in New World due to these skills. The important thing was to learn to take advantage of every skill!

"That's right."

Ark smiled and closed the information window. His equipment and skill inspection was finished.

"Now, let's go!"

Plop!

Ark plunged into the lake. Ark gathered the floating air board and dived in. The rock tunnel that Bakum mentioned was quite deep underneath the water. Ark used the Wire Camera to check inside the tunnel and he still couldn't reach the end. The Wire Camera was the reason he hadn't immediately dived in.

Bugul bugul, bugul, bugul.

He blew some air bubbles while diving down. The Nymphe depth gauge said he reached 50 metres before his feet touched the ground. The tunnel and 50 metres depth meant the water was pitch dark.

However, he could see 10 metres in front of him thanks to the Clairvoyance skill he received from the Survivor coating.

'The search area isn't wide but this should be enough.'

Ark started to earnestly search in the dark water. He went back and forth for a while and checked the opposite end of the tunnel a couple of times. However, he couldn't find anything like what Bakum mentioned. All he saw were Mouse fish and Elephant Fish....Ark's unfortunate naming sense meant the fish were wandering around with horrible names.

'The problem is.....'

He couldn't find anything. Bakum said that dozens of octopuses went missing here. And some young octopuses had entered here a few

days ago. So why wasn't there even the slightest trail? He couldn't even find tracks from an octopus leg.

'It must be this method!'

Therefore Ark brought out his shovel! Ark went back to the beginning and started to dig at the ground. Despite his Dig skill reaching intermediate level, he was 50 metres deep so digging the ground wasn't that easy. The buoyancy meant it was difficult to move the shovel. However, Ark didn't give up and kept on using the shovel. Dust rose up all around him.

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

Suddenly there was a roaring sound and the floor shook. At the same time, a huge amount of mud rose up and bubbles appeared. A red eye peered at Ark through the dust. The identity of the massive object was revealed.

Falalalalak!

Air bubbles emerged from Ark's mouth. The translation of the bubbles.....

"Lobster!"

A lobster had risen through the ground! The size was 5 metres! It was a huge lobster where the pincers were 1 metre.

Secret of the Prohibited Area

Bugul bugul, bugul, bugul.

A pitch black area in the northern lake. A huge lobster with red eyes was staring at Ark.

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| -???? – Type: ??? Danger: ??? Combat Power: ??? You are unable to identify the object. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

That was the information window that appeared when he used Clairvoyance. But the name and information only had '???' This meant the life form wasn't registered with the federation's database. If he reported it then he could receive experience and fame. However now wasn't the time to rejoice. The lobster had appeared in the place where the octopuses disappeared.

'Does that mean all the octopuses were swallowed by this guy?'

It was natural to reach such a conclusion. In other words, this incident had nothing to do with Charem.

'Dammit, is this also a miss?'

He had dived 50 metres for nothing. But it wasn't completely useless. At least he found the source of the octopuses' disappearance. He received the Charenjok's token upgrade as a prepayment so he should catch the lobster. The lobster also had no intention of letting Ark leave politely. It separated the water and rushed towards him.

'..... Fast!'

The speed was difficult to imagine considering the lobster's large

size. He quickly grabbed his sword but the lobster's pincers were too fast.

Syu syu syu syu! Kung!

There was a dull ring as the dust rose.

'Ugh! My movements are too dull underwater.'

He had tried to avoid it but the pincer grazed his side and his health was sucked out. Ark had the body coating but the lobster was an underwater life form. The movement speed couldn't help being different. The most difficult problem was the buoyancy. Unless he placed stones to weigh down his feet, it was impossible for his body to move without bouncing upwards.

'That's the problem!'

Falalalalak!

Ark opened his mouth and shouted. He was saying Armour Armament! In reality the smart phone wouldn't recognize his pronunciation and work problem but the advanced equipment of the 24th century was different. It even worked when he was just saying speech bubbles! His bag opened and the Elephant fish appeared.

.....Well the speech recognition technology of the 24th century wasn't that perfect.

Kukung! Kukung! Kukung!

The lobster's attacks continued while Ark was trying to do this. The lobster's attack speed gave Ark no time to breathe. Furthermore the buoyancy made it difficult for Ark to stay attached to the ground.

