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Abyss

“Gram, gram, mahogram!”

Dudududu, dudududu!

A group of monsters ran across the swamp. Their overall appearance looked like a lizard. But it wasn't an ordinary lizard. It was a lizard double the size of a human and wearing armour with weapons.

“A rush? Razak!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak rushed forward at Ark's command. He lifted his shield powerfully and slammed it into the ground while flames emerged from both sides of the shield. The flames formed into wings which the lizards ran into.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

With a tremendous roar, the lizards were engulfed in flames and stumbled. It was the special skill Iron Fire Wall from Razak's shield made from the skull of the Fire Draconian. Around 100 lizards were caught by the Iron Fire Wall and their 'rush' was cancelled and they became stunned. In this state it was possible to counterattack and deal massive damage to them! However, Ark didn't dare counterattack.

“Karak, maram! Gram, gram, mahogram!”

A rough voice was audible from behind the lizards. Then the lizards wrapped in flames rushed again along with an extra 100 lizards. When the lizards approached with their swords brandished, Ark bit his lip and shouted.

“Damn, it's started again, Razak, fall back! Dark Eden, prepare your defense formation!”

“Defense formation!”

100 warriors repeated the command. The ones at the front of the battle

formation was the shield unit. They placed their shields down and lifted their spears at an angle. It was a formation designed to strike the enemy while defending against their charge. This defensive formation and the speed at which the warriors formed it was a result of their suffering in the secret dungeon.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a roaring sound as the lizards impacted with the defense troops. The defense formation was formed with 100 people. On the other hand, there were hundreds of lizards which rushed at it. Nevertheless, the defense formation didn't crumble. Most of the shock from the impact was absorbed into the shield and dispersed into the ground. The lizards who blindly rushed forward were also hit by the spears and fell down. While the defense of this formation was the best, it also had a fatal weakness. Since they required a sitting posture to prevent the enemy's charge, they were almost defenceless after that. In addition, the size of the monsters was 2~3 metres.

If they attacked from above then there was no way for the shield troops to respond. As expected, when the rush was obstructed the lizards immediately lifted their weapons. If they took an attack in that position then the damage to the shield troops would be devastating. Of course, Ark wasn't the only one who realized this when looking at the situation.

“Archers and magicians, stop those lizards!”

“Horizontal Fire, Precision Fire!”

“Ray of light which pierces the darkness, Ray!”

A huge number of arrows and magic flew towards the lizards. The reason the warriors crouched down wasn't simple to raise their defense against the charge. It was to raise the attack of the archers and magicians. The magicians and archers played an important role in battle. Warriors could only attack

when close to the enemy. In other words, if they attacked the enemy then the enemy could attack back. So for warriors a battle was like a war of attrition. However, archers and magicians were different. They could attack enemies from a distance without receiving any damage at all. When fighting a huge enemy like a dragon, it was difficult for more than a few dozen warriors to attack one monster because of space limitations. However, hundreds or thousands of archers and magicians could concentrate their attacks on one enemy. There were no distance restrictions. So it was possible to reduce the enemy one at a time. Thus archers and magicians were an indispensable presence in fights. However, in practice the archers and magicians' abilities were limited on a large scale. The reason was their allies who weren't enemies.

Archers and magicians had low health so they couldn't be on the front lines. Their role was support at the back. In other words, there were always allies between them and the enemy. The attacks from magicians and archers flew in a parabola in order to hit the enemy. So there was always the chance of hitting their allies first. That's why the archers and magicians were positioned so their curved attacks didn't hit their allies. To users in New World it was common sense. Naturally, Ark had also used that method until now. But he got to know the archers and magicians better after invading the secret dungeon and his thoughts had changed.

'That method is too inefficient.'

The reason Ark thought that was because of how archers and magicians used their skills. Archers and magicians had numerous skills and they were divided into two main types, a straight or curved attack. So if there wasn't an obstacle between the enemies then they could attack directly and if there was then they could use the curved attack. Of course, the horizontal attacks were more powerful. It was similar to when throwing a stone. One thrown in a straight line would be more powerful than one thrown in a curve. The

damage and accuracy of a horizontal attack was 1.5 times better than a curved attack! In addition, there were several limitations to using a curved attack. When soloing the most effective skills for archers were 'Precision Fire', 'Rapid Fire', 'Piercing Shot' etc. In the case of magicians, it was skills which had a short incantation speed and power like 'Ray' etc.

But those skills were horizontal attacks and couldn't be utilized properly in a group battle. Of course, the wide area skills had a lot of power in a large scale battle but some of them had cool down time of 2~3 hours. When considering those points, the archers and magicians only showed 50% of their actual abilities on a large scale.

'Is there a way for an archer and magician to wreak havoc in a group?'

Ark had been thinking that since he started invading the secret dungeon. Then he found a surprisingly simple answer. It was the formation where the warriors crouched down and defended. When the warriors at the front crouched down, they exposed the enemies to the archers and magicians. All the obstacles blocking the archers and magicians had disappeared! The archers and magicians immediately changed the way they attacked and hurled horizontal attacks like a machine gun. The arrows and magic flew straight forward like a clothesline and wreaked havoc! Both the power and accuracy was incomparable to the curved attacks.

Kwa kwang, tu tu tu tung!

The precision shooting attacked the vital spots! The arrows accurately stuck from the joints of the lizards. Thanks to the arrows stuck in elbows and shoulders, the lizards couldn't attack without flinching. That was why he wasn't worried about the counterattack when the troops crouched down. When the magician's attack 'Ray' hit the knees, the lizards immediately stumbled. Once the movements were disrupted, an ally would take care of the enemy. With this simple idea, the archers and magicians could use 100% of their abilities in a large scale battle.

“Now’s the time. Shield troops, push against those fellows and advance!”

“Ohhhhhh!

The warriors seemed to bounce up and brandished their shields simultaneously. There was a rough metallic sound and the lizards were pushed back. After they struck, the shield troops immediately sat down again and allowed the magic and arrows to fly.

“Okay, it is a little hard but if we continue pushing like this....”

Just as Ark was about to push against the lizards again.

“Master, those lizards are preparing for a huge rush again!”

Racard’s voice could be heard from above.

“Gram, gram, mahogram!”

At the same time, there was a loud roar from behind enemy lines. Then the lizards at the front split to the sides and 100 lizards rushed forward in a wedge formation.

“Bah, it is impossible! Defend!”

Once again the warriors used their shields and spears to build a barrier. Then just before the rushing lizards collided!

“Karakin, baram, noramuda!”

A commanding voice rang out and the rushing lizards simultaneously jumped like frogs. Ark’s heart also simultaneously jumped like a frog. Ark had used that tactic several times so the lizards had already found a countermeasure for it. Just jump over the warriors who were crouching and break through! Ark hadn’t realized that the lizards would think like that and hurriedly shouted.

“Archers and magicians, stop those lizards!”

The arrows and magic blew into the crowd of jumping lizards. The lizards were almost defenceless when they jumped. Once intercepted by arrows and

magic, those guys fell into the swamp. However, he hadn't expected the move so his reaction was delayed. Around half the lizards managed to break through.

“T-this....is serious!”

Panic spread on Ark's face. Currently all the warriors in Dark Eden were posted at the front. Because the lizards had suddenly jumped over, they couldn't immediately respond to the situation. Moreover, the lizards still at the front started attacking. If they turned around to attack the lizards who intruded then they would be attacked by the enemy in front. Meanwhile, the dozens of lizards who intruded rushed at the magicians and archers.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

“Keuahahak!”

This intrusion and confused fighting was the situation magicians feared most! The magicians and archers who had lost their protective screens couldn't properly oppose the enemy. Furthermore, the lizards were mixed in with allies so they couldn't fire arrows and magic blindly.