'Eat this!'

He grabbed the Elephant fish that appeared from his bag and threw it towards the lobster.

Saktok!

The Elephant fish flew across the distance and the lobster's pincer cut it in half. Meanwhile Ark quickly expanded the distance and

manipulated his Nymph. He opened to the main menu and clicked the armour icon. A flash of light appeared around Ark's body. The space warped and armour like objects appeared. It moved like a living creature to wrap around Ark's body. His limbs, chest and his head were covered with a crustacean like carapace. A red light appeared as the helmet finished covering his face. It was Ark's battle suit Hyper Drone! He had manually summoned the battle suit. The battle suit caused Ark's stats to rise by 30%. However that wasn't why the desperate Ark had taken out the battle suit.

Kukung!

'That's it! My feet touched the ground!'

The battle suit was heavy! The weight caused Ark's floating body to sink.

'Bring it on lobster! I'll turn you into barbeque and eat you!'

The situation changed 180 degrees once Ark wore the battle suit and his feet touched the ground.

Syu syu syu syu! Kakak! Chwiiiiii! Tu tu tu tung!

There were continuous roaring sounds and dust shot up while Ark and the huge lobster collided. In fact Ark had a lot of experience when underwater fighting. He had fought a large number of enemies underwater in New World. Although that was when he had equipment that nullified the underwater penalty by 100%. But Ark wasn't just a master of fighting underwater because of his equipment. He had gained a number of ingredients from the ocean floor and underwater skills. He had no equipment that nullified the underwater penalty by 100%! Galaxian's combat system was also completely different from New World! The experience from that time was still imprinted in his body.

This experience was Ark's strongest weapon. That experience showed during his battle against the lobster. Ark's feet touched the ground thanks to the battle suit but he still couldn't move freely. So almost all the attacks were from the lobster's side. But Ark blocked most of the attacks with his sword and used the chance to counterattack. Of course his movements were slow so he couldn't

block every attack.....

-The Mind Shield has been activated.

<A shield with 230 durability has been generated around the body. The shield will reduce all damage by 40~60% until the durability falls to 0.

In addition, the effect of Backstab or Sudden Blow will be nullified by 100%>

A blue sphere wrapped around Ark's body! The Mind Shield decreased all attacks by 40~60%. And the durability of this Mind Shield was 230! It was higher than when he hunted in the forest due to all his practice. Ark's ability to concentrate in a crisis situation was clearly shown.

'But.....'

There was something strange. In theory it should be an overwhelming victory for Ark. In reality it was different. Out of 10 attacks he blocked 6~7 of them. The damage was reduced by a considerable part. The remaining 3~4 attacks were reduced by 40~60% due to the Mind Shield. On the other hand, Ark's attacks hit 9 times out of 10. Yet Ark was the one being pushed back as his attacks didn't do that much damage. The difference gradually started to show. However, the lobster wasn't a particularly high level. Clairvoyance showed that the lobster was only level 70. That was only a 3 level difference with Ark. Ark also had high stats thanks to the 30% increase of his battle suit.

'Why can't I damage it properly? Why?'

Ark discovered the reason as the battle continued. He deflected the pincer and struck a blow to the lobster's chest. The lobster stumbled back and opened its mouth. Ark looked inside the mouth and his face stiffened.

'T-that is.....'

Tutung!

Ark felt a sudden pain and he flew back several metres. This was due to the Water Pressure Gun shot from the lobster's mouth. But Ark wasn't surprised because of the lobster's new attack. It was what he saw in the mouth before the Water Pressure Gun was fired.

'Machine! A machine was used to fire the Water Pressure Gun!'

A lobster had appeared in the bottom of the lake. Naturally Ark assumed that it was a monster. Yet now there was a machine in its mouth! In other words, this is a mechanical creature. An android!

Why was there an android in the bottom of the lake? And why was it camouflaged as a lobster? Ark didn't know the reason but he realized why he couldn't do that much damage. If a sword was used to attack mechanical creatures then a significant penalty would be attached. Right now Ark was using the Impact Blade. It was a weapon with high damage. However, the damage of the sword was only shown 100% when dealing with living organisms. No matter how rare the sword was, it couldn't exert maximum damage against a mechanical creature.

'Yes, this is the reason for the question marks when looking at the information! It is natural that I can't find biological information when it is a mechanical creature. It is natural for a sword to not damage iron.'

All his questions were answered. And he also found ways to cope with this problem.

Tutung! Tutung! Tutung!

Ark operated his Nymphé while avoiding the Water Pressure Gun and opened his bag. Impact Blade was sucked back into the bag and automatically stored. At the same time, the right and left side of his bag opened and 2 weapons shot out. It was the Modified Alloy Dagger and Fading Steel-II!

'It is different if my partner is an android!'

Ark smiled as he grabbed the dagger and Fading Steel. He had to use bullets to damage an android.

Of course Impact Blade also had a gun attached. The attack

damage was 20~25. Fading Steel only did 15~20 damage so Impact Blade was stronger. However the gun attached to Impact Blade had a fatal weakness. It was the mistake he made when fighting the Bellos. Impact Blade only had 4 bullets! The most dangerous time when using a gun was when reloading. Having 4 bullets meant he had to reload more frequently so he was exposed to more danger. Moreover, Impact Blade could only load one bullet at a time in the cylinder. The gun feature of Impact Blade wasn't an excellent secondary instrument but the gun couldn't be made as a main weapon. On the other hand, Fading Steel had 12 ammunition! Moreover, the reload time was a lot shorter.

'This will make up for the insufficient damage!'

Ark grabbed a magazine that came out of Fading Steel. Once again, Galaxian had special bullets with special effects. Among them were two types of special bullets effective against androids!

-Shock Bullet -I

Attack: Firearm Damage +5 (Additional Shock Attribute)

A bullet developed by Hell Lion, one of the 4 big companies. A shock bullet developed by Hell Lion that gives off a high voltage electric current when it hits. This current has a particularly strong effect on energy shield. In addition, the electromagnetic current can cause the same effects as stiffness to androids.

<3% chance of discharging electricity, 5 seconds rigid effect>

-Armour Piercing Bullet-I

Attack: Firearm Damage + 8 (Metal only)

A special bullet especially developed by the galactic federation for use against heavy armoured enemies. The head rotates like a drill to pierce through iron armour. This will have no effect against general creatures and shields but it is a powerful attack against androids.

<Additional 8 damage will be given when penetrating metal

||armour>

They were Shock Bullets and Armour Piercing Bullets. The Shock Bullet was useful against the android's shield. The lobster was an android but it had no shield. That's why Ark never imagined that it was a machine. And if he used the Shock Bullet in a place like this then there was a chance that Ark could also be hit by the electrical shock.

'Then it must be this method!'

Therefore Ark selected the Armour Piercing Bullet! It was a bullet that dealt 8 extra damage when attacking metal armour.

Cheolkeok!

Ark ran around avoiding the Water Pressure Gun and finally finished changing the weapon and magazine. This meant Fading Steel's damage with the Armour Piercing Bullets loaded was 15~20 +8! It was transformed into a weapon with higher damage than the Impact Blade.

'Now let's start attacking properly!'

Then the pincer of the lobster descended onto his head again. But Ark no longer ran away. There was no reason for him to flee. Ark lifted the Modified Alloy Dagger and blocked the lobster's pincer. Then the opposite pincer flew towards him. But Ark no longer had just one weapon. Just before the pincer was about to hit his side, he blocked it with his gun and fired.

'An appetizer. I'm going to eat you!'

Tung-! Tung-! Tung-!

The sound of a gun being fired was heard. The attack damage of the gun had no choice but to fall due to the resistance in the water. But Ark's marksmanship was different. After several desperate attempts, he discovered that he had no talent in shooting and learnt Close Marksmanship! This meant there was no penalty applied to his marksmanship. Blocking enemy attacks with the dagger and then

shooting was Ark's original fighting style against the Nakuma.

Kikikiki! Kikikiki!

The lobster opened its mouth once both pincers were blocked. The lobster had 3 ways of attacking thanks to the Water Pressure Gun. However, Ark also had 3 weapons instead of just 2.

'Ha! You want to open your mouth right in front of me?'