‘Dammit, this is the worst situation!’

Ark's breath felt clogged as he heard screams from everywhere. Of course, only a few lizards had broken in so the magicians and archers could take care of them. But the warriors were tied up with the lizards so the magicians and archers received quite a lot of damage.

‘Yet it isn't possible to let the magicians and archers retreat.’

If the magicians and archers retreated then the warriors would be left isolated with the lizards. The 100 soldiers would be surrounded by the lizards without any support. In that situation, the warriors would be wiped out within a few minutes. Wiped out!

“Damn, if only I had more troops.....”

Ark muttered while biting his lips. In fact, Ark had known about the weak point when he made the warriors crouch down and form a defensive stance. When crouching, the switch between defense and offense was slow and there was a high chance of intrusion if the enemy was willing to take damage. However, no enemy had ever broken through until now. When facing hundreds of large monsters, it wasn't difficult to drive them off. But the defense formation he used now wasn't complete. The original formation Ark used was double the size with two layers. The warriors in front would prepare for a charge. And he arranged another unit of warriors 1 metre behind to defend against any intruding enemies. But the current defense formation only had one layer. Despite knowing the risks, he was forced to use it because of insufficient troops. Currently Dark Eden only had 300 people.

“In this state where the troops aren't replenished, isn't it impossible to capture the dungeon to the end?”

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark's mouth. In this desperate situation, he recalled the hardships experienced over the past few days.

“Kuaaaa!”

A huge monster yanked its hair and screamed painfully. With a dark aura wrapped around numerous dead bodies like a veil, the one holding the wand commanding them was the dark conjurer 'Surka.' He was a middle ranked level 650 boss who they met on the 50th floor of the secret dungeon. Just like the alias Dark Conjurer, Surka was a powerful middle ranked boss who could conjure hundreds of undead as his subordinates using dark magic.

“But.....”

Ark smiled and muttered. It had been 10 days since Ark started the dungeon. The number of monsters Dark Eden killed to get him numbered in

the hundred thousand. All those monsters were experience for Dark Eden. It wasn't simply just raising their level. Of course, raising level was good but the even more important thing was gaining experience fighting against monsters. This was known as 'combat experience.'Put simply, Ark's dungeon invasion during the last 10 days could be classified as 'insanity.'

An average of 4 hours sleep. Ark invested the remaining time into attacking the dungeon. He didn't just invest simply into capturing the dungeon, he invested 'terribly.' Normally after an intense battle, most players would take a few hours break. Even if they were just lying down in the unit, a battle lasting several hours required high levels of concentration. But that common sense didn't apply to Ark.

"All of the enemies have been finished."

"Really? Then let's move to the next place right away!"

"Huh? Didn't the battle just end?"

"So what? Hasn't your health and mana already recovered?"

"That is true however....."

"Then why do you want to rest?"

Ark couldn't understand the users who wanted a break. In the secret dungeon, experience and loot were swarming everywhere. Since they troops travelled in a large crowd, the health and mana consumption wasn't large. In other words, there was a chance of gaining serious experience around the clock without any breaks. Honestly, even the time Ark took to sleep was valuable.

"There are no limits on your stamina. Stop talking and move! Go, go!"

"It isn't our stamina but our hunger....."

The users of Dark Eden muttered as Ark spouted some words from an 80's movie. When the atmosphere became like this, the rehabilitation members instantly interrupted.

“Yes, it’s not like the monsters are running away.”

“Well, we’re not trying to be difficult.”

“Their talk is becoming concerning.”

The rehabilitation members had already experienced hunting with Ark so they were already prepared to die before entering the secret dungeon. But they were finally couldn’t endure suffering so much under a younger brother. Now that the users were expressing their dissatisfaction, they used that chance to try and convince Ark.

“Why would you want to rest when you can raise your level? You can rest anytime but this is a big chance to gain a lot of levels! If other people hunt then you’re hunting and if other people are resting then you’re hunting. This is the secret to gaining more levels than other people! Isn’t it like that?”

“No, what we’re saying is.....”

The rehabilitation members sighed and opened their mouths again.

“That is correct! These days people don’t have any guts. Complaining after only hunting a few days.....how can you defend the territory like this? Raise your spirits and become stronger. Advance, advance!”

The person speaking was none other than Isyuram. As part of Isyuram’s police duties, there were many days without sleep due to undercover investigations, stake outs or emergency standby. So Ark’s reckless hunting was no problem for Isyuram. Besides, it was the first time he could hunt like normal users so he found it quite interesting.

“Damn, are they even humans?”

But the rehabilitation members didn’t know Isyuram’s true identity so they didn’t know why he was a monster like Ark. Anyway, Dark Eden continued hunting thanks to Isyuram’s enthusiastic support. There was another reason for Ark’s quick hunting speed. There was a deeper idea....

‘Capturing the secret dungeon isn’t just to raise Dark Eden’s level. It is more important to ensure that Dark Eden gains battle experience.’

Even if Dark Eden was an attack corps, the troops were used to playing alone. During the siege, they still hadn’t been used to fighting in their units. They were able to win the siege thanks to Ark’s strategy but their organization ability couldn’t be compared to the Hermes alliance. So it was imperative to raise Dark Eden’s ability to fight in units before the next siege. In order to increase that, comradery was necessary.

‘The monsters in the secret dungeon are elite creatures. But remembering battle tricks is different from fighting in an organized group. So their comradery needs to increase. That is the decisive difference between the Hermes alliance and Dark Eden.’

The Hermes alliance had been created for two years. While there was a sense of solidarity from winning the siege, it wouldn’t be enough against an establish guild alliance. If the alliances fighting were at a similar level, this would be the difference between victory and defeat. While the commander could give instructions to the units, it wasn’t possible to direct each soldier’s movements on the battlefield. So it was important for soldiers to move together on the field. Thanks to Ark’s relationship with his summons, he knew how important a sense of solidarity was on a battle. When Ark was executing an operation with his summons, the success rate was completely different when there was a sense of solidarity compared to when there wasn’t. Ark had managed to instil an ‘All for one, one for all’ mentality in his summons.

‘If I use conventional methods then it will be impossible to instil the same sense of comradery as the other guild alliances in just one month. But with this method it is possible.’

After experiencing difficulties in a place like this, their comradery would become strong! In fact, the person who tipped him off to this approach was

his passionate supporter Isyuram. The secret to developing solidarity was a method used in the army. Only a person who experienced it would understand. But that method often formed a closer relationship with someone in a month than with a person you've worked with for one year.

It was a sense of pride for overcoming difficult times together.

That was the reason Ark used an extreme situation to push the Dark Eden users. After overcoming difficulties together, the sense of accomplishment would change to solidarity between allies. So the soldiers came together just like a real battlefield.

However, Ark's plan was a success in a slightly different way.

“Damn, I'll never hunt with the leader again.”

“Quickly escape from the dungeon so we can leave the leader's grasp!”

The soldiers of Dark Eden were all united in that goal. Everyone united to escape from Ark quickly.....Anyway, one everyone united in one idea the soldiers immediately changed.

“Huck! D-dangerous!”

“Avoid it, ugh!”

A magician was hit by the sword of an undead and collapsed. The magician next to him killed the undead instead. It didn't matter if the undead had 100% health, it couldn't stand up to the organized attack from the magicians. It was because the intentions between colleagues had become mutual. Thanks to that, Dark Eden's organizational abilities in a group became solidified with every day that passed. And they managed to advance to the 50th floor quicker than expected. The boss monster Surka which appeared on the 50th floor was even stronger than the previous bosses that they had met. But thanks to the rise in organizational ability and strategy execution, this boss felt like an easier opponent for Dark Eden.

No, to be exact the troops had found the previous bosses harder. Thanks to the rise in solidarity, the level 650 middle ranked boss wasn't an even opponent for Dark Eden anymore. While Surka summoned many undead and used various curse spells, his health reached rock bottom after 20 minutes of being surrounded by Dark Eden.

“Kuaaaa!”

Surka's health ran out and a piece of flesh fell off him. The rest of the skin collapsed to reveal thin bones.

-Your level has risen.

A wonderful message floated in front of him after Surka died. Ark also noticed cross marks above more than half of Dark Eden's heads.

‘Huhuhu, experience really is rushing in from monsters in this place.’

Ark giggled and opened his character information window.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baron
Fame	21,785 (+500)	Level	403
Profession	Dark Soul		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero		
Health	7,625 (+475)	Mana	7,815(+225)
Spiritual	956	Strength	784 (+58)

Power			
Agility	1,029 (+90)	Stamina	1,269 (+45)
Wisdom	205 (+10)	Intelligence	1,417 (+5)
Luck	209 (+60)	Flexibility	268
Art of Communication	79	Affection	129 (+10)
Resilience	483	Dark Fog	74
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics			233
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40			
Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance + 100%, Agility +20, 'Magic			

Protection' is automatically activated when health is less than 50%.

Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Ark's Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, 'Sudden Increase in Power' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

'It is an average of 2 levels in one day.'

Ark smiled warmly as he looked at the information window. When he first entered the secret dungeon he had been level 383. He had gained 20 levels in 10 days to reach 403. This level up speed was unthinkable in other hunting

grounds. It wasn't just Ark. Although there was an individual difference, the soldiers of Dark Eden had gained an average of 10~15 levels.

'I don't know why they're dissatisfied when their level increased by this much.'

Once again Ark thought it was a good idea to capture the dungeon.

'Instead of ten days, even spending several months in this dungeon is okay!'

However, Ark's happy mood only lasted until the 50th floor. After defeating Surka and descending to the 51st floor, an unimaginable scene stretched out in front of him. Although it was unnecessary to say again, the secret dungeon was similar to an underground temple. It was complex but it didn't differ significantly from normal dungeons. However, this completed changed around the 50th level. No, it was more accurate to say that the 'Cradle of Ancient Evil' actually ended on the 50th floor. Below was a completely different dungeon. It was an underground cave which seemed to continue endlessly. Once he reached the 51st floor a new information window appeared.

-Abyss (Special)

You've discovered a strange cave at the bottom of a labyrinth. This cave hasn't seen any light in hundreds of years. This deep space is so dark and dangerous that it seems like hell. You can sense a huge, evil presence which surpasses a human's cognitive abilities from the entrance. That evil presence has noticed that the underground labyrinth was being cleared.

Now you can choose between two options. Either turn away and escape or prepare for a huge sacrifice and head deeper to where the devil lies. Make your choice now.

<Explorer's Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 20)>

'Abyss? This is the abyss? We're already a few hundred metres underground and now there is the abyss. But the dungeon connected is different from the

other dungeon.....’

It was something he had never even thought of. Furthermore, the information in the window wasn’t ordinary. Usually it was possible to grasp the dungeon difficulty by looking at the information window. Since the information window only had dire threats, the dungeon seemed to be unfathomably difficult. However Ark wasn’t going to let that intimidate him. No, he felt even more excited by the threats.

‘I’ve never seen a warning message like this!’

Then the monsters here must be even stronger than those in the underground temple. In other words, wasn’t it possible to get more experience and loot? Dark Eden had also changed 180 degrees from when they first entered the dungeon. It was to the extent that he thought the underground temple was too easy. A dungeon with higher difficulty was welcome.

“There’s no need to be concerned. Advance forward!”

Ark ignored the threat and entered the cave. Not long after he entered, Ark started to understand the contents of the letter. They had been advancing in the cave for a while when a warning message suddenly flashed in front of Dark Eden.

-You have entered the ‘Asmodian’ sphere of influence.’

In New World, there are a common race of monsters called Asmodians that are discriminated against. The Asmodians are a species which belong to a hell space and their existence will warp the space itself. When entering the presence of a strong Asmodian, the space will distort powerfully and an ‘Asmodian sphere of influence’ will form.

The demonic monsters are those who have been deformed by this influence. When the Asmodian influence permeates the air, the area will also change to a hell space.

<The abilities of all players within the sphere of influence will decrease by 10%. On the other hand, all monsters that have been changed by the Asmodian influence will have their stats increase by 10%>

‘Asmodian? Demonic? Perhaps.....’

Ark flinched as he verified the information window. Hearing the word ‘Asmodian’ was alarming. The Dark Lord who invaded New World a long time ago belonged to a family of Asmodians. And they covered the continent with their power. When the Dark Lord disappeared, the Asmodians disappeared.

‘In other words, a family member of the Dark Lord is hiding somewhere in this cave?’

It was unexpected but when thinking about it, it wasn’t that strange. The official name of the secret dungeon was the Cradle of Ancient Evil. If it was called an ancient evil in New World then wouldn’t it be related to the Dark Lord?

‘And monsters until the Asmodian influence will be mutated.....’

Just as Ark was thinking that.

“Grrrr!”

Suddenly hundreds of red lights appeared in the darkness. They were intense and vivid eyes burning with anger.

“The enemy! Prepare to defend!”

Ark’s voice cried out in the darkness as he saw the hundreds of monsters. At the same time, the members of Dark Eden screamed.

“Huk! What, what the? Those are?”

“Ack! D-disgusting.....”

The monsters that appeared in the darkness had terrible forms. They were

similar to the Goats and lesser demons he met in the underground temple. However the monsters seemed like they had been joined together before it suddenly stopped halfway. The whole body was covered with some form of viscera and something which looked like a baby's end sprouted from the skin. It was more disgusting than scary.....no, it was disturbing and grotesque. Even the confident Ark felt disgusted by the sight of the monsters. Some users even became nauseous.

'They've been mutated?'

"Kuwaaaaah!"

Then they shrieked and ran forward.

"Steady! This isn't the time to be put off by an unpleasant sight!"

Thus the battle between Dark Eden and those influenced by the Asmodians started. The way they attacked was odd. The creepy monsters squirted pus all over the place. When affected by the pus, it would cause the 'plague' status and health would be continuously lost. They even become confused and would attack their allies. The baby hands sprouting from the body also squirted acid venom. Thus the health of Dark Eden members quickly decreased. It was an abnormal look and abnormal attacks. Dark Eden became surprised and panicked. 100 soldiers quickly collapsed.

"Damn, push them back and keep your distance. Jjak-tung, please use your skill to grasp their alignment and specialities!"

"U-understood.'Knowing oneself and one's opponent'!"

When Jjak-tung used the skill, a ray of light shot out from his eyes and hit the body of a monster. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Jjak-tung.

-Name: Corrupted Agurin

Level: 400 (Elite)

Health: 7,000

Description: Agurin that has been mutated (Asmodian). Abilities have been increased by 10%.

Characteristics: Blunt weapons resistance +50%, Resistance to blades -20%.

Specialty: <Capture> Hundreds of small hands growing from the body will squirt acid poison and deal continuous damage.

<Horror> A weird sound will emerge from its mouth and everybody with a weak resistance will be affected by 'fear.'

<Frenzy> When its health falls below 50%, it will be enveloped in insanity and have its attack increased by 50%. However, its defense will fall by 50% when affected by 'Frenzy.'

It was the special skill of the Guardian= Strategist, 'knowing oneself and one's opponent!' When Jjak-tung used the skill, information about the monster instantly appeared. Ark's 'Skill Penetration' could only confirm information about the skill just used. With Jjak-tung's 'knowing oneself and one's opponent,' it was possible to get information about all the monster's skills. Jjak-tung continuously informed Ark about the level and skills of the monsters. If he knew about the skills the monsters possessed then he could come up with an idea to deal with it.