Ark's foot parted the water as it shot up vertically. Ark's battle suit clad feet hit the lobster's jaw and pushed its head upwards. He pressed the muzzle against the jaw and pulled the trigger.

Tung-! Tung-! Tung-!

-Headshot!

<You have inflicted a serious blow and the enemy will receive additional 150% damage>

A headshot had occurred! The lobster's health fell thanks to the Armour Piercing Bullet.

'Yes, this is more like it.'

Damage started to appear once he changed weapons. The battle completely followed Ark's pace after that. He blocked the lobster's pincer with his dagger and....Tung! Tung! Tung! He kicked the jaw when it tried to use Water Pressure Gun....Tung! Tung! Tung! He changed the magazine and.....Tung! Tung! Tung! The lobster's health nosedived like the price drop of the Taek Mountains by the storm of attacks.

'Ah, damn! I'm feeling angry again!'

The memory caused anger to well up inside him while he kept on shooting. After 3 minutes of frantically firing.

Kikikiki.....Kikikiki.....

The lobster's movements increasingly slowed down and finally stopped moving.

'Pant pant pant, phew! It became easier thanks to the Armour Piercing Bullets.....'

Ark panted roughly as he looked at the metal shell. He still had doubts about why an android was hiding in the bottom of the lake. An android wouldn't be in a place like this for no reason. It was also strange if the lobster was the reason for the octopuses disappearance. An android couldn't eat octopuses so their corpses should still be near here.

'What is the reason? Who put the lobster at the location where the octopuses disappeared? Damn, I'm back to the start again. Anyway, I'll examine this guy for the moment. A clue might appear.'

Ark approached the wreckage with the idea of searching it.

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

All of a sudden the floor started shaking. The sediment accumulated on the floor rose like a cloud of dust.

'W-what is this? Huk, that is.....'

Ark raised his head and stiffened. A huge object was soaring up from the lake bed. Ark stared at the object and say 10 lobsters.

'Oh my god!'

His expression instantly darkened.

"Pant pant pant. Pant pant pant."

The shoulders shook form the intense breathing.

'Dammit, I shouldn't be doing this.....'

A frustrated sigh emerged from the blond youth's mouth. Once again, he had started Galaxian to meet Ark. That was all. He had no interest in anything other than that. That's why he deliberately started that incident in Nephalim. But the government thought he was part of the Tree of Life organization and was tortured. It was good up to there. He was willing to go through that process if it meant

meeting Ark. So I endured it.

.....Yet it was useless. The disputed planet he was sent to was Hanan. It was a planet dozens of light years away from Beltana. He had only entered the game to meet one person. Why was it so difficult? Fortunately the life of a prisoner on Hanan wasn't that harsh. It was because of what happened on Istana.

-The prisoner Ark who became Beltana's Hero has returned!

-The hero Ark visited each city and talked about the troubles that prisoners faced on Beltana. Therefore questions about the prisoner's human rights have surfaced again.

-There are rumours that federation officers used the plight of the prisoners to receive bribes.....

-The federation's Secretary of Defense has ordered that the treatment of the troops be improved!

Ark had gone around various cities and given interviews. Thanks to him the treatment of prisoners had improved! The prisoners on disputed planets were now provided with 1 free food a day.

.....Of course he wasn't happy at all. However the blond youth was glad to hear the news. Thanks to Ark going around the cities and promoting the galactic federation, the public opinion against the war was reduced. This was a great opportunity for the galactic federation! The galactic federation could reinforce their military budget thanks to the improved opinion and could now support more troops on the battlefield. 50% of the troops were dispatched to the right place! Hanan in the Bellin constellation was the battlefield that was fought over the hardest. 5 tanks, 30 combat androids and hundreds of troops were sent there. The numbers were sufficient to change the war situation. Luck followed from there. By the time reinforcements arrived, the Hanan garrison had acquired the GPS information of the Rama's main base. The commander of the Hanan garrison was excited by the good luck that kept on coming.

"Now is the time to show the power of the federation! Advance!"

And ordered an assault towards the enemy lines. The blond youth was excited.

'If the federation wins in this attack then I can return to Istana!'

"But....."