For example, if the Agurin tried to use 'Capture' or 'Fear,' he could just have the archers and magicians attack from a distance. After they've been caught by the long distance attacks, the warriors could then attack Ark used the rehabilitation members who had changed to Guardian=strategist to place a type of token above the head of a monster.

The monsters for warriors to take care off had a sword token. The monsters for magicians and archers had an arrow mark. A wand shape indicated a

monster vulnerable to magic while the skull mark indicated a dangerous monster.....He had used this classification system during the underground temple. Once sorted like this, the soldiers would know what to do despite the confused fighting. After the monsters were classified, the Dark Eden members who had fallen into confusion regained themselves and started fighting.

“Don’t be confused by their appearance!”

“No matter how strange it looks, it is still a monster!”

“Unit 1, keep your distance from those with a skull mark. They use wide area skills!”

“The ones that look like a caterpillar are resistant to blunt attacks. Use your swords!”

Dark Eden had experienced a variety of situations in the underground temple. After the unexpected situation occurred, there was no reason for them to be surprised again. Once the situation was arranged, they started methodically attacking the monsters. After a few monsters were driven to a critical condition, an abrupt message window appeared in front of Ark.

-The Corrupted Agurin’s health has fallen below 3% and you can extract the demonic aura.

“My guess is correct!”

The monsters which were influenced by the Asmodians had been changed. So Ark was quite happy that the opponents had a demonic attribute. Thanks to Eternal Soul, every time a demonic monster appeared his attack power increased by 20% and his resistance to that attribute increased by 30%. Furthermore, when the demonic attribute appeared didn’t it mean he could produce the cursed japtem? Of course, creating the cursed japtem wasn’t necessary. The standards of the cursed japtem could at most be used for Blade Tempest.

“But the important thing is the process of creating the cursed japtem.”

That’s right. When he used Demonic Seal, he received a bonus of 20~30% experience. After ten days of wandering around the dungeon, his stockpile of cursed japtem had decreased. If he could build up that pile again and receive 20~30% bonus experience then he wouldn’t lost any money.

“Okay, the guys with 3% health don’t kill and just gather them to this side! I’ll suck every last bit of experience. Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal! Demonic Seal!”

Ark was the type to get even 1% more if it meant he could get more leather, meat, experience etc. Ark just continuously fired Demonic Seal whenever the message window appeared. After 20 minutes, all the monsters had been changed into cursed japtem.

“Huhuhu, this is actually quite decent?”

Ark made a pleased smile after confirming how much experience he got. He had honestly been a bit concerned after seeing the warnings in the information window about the dungeon. But when he came in, wasn’t the experience actually quite good? Although his abilities were decreased by 10% thanks to the Asmodian influence, if the monsters were similar to this then he was confident.

“The monsters of this standard aren’t difficult.”

Furthermore, it was possible to receive an additional 20~30% experience! Thanks to that, Ark now saw the Abyss as a field of experience.

“Okay, let’s go! I’ll eat up all the experience here!”

.....At this point, Ark couldn’t imagine what would happen in the future. No, Ark was mistaken. When the warning message about the Abyss first appeared, Ark thought it was referring to the monsters. But the danger of the warning message wasn’t referring to the monsters. Ark hadn’t thought it was necessary to confirm the real risk. Tuduk, tuduk, tuduk tuduk. After the

first successful battle, they advanced through a stone bridge. Suddenly out of nowhere, there was the sound of chopped wood. The first person who heard the sound was the warriors at the front.

“Eh? That sound wasn’t audible before?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Let’s see? It sounds like something cracking?”

“I don’t hear it? Aren’t your nerves just too keen because of the Abyss?”

“Is that so?”

The lead warrior scratched his head with an embarrassed expression.

Kwa kwa kwang, puhwaaaak!

There was a sudden loud roar and the warrior scratching his head disappeared. The user who was just talking to the warrior couldn’t understand what happened. Then he saw blood on the ground and shouted.

“F-f-falling rocks!”

That’s right. The warrior had been hit by a huge stone pillar which fell from the ceiling and disappeared in an instant. That was just the beginning. Who could blame their colleagues who witnessed the scene to run away in panic? The sound continued and enormous stones started to fall from the ceiling like hail.

“Stone pillars are falling”

“A-avoid it!”

The interior of the cave became a mess of confusion in an instant. However it was already too late. The soldiers crumpled from the merciless hail of stones. But there was even more. While the stone pillars were falling from the ceiling, the ground started to shake. The stone bridge was unable to tolerate the shock and collapsed.

“The bridge is breaking!”

“Run! If you fall in then it’s the end!”

The stones were falling and then the stone bridge collapsed! In this situation, level and organizational abilities didn’t help at all. While screaming and avoiding the stones, the bridge collapsed and they fell to the bottom..... It was like a scene of misfortune from a movie. While some barely escaped from the place, at least 400 soldiers had died.

“What is this nonsense.....?”

Ark murmured as he looked at the stone bridge which disappeared.

“Phew, I thought I would really die this time.”

A soldier sighed as he leaned on a rock. At that time, there was an audible noise from the rock he was leaning on. The soldier felt a strange feeling and flinched as he stood up. Suddenly, the soldier was pulled into the rock by an absurd sucking force.

“What? R-rock? The rock.....is alive! Waaaahhhh!”

Soldiers who were leaning on rocks were sucked in. The soldiers’ flesh and bones were turned into rock as they were sucked into the rock. Then blood seemed to pour like oil from the bottom of the rocks. They were rocks which sucked in people and ate them!

“Everybody get away from the rocks!”

Ark hurriedly exclaimed as he belatedly realized the situation. But 100 soldiers had already been sucked into the rocks. The other soldiers were trying to tug on their arms but it was ineffective. They could only save a few soldiers after the warriors crushed the rocks. Just minutes after losing 400 soldiers, another 100 had died in vain. They had died from the hail of stones and the people eating rocks. But that was just the start. On a narrow road lava surged like a tidal and there were also areas where poison would spout from

the ground like a geyser. They weren't traps but a natural phenomenon. Thanks to that, the scouts couldn't predict where one could occur.

“This is the danger from the information window.....”

The warning wasn't about the changed monsters or the reduction in stats. It was pointing to the dungeon itself! Just like the monsters, the dungeon was also changed by the Asmodian influence. It had been changed to a hell place. It wasn't so strange that this place had turned into a hell. By the time they reached the next layer down, 700 people had died without even swinging their weapons. In the end, Ark had to make an important decision.

‘I can't be assured of what will happen if we continue into the dungeon. It is different from fighting with monsters. No matter how I handle it, there is no choice but to suffer damage. Well, its okay if the users are hit but the NPCs are the problem.’

No matter how distressing the death, the user would revive again after 24 hours passed. Unfortunately the NPCs weren't immortal. If they died once it was the end. So after coming here, Ark always arranged the NPCs in the safest place. Therefore only 20 NPCs had died by the time they reached the 21st floor. But the risk in the Abyss was incomparable to that of the underground temple. This was a place where hundreds of people could be completely destroyed with only one mistake.

‘The important goal of capturing this dungeon is to raise Dark Eden's level and cooperative play. However, there is no point raising that if the NPC troops die. I can't bring the NPC troops to such a dangerous place. Just having the NPCs in the dungeon is dangerous. If we go further down there might not be a chance to return.’

Ark made the decision to send the NPC troops from Seutandal and Lancel back before it was too late. And he also told the users who had resurrected not to enter anymore. It had already been 10 days since they started capturing the dungeon. Some monsters would've already revived in

the upper layers. Therefore many users would die if they just blindly entered the dungeon. Of course, if they entered in units then it was possible to fight the monsters but it would take considerable time to descend.

‘There are natural traps everywhere. Even if the troops are arranged and down, the risks will still be the same. I can’t gather any information about this place so no matter how many troops there are, there is a chance that a lot of them will be wiped out before managing to join up.

While users could be resurrected, if they died then they would lose levels and stats.

“There are no more troops and ingredients. If all the remaining troops are destroyed then the dungeon invasion is a failure!”

Since then, Ark’s method of invading the dungeon changed 180 degrees. When he invaded the underground temple, he just pushed the troops through like a bulldozer. But now he couldn’t expect any more troops or ingredients. Thanks to that, his priority was to preserve the troops rather than how quick he could clear the dungeon. Ark organized the soldiers who had various scouting skills to observe before moving the troops. If they discovered a group of monsters, they wouldn’t attack without reason and would lure the monsters to a 100% safe place to fight. They also avoided as much monsters as possible while marching. The purpose of the dungeon expedition had changed from reaching the last floor to survival. Thanks to that, they took 6~7 hours to travel a distance that would’ve normally taken 3~4 hours. Nevertheless, they kept on facing unique situations and the troops kept on decreasing. After 4 days had passed since Dark Eden entered the Abyss, there were only 300 people left.

“But without a doubt, the 300 people who survived are the elite of Dark Eden. Their combat power and crisis management skills are the best. In such a situation, it might be better to move with elite troops rather than a lot of people.”

Ark's judgment was correct. The cave after that continued to be dangerous but the number of casualties had decreased. That's because the soldiers who were still alive had the skills needed to survive. In addition, the troops had decreased so much that they were easy to command.

“Okay, if these troops are maintained then we can even defeat the final boss!”

Ark who had previously thought about giving up halfway had now placed his hopes on the 300 elite troops. However, that hope faded away as soon as he reached the 60th floor. When he finally arrived at the 60th floor, it seemed to be made entirely of ravines and swamps. Dark Eden carefully crossed the ravine and entered the swamp. An armoured monster 2~3 metres big had appeared in front of them. A red warning message floated in front of Ark at the same time.

-The medium ranked chief of the Abyss Demonic Troops 'Vega' has appeared!

“A middle ranked boss monster!”

Ark flinched and immediately used Eyes of the Cat for information. However an unexpected result appeared. So far he had been dealing with level 500~650 boss monsters. But the boss monster Vega who appeared on the 60th floor was only level 450.

“Why is the boss monster in a deeper place lower levelled? Does it have a special skill or something?”

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted.

“Kurak, kurak, haradura kurak!”

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Vega who had discovered Dark Eden shouted in a strange language. As a result, an absurd number of monsters appeared from the swamp behind Vega. They were around 1,000 lizard type monsters that were level 400! Even if he had 2,000 troops, he would barely be able to defeat the 1,000 level 400

monsters. However, currently Dark Eden only had 300 people.

“We’re screwed!”

Ark’s expression instantly became dark.

Dungeon of the Blind

“Forget the 1,000 monsters and just focus on the one middle ranked boss!”

Ark shouted as he stared at Vega giving orders from hundreds of metres away. That was the best thing Ark could think of in this desperate situation. Of course, the lizards weren't Vega's summons so there would still be 1,000 of them even after the boss died. With only 300 people, it was inevitable that they would be wiped out by the lizards.

“Even if we die, we won't just die like this!”

Anyway, Vega was the current boss of the 60th floor. If they defeated him then wouldn't they collect a lot of experience and loot? With any luck, they might be able to run away after dealing with Vega. Using that glimmer of hope, Ark started a bloody battle against the lizards. As expected from the 300 elite soldiers who survived the Abyss, they managed to execute the plan perfectly and lasted for 10 minutes against the advancing lizards. However, as expected the lack of troops was fatal.

While the warriors crouched down and built shields, the magicians and archers intercepted the lizards. After they impacted with the barrier, the warriors could get up and push the lizards back. But thanks to the crouching down position, it was possible for the enemies to break through by jumping over the barriers. But he had no choice thanks to the lack of troops. After the situation repeated many times, the lizards noticed the weakness and jumped through. It wasn't possible for them to face this situation.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

Screams were everywhere as dozens of lizards broke into the camp. The long range attackers had no chance against level 400 elite melee monsters. The archers and magicians instantly lost 20~30% health. Furthermore, the lizards were mixed with their allies so it was difficult to attack properly. However,

he also couldn't call the warriors back to deal with them. Thanks to the lizards inside their camp, the lizards at the front had their attacks strengthened. If the warriors turned around to attack their allies then they would be attacked from behind in an instant. Of course, only dozens of lizards had broken through. The problem was how much damage the archers and magicians would receive before the lizards were killed. Now that the weak point was found, it wasn't possible to use the crouching down defense formation anymore. The method to get to Vega was lost.

“.....Is it going to end here?”

Ark moaned as he thought about the situation. One lizard smashed the head of a magician and rushed towards Ark. Ark who was looking at another place wasn't able to respond properly and could only flinch before withdrawing a step.

“You idiot, where did your spirit go?”

Then Isyuram's voice was suddenly heard from behind him. At the same time, Isyuram jumped over Ark's shoulder and kicked the lizard. The lizard who was hit in his jaw stumbled and retreated. By the time it recovered its centre, Isyuram was already right in front of the lizard.

“This is a big lizard.....shall I see how good its endurance is?”

Isyuram smiled and soared through the air.

Pepepepeng!

It was subsequently followed by continuous roars. At the same time, several clear fist marks were seen on the lizard's armour. Then it was hit in the jaw, the nose, the forehead.....It was Isyuram's deadly attacks which aimed for the vital spots. If a person was beaten like that then they would have to go to the hospital.....no, the attacks were enough to put someone into a mortuary! The lizard kneeled down after receiving the successive critical hits.

“Disappear you stupid lizards!”

At the same time, Isyuram's knee sprang up and hit the jaw of the lizards. The head was forced backwards and Isyuram then kicked the neck. With a huge roar the lizard flew away and became stuck in the swamp. It was an amazing combat ability! Once again Ark realized Isyuram's skills.

“Ark, have you already forgotten what I taught you? Do you want me to teach you again?”

Isyuram muttered as he turned his gaze from the lizard to Ark. Ark recalled the words Isyuram taught him in the police agency's gym.

“Never give up!”

“I know that.”

Ark raised his voice angrily and Isyuram just laughed.

“But even if you know, it is different if you can't put it into practice. You foolish student.”

“I'm aware of that.”

Ark said before hitting his face with his palm. That's right. It wasn't Ark's style to give up no matter how hopeless the situation was. He didn't have the manners to accept defeat and die politely. Ark's style was to grab their ankles and hold on dirtily until the very end!

“I'll fight until the end! Take this, Dark Blade!”

Ark ran towards a lizard and twisted his sword. The sword which had darkness assimilated into it pierced through the flank of the lizard. A violent blow rang out and the lizard retreated. Ark narrowed the distance between him and the lizard. He threw his body like Isyuram and subsequently kicked the vital spots. Then another lizard close by threw a spear.

“Not a chance. Dark Dance!”

Ark used Dark Dance and avoided the spear. Then he did a roundhouse kick and knocked the lizard's sword down.

“Hmm, not bad. But you still have a long way to go! Adadadada!”

Isyuram continuously plunged between the lizards.

“We’re also here!”

“Gather the lizards to one spot!”

The rehabilitation members also plunged into the fray. The lizards that had been scattered around the camp started to gather in one place from the combined attacks of Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. The archers and magicians who had scattered from the lizards’ attacks were now free to attack.

“As expected from the coalition’s leader and unit chiefs.”

“It’s really not a joke when you look at them.”

“How long do I need to practice to fight like that?”

“Now’s not the time for this. Even the leader and chiefs can’t deal with all of them!”