The blond youth looked around with a dark look. Smoke bombs were covering Hanan so he could only see 10 metres around him. But that was enough to confirm the military situation. 8 out of 10 bodies belonged to the galactic federation.

'We were tricked. The GPS information from the Rama's scouting unit was just bait!'

The Hanan federation army was attacked by the Rama's main forces while they were marching. The result was clearly seen through the corpses of the federation soldiers. They suffered a crushing defeat!

'But even so.....'

It wasn't that easy to defeat the federation soldiers with a surprise attack. He had a lot of experience with online games before Galaxian. He had led a lot of subordinates and won many battles in New World. Therefore he knew. A surprise attack wasn't always profitable. All the variables had to be considered and the soldiers had to be able to handle the situation flexibly for it to have a tactical effect. And looking at the Rama's surprise attack.....

'Perfect! There are no gaps at all!'

The Rama's surprise attack had no gaps. Even with the reinforcements, the federation army was overwhelmed.

'But I can't fall in a place like this! This is a chance to raise my achievements quickly! If I hesitate then it will be more difficult to meet Ark in the Outlands!'

Kakakaka! Kakakarak!

While the blond youth was thinking. The dust blurred and he could see some Carack. The blond youth's hand movements quickened.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

On R-14 the blond youth couldn't move his body properly. On R-14 and Nephelim, he diligently practiced and now his hand techniques were more agile than most users. It was hard to imagine that the blond youth had grown up in a rich environment. He fired his gun and the bullets accurately hit the Carack's leg joints. The blond youth then narrowed the distance and hacked at the Carack with his sword. In only 1 minute! The 3 Carack couldn't attack and collapsed.

'It is useless no matter how many Carack I destroy. I should join the main army!'

He looked around and was about to move a step. Then a shadow shot out from the dust. He knew just by the silhouette. The opponent was a Rama warrior! The hand of the blond youth once again moved.

Ting-! Ting-! Ting-!

However the bullets bounced off the opponent's shield. The blond youth felt despair as he saw the features of his rival. In fact, he knew the person who commanded the Rama's surprise attack. It wasn't just him. All the soldiers on Hanan knew his identity. It was the Rama warrior that pushed the federation soldiers to despair during the many months fighting on the Bellin constellation! The nickname showed the overwhelming power.....

'The Red Slaughterer!'

The Rama warrior received that nickname due to the blood red battle suit he used!

"You seem quite skilled. Shall I play with you?"

The Rama warrior wearing the red battle suit smiled and lifted his sword.

Bugul bugul, bugul, bugul.

It wasn't just the sound of bubbles rising. Ark's shoulder shook as he gasped.

'Dammit, why are these lobsters.....'

Ark breathed roughly and looked around. Sediment was scattered around him but he could see through it with Clairvoyance. And the red light opposite him could be clearly seen. 10 minutes before a group of android lobsters had appeared from the bottom of the lake.

'It is impossible!'

Facing 1 wasn't a problem as he already proved. But that changed when he was facing 10. It was impossible with his level to take care of each one. If all 10 attacked together then his chances of victory was 0.1%. And Ark's expectations proved correct. He became tattered after encountering the lobsters for 10 minutes.

Bbok! Bbok! Bbok! Bbok!

| |
|-----------------------------------|
| -You have recovered 2 health. |
| -You have recovered 2 health..... |

Ark was still alive thanks to the battle suit. And he diligently attached the Charenjok's token to him.

If it wasn't for the battle suit and the Charenjok's token then he would already be a bloody rice cake. No, now he only had 8% health left. The lobsters were also really quick so he couldn't run away either. But Ark believed something.

'I can't die like this!'

Ark took out his trump card. It was the STK-VII grenade with destructive power! He shed tears as he threw the remaining STK-VII towards the lobsters. However.....

'I'm screwed!'

The lobsters only had their health reduced by 50%. He understood why the moment the STK-VII exploded. The problem was that Ark was fighting in a place 50 metres deep. Just like the power of the bullets were deduced by the water resistance, the same thing applied to the STK-VII. The STK-VII was used in vain. The tattered

Ark had to clench his teeth and keep on fighting.

‘But! But I can’t just die like this!’

The odds weren’t in his favour. However he couldn’t just give up. If he gave up here then the results of the past 10 days would fly away. He would be resurrected back in Nabe and he didn’t have any STK-VII left.