That’s right. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were all accustomed to fighting. Thanks to that, no users in Dark Eden could match their combat power. However this was a game. The rules of the game applied in the game. Even if they had strong combat power, there was a limit to how many level 400 elite monsters they could take care of. While they managed to limit the damage by gathering the lizards in one place, there were still dozens of them. Meanwhile Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were only 12 people. Despite pushing the lizards to one place, they were numerically disadvantaged.

“We have to help them!”

Fortunately, the magicians and archers regrouped and started attacking. Once the attacks were focused on the lizards, they couldn’t endure anymore and collapsed.

‘That’s it. The urgent fire has been put out!’

Ark sighed with relief. Suddenly he heard Racard’s urgent voice.

“Master, your 3 o’clock, 3 o’clock!”

Ark turned his head and stiffened. Since the magicians and archers couldn’t cover them, some warriors couldn’t endure anymore and collapsed. Once some warriors fell, they continued falling like dominoes until the defense formation was completely destroyed.

“Kura, kura, bekinohun!”

The lizards stepped on the warriors and intruded the camp at Vega’s command. There were 200 of them! The camp was already a mess from the dozens of lizards who intruded, so if 200 broke in then Dark Eden would be destroyed in seconds! Ark jumped towards the incoming lizards and immediately exploded a sword.

“Blade Tempest!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When hitting a monster with the demonic attribute, the cursed sword did a couple times more damage! When the power of the cursed sword was enhanced, it seemed like a bomb had exploded. And hundreds and thousands of fragments swirled around the lizards like a hurricane. The skin and armour of the lizards became torn in an instant. Blade Tempest, it was a storm of swords.

“Teacher, hyung-nims!”

“Oh, let’s just die today!”

Isyuram and the rehabilitation group also rushed towards the lizards. And they acted like a literal clot. They couldn’t allow the lizards to intrude or Dark Eden would be destroyed. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members fired various skills without a break and prevented the lizards’ penetration.

Meanwhile the archers and magicians focused all their attacks on the lizards. But once it started collapsing, it was impossible to stop it. The lizards didn't have high attack or agility. But their defense and stamina was at a considerable standard.

It took a considerable amount of time to kill just one. So Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members could only stop 10 lizards from entering.

Meanwhile the other lizards broke into the camp. Once the lizards' intrusion was permitted, there was no possibility of enduring. The warriors had barely managed to get a barrier up again to prevent more lizards from entering. But waves after waves of lizards attacked and some parts of the barrier collapsed again. Once it became like that, the warriors were unable to maintain the barrier at all. It was the worse situation.

“Dammit!”

Profanities burst from Ark's mouth. The 200 allies and 1,000 lizards were completely mixed up together now. When this occurred, the soldiers had no choice but to fight 1 against 3 lizards. Even Ark was confronting at least 5 lizards attacking him with spears. Ark had no chance to counter the attacks coming from all directions.

“Damn, Dark Blade....ugh!”

Ark was about to swing his sword when he received a spear in the chest. And another lizard swiped Ark with its tail and he flew back several metres. While he avoided falling into the swamp, he was blown towards a place where dozens of lizards were gathered. The lizards simultaneously attacked him when Ark fell on his side. A hopeless light started to appear in Ark's eyes.

‘It is the end if I'm surrounded!’

Then some rocks that were a few metres away caught his eyes. At the moment, thoughts started spinning quickly in Ark's head. If he entered a gap between the rocks then it was possible to avoid being surrounded by the

lizards. And he could deal with incoming opponents 1 on 1. It was a common tactic to use a narrow place to limit the number of enemies.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used Dark Dance and slipped through the gap in the rock like a ghost. Then he turned his body and faced the lizards. However, Ark witnessed an incomprehensible situation.

As expected, one lizard had followed him to the rocks. Although it thrust a spear.....it unexpectedly thrust several metres away from Ark. At first he thought it was a mistake but then it happened again. It would attack, strike a rock, attack and so on. Despite Ark standing in front of it, it missed and struck the rock a few times before running off back to the battlefield. Ark forgot about counterattacking because of the abnormal behaviour and looked on in dumb surprise.

‘What’s this?’

There must be a reason for its strange behaviour. After realizing there was something wrong, he started watching the lizard’s behaviour closely. Right now there was a violent battle occurring. It seemed to look no different from a normal battlefield. However.....

‘Something is different. There is something strange about the lizard’s behaviour. What is it?’

Ark watched the scene for a while. No one in Dark Eden seemed to sense it but Ark was sure there was something questionable about the lizards’ behaviour. After a while, Ark finally had some idea of what it was.

‘Perhaps.....don’t tell me.....is it really like that? No, it is the best explanation for that situation I experienced before. And if my guess is correct.....’

Ark instantly ran out from between the rocks. After searching the swamp for a bit, Ark was able to find the body of a dead lizard. After examining the dead body, Ark’s guess was 100% confirmed. Ark instantly had a spark go through

his head. The questionable behaviour of the lizards, the terrain of the battle, Vega's response.....all of it flashed through Ark's eyes.

‘.....I can win this fight!’

“All Dark Eden troops immediately retreat back to the ravine!”

Ark's shout exploded like a bomb from his mouth. But the soldiers didn't move immediately.

“What? Back to the ravine?”

“But that place.....?”

The reaction of the soldiers was natural. There was a swamp a lot deeper behind the ravine. The sticky swamp would reach up to their waist and it would be even more difficult to fight. Meanwhile the enemy was a lizard. There were a species which lived in the swamp so they could move more freely than Dark Eden. Of course, if they fought here the chances of winning were only 1% but they couldn't understand the reason for moving to an even more disadvantageous terrain. However Ark was convinced he could reverse the momentum in that place.

“There's no time to explain! If you have strength left then move!”

“I don't know why.....”

“The coalition leader must've thought of something.”

“Okay! Let's retreat like the leader said!”

Although they couldn't sleep and complained about him, Ark was the leader that they had absolute faith in. The strategies used in the siege and even the secret dungeon, they had overcome many difficulties thanks to Ark. If Ark wasn't the leader then Dark Eden probably would've been wiped out a long time ago. The soldiers abandoned the battlefield and escaped to the ravine at Ark's command. But the soldiers were sure they were about to die so there were in a gloomy mood. There were only 120 soldiers who managed to

escape from the lizards. 180 soldiers died in between.

‘But if this plan succeeds then 120 soldiers can survive!’

“What’s going on? Why did you tell us to retreat to this difficult place?”

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members asked as they sunk up to their waists in the swamp.

“.....It is to lure Vega....”

“Vega? Vega the lizard captain?”

Their eyes looked dubious at Ark’s answer. It was a natural reaction. Vega always stayed hundreds of metres away while giving out orders. So why would Vega suddenly enter this place? Ark just answered with a confident expression.

“There is no doubt that he will enter here. But those lizards will arrive soon so I don’t have time to explain. Just believe in me.”

“What?”

“For now all members should hide their bodies in a suitable place.”

“You want us to hide here?”

“Anywhere suitable is fine. And.....”

Ark explained what the Dark Eden members needed to do from now on. The soldiers couldn’t understand Ark’s direction but scattered and hid themselves as directed. Well, there weren’t that many places to hide themselves so around half of the troops couldn’t find a hiding spot. But Ark already had a method to solve that problem. Ark looked at Jjak-tung who nodded and shouted.

“Understood. I don’t know if there will be much effect but....Feng Shui!”

-The effects of Feng Shui have been applied to the attack corps.

Feng Shui is the unique skill of the Guardian=Strategist.' Using Feng Shui will increase resistance to all environmental and terrain effects. Bonus damage will be added when attacking an enemy from a high place and conversely a penalty will be applied when attacking from a low place. In addition, you can hide your body using the darkness and terrain features to avoid detection by enemies.

<Decrease the probability of the enemy suspecting you by 30%>

It was 'Feng Shui,' the special skill of Jjak-tung who had changed to a Guardian=Strategist! When the effects of Feng Shui were applied, the soldiers instantly became blurred. If they didn't move and blended into the environment, their Feng Shui would decrease their chances of being found. Of course, it was different from 'Stealth' and the person could be discovered if looked at closely enough.

"What will we do?"

"Just hide in this area with me."

Ark replied to Isyuram and the rehabilitation members.

"Master, the lizards are gathering."

Racard whispered in his ear after spying with satellite mode. Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members quickly hid themselves. Immediately afterwards, he could hear splashes as several hundred lizards gathered at the entrance of the swamp. Then they started looking all over the place for the Dark Eden members. The soldiers became tense at the lizard's behaviour. Although they hid themselves, it wasn't as good as stealth so the lizards could spot them if they looked closely enough. Since the soldiers were scattered all over the place, if spotted they wouldn't be able to get away unscathed.

But soon the soldiers became aware of something strange about the lizards. Despite such sloppy hiding, they couldn't find them at all. Sometimes they

would push their face right where a soldier was hiding and still couldn't spot them. In the end, the lizards couldn't find the soldiers and just started swinging their spears randomly. Since it was swung randomly, sometimes the spears would pass close to the soldiers. In such a shaky situation the soldiers didn't even dare breathe. Ark had emphasized many times before hiding to 'not move or cry out!' After there were no reactions to their spears, the lizards stopped moving. And.....

“Master, that guy! The big lizard is heading inside!”

Then he heard Racard's voice again. After receiving Racard's information, Ark craned his neck and looked at a corner of the ravine. There was a yell and Vega who was surrounded by 30 lizards approached the place where the Dark Eden members were hiding. Currently Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were hiding in the swamp near the entrance of the ravine. Naturally Vega moved straight towards the place where Ark's group was hiding. After checking where Vega was, Ark quickly submerged his head in the swamp again.

‘From their movement speed and distance, that fellow should arrive in 1 minute. Now to countdown. 60, 59, 58, 57.....’

Ark calmly counted down the numbers in his head. He finally stood up after 1 minute passed. When he raised his body, the huge figure of Vega could be seen 3~4 metres in front of him.

“Dark Blade!”

Dark Blade split through the space and pierced Vega's chest. Isyuram and the rehabilitation members also simultaneously attacked Vega.

“Kura? Baratura, abera.....”

Vega seemed at a loss and made upset sounds at the sudden attacks. The moment he tried to rattle orders....

“I won't allow you. Teacher!”

“Right!”

At Ark’s command, Isyuram joined both hands together and made a foothold for Ark. Ark put his foot on it and jumped towards Vega. Then he took out a piece of food from his bag and shoved it into Vega’s mouth. His knee then kicked the chin and closed Vega’s mouth forcibly.

“Kuaaaa!”

Vega grabbed his face and let out a cry of distress.

“Huhuhu, how do you like the taste of my specially created Creative Cooking? Is it hot?”

That’s right. Ark had shoved a Creative Cooking dish into Vega’s mouth.

-Fiery Sausage

A special food made using Creative Cooking. Pig intestines, pepper, mustard, wasabi and 30 other spicy ingredients were used in this sausage. The combination of spicy ingredients will cause a violent explosion in the mouth. The spicy taste of the Fiery Sausage is far beyond the limit for most ordinary people. Those who eat it will be in extravagant pain and won’t be able to talk for a while.

<There will be a ‘Berserk’ and ‘Silence’ effect for 10 minutes>

It was the unique and burning taste of the Fiery Sausage! It was a horrible food which caused ‘Berserk’ and ‘Silence’ for 10 minutes. But Ark had another reason for feeding the Fiery Sausage to Vega.

“Kuah....kuah.....kuah.....”

Vega groaned painfully as his lips and tongue swelled like a balloon. Due to the various spicy ingredients exploding in the mouth, he couldn’t speak anymore. This was the effect Ark wanted when he used the Fiery Sausage.

“Now. Plan A!”

Ark withdrew after feeding Vega the bomb and shouted. At the same time, 120 soldiers stood up from their hiding spot and shouted. Then an amazing thing happened. Previously while attacking Vega, they had been surrounded by lizards. So why did the lizards disperse in different directions away from Ark's group after hearing the soldier's shouts? A satisfied smile appeared on Ark's face.

'As I expected!'

Ark had discovered the weakness of the lizards. He had noticed the lizard's strange behaviour of futilely attacking the rocks where Ark was hiding. After watching that behaviour, Ark could only think of one answer.

'Perhaps those guys are blind?'

It was the only explanation for the lizard's strange behaviour. Then how could the lizards fight so far? And how had they managed to fight Ark just then? He had those sorts of questions. But the answer wasn't that difficult to discover. The lizards were commanded by Vega. That's right. Vega acted as the eyes for the lizards. This was the reason why Vega couldn't directly participate in the battle. He became the eyes for the lizards and conducted them in battle. Since blind people had their other senses develop, the lizards depending on their hearing and Vega's orders to fight. That was why Ark felt a strange uneasiness during the battle. He often thought it was strange that the lizards ignored injured soldiers at the front and ran to an unexpected place. He forgot about it during the heat of the fight but once he started watching from the rocks it was really obvious.

'Those guys can't see. They depend on Vega's commands and instincts to fight. So even if they are directly in front of me, if I don't make any noise then they won't notice. And they will instinctively run to the area where they hear a loud noise!'

That was the reason why Ark searched for the corpse of a lizard. The first thing he did was check their eyes and mouth. He figured out why the lizards

didn't really defend. Since they relied on hearing for location of the enemy, the only thing they could do was attack. In other words, they had no choice but to give up defending and just indiscriminately attack! It was why Ark made Dark Eden retreat to the ravine. Vega couldn't see inside the ravine. The soldiers were hiding so the lizards couldn't find them. In the end, Vega had to come inside the ravine in order to understand the situation and direct them. That's why Ark hid at the entrance and fed Vega the Fiery Sausage. Vega couldn't give anymore commands inside the ravine. In other words, the eyes of the lizards had vanished!

'It doesn't matter if it is 120 against 1,000 when the opponents are blind!'

Ark's plan for dealing with the lizards was divided into two. There was plan A where Ark's group preventing Vega from interfering and the soldiers scattered the lizards by making noises. And plan B.....

"Over here. You stupid lizards!"

"Try and catch me!"

All of a sudden some soldiers on one side spat out insults. The lizards that were scattered everywhere started to run up to them. Then the soldiers shut their mouths and another group of soldiers on the other side started shouting.

"You're so slow that it is impossible to catch me!"

"Hey, lizard! No, are you a water lizard? Over here!"

So the lizards rushed back and forth between the shouting soldiers. The lizard's IQ was in the single digits.

'Wasn't that guy their eyes and heads?'

Ark smiled and looked at Vega. Vega had tried to give commands many times after seeing the lizards rush to and fro. However, the strength of the Fiery Sausage was no joke.

"Kasi....ku....ka....."

Thanks to the swollen lips and tongues, all he could do was make strange noises.

“Now I can fight you directly like the other bosses. Dark Blade!”

Ark brandished his sword and ran towards Vega. Isyuram and the rehabilitation group also simultaneously attacked Vega with their skills. Vega’s health quickly fell to 20% from the shower of attacks. This was another reason why Vega didn’t participate in battles. Vega was the eyes and head of the lizards so he was like an advisor. Despite his inflated level, he was a boring boss who couldn’t do anything alone. Vega didn’t even carry any weapons.

“Ku.....ku.....ku.....”