‘Don’t make me laugh! All the levels that I gained!’

Ark glared at the lobsters. The last STK-VII was a dud. But that didn’t mean it was ineffective. The lobsters had lost 50% of their health. Therefore Ark attacked the lobsters until they had 20% health left.

‘There is only one way out! This is an opportunity! I can use 18 Barrage to escape from their siege.’ He would be affected by the buoyancy as soon as the battle suit was stripped off so he needed to escape as quickly as possible. If he reached the surface and got on the air board then he could escape them. This is the only way! Concentrate Ark! Let’s go!’

Ark prepared himself and was about to rush forward.

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

The ground started shaking again and a roaring sound was heard.

‘Heok! W-what is this? Don’t tell me another lobster is appearing?’

Ark turned around with apprehension. Something unthinkable occurred. Until now the ground vibrated every time a lobster climbed out. But this time the lobster hid back underneath the ground?

‘What, what the? This is? They’re acting scared.....’

Ark asked with a befuddled look.

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

A huge vortex started swirling in the water. The words of Bakum, the Charenjok elder appeared in his head.

‘Yes, that’s it! This is the whirlpool that Bakum mentioned would sometimes appear in the prohibited area. I don’t understand but the lobster knew this vortex was happening and hid in the ground. It is a great opportunity for me to get away! I can run away while these guys are hiding.....run away.....eh.....eh?’

Ark finally realized an important fact. Once again the size of the lobster was 5 metres. They were more than twice Ark’s size. Moreover, their true identity was an android. The interior of the lobster was filled with metal parts. If placed on a scale then the lobster would probably weigh hundreds of kilograms. Despite weighing hundreds of kilograms, the lobsters had hid in the ground to escape from the vortex. However, Ark was much lighter than them! Ark was caught by the swirl of water. He couldn’t do anything once he was caught. No matter how much he struggled, he just spun around like a cockroach caught in a toilet bowl. Ark realized some strange points while facing motion sickness. An ordinary vortex would normally be shaped like a pyramid. But the one Ark was caught in was different. It was a big circle focused on a particular spot. To his surprise, the centre of the vortex was.....

‘W-what is that? A black ball? No, a hole? Why is there suddenly a hole in the lake?’

A huge black hole opened in the centre of the vortex. Ark and the lake’s water was being sucked into the hole at an incredible speed. No, it wasn’t just Ark. This was probably why he couldn’t find the bodies of the octopuses. And why none of them ever came back.

‘It can’t be! This can’t be!’

Ark struggled with a desperate feeling but it was impossible like he expected! Ark was drawn into the black hole. And.....

“Heok! What the? What? What the?”

Ark looked around and screamed. He had just been drawn into the black hole thanks to the momentum of the water. And he rose to the surface of the water. However, the place that his eyes saw wasn’t the large northern lake. It was a pipe with extravagant size.....no, a pipe! Surprisingly it was a pipe dozens of metres long. Ark was

dragged along the pipe by the current of water.

“What on earth is going on?” Where is this place? Why am I here?”

Ark was in a state of panic and turned his head like crazy. Suddenly he saw a dark object in the direction he was headed towards. It was an iron net. He didn't know where this was but he could determine the purpose of the net right away. It was a net meant to catch fish. The purpose of the net was to filter the fish from the water. He didn't know where this was! But he knew what would happen! If he was caught in the net then it wouldn't be a good thing.

‘I have to pay attention! This isn't the time to be discouraged!’

Ark took a deep breath and looked at the quickly approaching net. The moment the net approached!

“18 Barrage!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At the same time, steam emerged from the shoulders of his battle suit. His arms moved like motors were attached to it and hit the metal net. One hit! Two hit! Three hits! Four hits! The top of the net was bombarded with his fists.

| |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>-The mana of the Hyper Drone has been exhausted. <Hyper Drone will be recalled to its dimension and it can't be summoned for another 10 hours></p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The battle suit was recalled the moment he ripped a hole in the net.

“That's it! I've escaped from the net!”

Ark cried out as he burst through the hole. But his cheer changed into a scream after 20 seconds.

Dudududu! Dudududu! Dudududu!

On the opposite side of the net was a propeller rotating at a quick speed. If he touched the propeller then he would be cut to pieces. Ahead of him a small Mouse fish had passed through the net and

disappeared without a trace thanks to the propeller.

'N-no! This can't happen!'

Ark frantically looked around. His Clairvoyance skill allowed him to see in the darkness and he saw a ladder near the propeller. The ladder went to the upper portion of the pipe!

"That's it! Wire Camera!"

Ark attached the Wire Camera to his Nymphe and threw it towards the ladder. If it was connected to his Nymphe then it would move in the direction he desired. Ark manipulated the Nymphe and the wire wound around the ladder. He pulled the wire and managed to grab the ladder.

"Pant pant pant! I'm alive!"

Ark climbed up a few metres and looked down. Thanks to the hole in the net, the Elephant fish was also sucked towards the propeller. And.....it was gone without a trace. Ark would've also been like that if it wasn't for the Wire Camera. But it was still too early to be relieved. He still didn't know where this place was.

"Anyway I need to climb out of this pipe and check."

He raised his head and saw a manhole cover near the end of the ladder attached to the pipe wall.

He climbed up the ladder and pushed it but it was locked. But the manhole wasn't just locked with a simple key. It was the future and all locks were electronic.

"I'm thankful for this."

He connected his Nymphe and a message popped up.

-This door is protected with a security device.

Enter the security code or use Invaders to hack and release the lock.

Attempt to hack? Y/N

His 4 star rated skill Hacking! Furthermore, this looked like a sewage treatment plant so the lock shouldn't be that complicated. When he attempted hacking, the game to release the lock was Tetris.

-The current lock accessed is 'Tetris: Level 1.'

The bricks falling from above are the lock's intrusion prevention programs. Remove all the hacking prevention programs to release the lock.

Please don't hesitate. If you can't release this type of lock then you're not worthy to be called a hacker!

It was only a level 1 lock. The Tetris with an easy difficulty was quickly destroyed! But Ark didn't lift the lid and exit yet. He said it a few times but Ark still didn't know where this was. Therefore he didn't know what was beyond the manhole cover. He couldn't relax until he registered with the Fairy. His mistake was blindly entering the prohibited area. He had to be careful if he didn't want to repeat the same mistakes. Ark lifted the lid slightly and pushed the Wire Camera through. He had bought the Wire Camera for a use like this. It wasn't a fishing rod or an escape rope! Anyway.....

'There seems to be no one around.'

A 1 metre pipe was shown on the screen of the Nymphe. Once Ark confirmed that no one was around, Ark lifted the manhole cover and climbed into the pipe. He skillfully scanned around with the Wire Camera and moved easily through the pipe thanks to his experience as a pipe cleaner on R-14. After a short time Ark was able to find a light in the pipe. The pipe became wider as he approached the light.

'That's great. I've been wondering if the pipe led outside.....'

Ark pushed the Wire Camera through a gap. Then a scene he never imagined showed up on Ark's Nymphe.

"What, what the? This place is? Why is there a place like this outside?"

The reason he was surprised was because the camera showed a

huge city. There was a huge variety of buildings, people and alien cities moving around the city! When he turned his camera to the other side, an even more amazing scene appeared. The city outside the manhole was covered by a huge sphere. And outside the sphere was the sky! The city was floating in the sky with clouds underneath it.

“P-Perhaps.....?”

Ark stuttered with surprise. The landscape on his Nymphe screen changed to an information window.

-You have found the hidden city 'Charem!'

-City Information: Charem-

You heard from Marquis Martin that Charem was located near the northern lake of Istana. But even Marquis Martin doesn't know a lot of information about Charem. As Charem is officially a lawless smuggling city so communication with anything outside the shield is difficult. Although the correct GPS information was determined, the most crucial unknown fact is that Charem is an aerial city floating in the sky.

All smuggling organizations associated with Charem have to sign a confidentiality agreement and only one person has permission to access it. Only a small percentage of people have discovered this hidden city so you will receive some adventure points.

* Adventure Points +200

The city that shone in Ark's Nymphe. The smuggling city wrapped in a veil of mystery was Charem.

Credits

| | | |
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