Vega just continued making strange sounds as he waved his hands and struggled. Ark assumed it was supposed to be an attack. But none of them would be hit by an attack of that standard. They quickly avoided Vega’s attacks and continued using him as a punching bag.

After 10 minutes.

“Ku.....!”

Vega let out one last cry and collapsed.

“Okay, we’ve dealt with the middle ranked boss!”

Ark quickly turned his body and looked at the lizards. The lizards were still being fooled by the soldiers while their leader was being killed. In other words.....It was slightly pitiful looking at them. However that pity quickly passed.

“Shall we clean this up?”

Ark laughed as he looked at the lizards. With Vega handled, dealing with the lizards wasn’t hard. Ark organized his troops into groups of 70 people. They would separate and lure around 20 lizards away. The bigger the noise the

more lizards there were in the area. By splitting into units, they could lure the lizards to another area and attack. Then lure again and attack. They repeated that dozens of times and took care of all the lizards.

“W-we did it!”

“We really killed all the lizards!”

The Dark Eden members murmured to themselves. It was reasonable. Who would’ve imagined that 120 people could win against 1,000 elite monsters and a boss? Nobody would believe it. Anyway, Ark and Dark Eden had accomplished their task. They also received a huge amount of experience thanks to their incredible work. Ark went up 6 levels. And the other soldiers gained an average of 4~5 levels. That wasn’t all.

“We’ve obtained 178 general and 42 magic items from the lizards.”

“We also got 3 magic items from Vega.”

The loot was enormous due to the numerous lizards. After entering the Abyss, their priority was to survive so they had avoided battle wherever possible. So there was a feeling of no loot but this battle quickly made up for that. The most valuable things were the 3 magic items dropped by Vega. Despite his abilities, Vega was still a boss.

“Do you want them?”

“All right. I’ll pack them in my bag.”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured. After entering the secret dungeon, they had fought tens of thousands of monsters. So they also received a huge pile of loot. About 30% of them were magic items while 10 rare items dropped. The combined value of the items would reach thousands of gold. But they were split among the troops so each person only received dozens of gold at the most. So Ark didn’t even hesitate to accept the loot.

‘That is the problem with capturing a dungeon with the coalition forces.

However, I wouldn't have been able to descend more than 2~3 floors alone.....'

That's what Ark was thinking. Then he suddenly felt a pain as both his wrists throbbed.

"Eh? This pain is?"

Ark was familiar with the pain so he pulled up his sleeves and checked his wrist. As expected, light was coming from both his tattoos. When particular conditions were satisfied, another seal of Eternal Soul would be released! The tattoos there were enveloped in light cracked and seemed to break. Then the tattoo sank into his skin and the information window appeared.

-A seal of 'Eternal Soul' has been released and you've acquired a new profession-specific skill.

-[Demonic Response III]: Eternal Soul stage 5 (Passive)

'Demonic Response' is a necessary stage to learn if they want to reach the enlightenment needed for Eternal Soul. When you find a demonic response, you will deal 30% additional damage against demonic monsters and the probability of resisting the demonic attribute will increase by 40%. In addition, you will be able to detect hidden demonic power within the bodies of monsters.

<When sensing a demonic attribute, you will deal +30% damage against demonic monsters and gain +40% resistance to the demonic attribute>

-[Demonic Manifestations]: Eternal Soul stage 6 (Active)

'Demonic Manifestations' is a skill which corresponds to the intermediate level of Eternal Soul. While Demonic Seal and Demonic Response were basic techniques, this skill is an intermediate level skill to prepare for war against the demonic monsters.

Magic Manifestations is a technique used to give special powers to your allies. 5 items created with Demonic Seal are automatically sacrificed when

Demonic Manifestation is used. The manifested effect depends on the type of equipment offered. In addition, the effect will change depending on the combination of equipment offered. It will be possible to know the active effect by looking at your allies. However, the sacrificed items will be destroyed when the effect disappears.

<Items created with Demonic Seal are automatically sacrificed and an effect triggered. Spiritual Power consumption: 100>

He hadn't considered that Eternal Soul would awaken. But it wasn't strange since the Abyss monsters had the demonic attribute. The problem was he couldn't see why the soul was released.

'Vega wasn't the first demonic boss I met in the Abyss. The 53rd floor? Wasn't there a boss with the demonic attribute? So why is the seal released now and not at that time?'

At first he thought it was unsealed when he fought bosses with the demonic attribute. But that wasn't the case this time.

'Oh that reminds me, doesn't the explanation for Demonic Response say that certain conditions had to be met for Eternal Soul to be unsealed? Then I must've met that condition while fighting Vega.....'

Ark read the information window for a while and was soon able to discover the answer. The new skill was equivalent to Eternal Soul reaching an intermediate level. And the intermediate skill was to prepare for a war against the demonic forces.

'Then I needed to kill a certain number of demonic monsters to unlock this?'

When thinking about it, the reason for the unsealing was clear. The boss on the 53rd floor also had subordinates but there were only 50 of them. The subordinates also weren't of the demonic attribute. However Vega had led the 1,000 lizards. The number was enough to be called an attack corps.

'The intermediate process for Eternal Soul is to fight against the demonic

corps. Then how many will I have to kill to unlock the other seals? It is become increasingly more difficult.'

He knew learning Hero Maban's legacy wouldn't be easy. But fighting against an army of demonic monsters was quite a difficult condition. Frankly, he had no idea where to find another corps after clearing the secret dungeon.

'Well, finding the demonic corps isn't the only difficult part. Won't I also need an attack group if I have to fight against an army? If I think about it, it really is a difficult condition. Well, leaving that problem for the future.....Demonic Manifestations.....the cursed items will be automatically offered and a special effect granted?'

While Demonic Seal would be used to create cursed japtem, he never really used Demonic Response. But according to the information window, Eternal Soul had reached an intermediate level. In other words, Demonic Seal was a skill that should be used in conjunction with Demonic Manifestations.

'A fairly useable skill has appeared now that Eternal Soul has reached intermediate.....although it does consume 5 equipment. I don't know what kind of effect it gives but I'll have to try it. Well, a time to test it will appear.'

Ark thought before dismissing thoughts of Eternal Soul. Right now it was important to finish capturing the secret dungeon. After the battle with Vega only 120 troops remained. Honestly, he couldn't guarantee how many would survive if they had to go down even more floors. But he had no intention of just leaving after reaching this point.

'I have to go as far as possible!'

Hell Door

“Now the rest is over so start looking for the stairs to the next floor!”

The soldiers scattered at Ark’s command and started searching. Unlike the upper layers of the secret dungeon, the Abyss was a natural cave. Therefore the structure was very complicated and it wasn’t easy to find the way to the next area. Sometimes they had to wander for 10 hours before finding the path to the next floor. While the 60th floor had swamps and a ravine, it wasn’t complicated like a maze. Looking for the way wouldn’t be difficult. However.....

“There’s no path on this side!”

“It also isn’t on this side!”

The soldiers scattered all over the place shook their heads as they reported back.

“What? What did you say? There’s nothing?”

“Is this the last floor of the secret dungeon?”

The soldiers asked with a look of expectation. It had already been a fortnight since they entered the dungeon. They were already sick of wandering around and being in danger. But Ark just shook his head.

“No, that’s not it. Vega was just a middle ranked boss. There should still be another boss in this dungeon. So there will definitely be a passage somewhere.”

That’s right. That was the reason why Ark thought the 60th floor wasn’t the lowest one. Only middle ranked bosses had appeared so the secret dungeon wasn’t cleared yet. He had also obtained another stone sculpture from Vega. The sculptures had dropped from bosses so there was no doubt it would be used in the dungeon somewhere.

“It is clear there is still a secret in this dungeon. If there isn’t a route to go down then it must be something else. If there is nothing then we’ll have to go back to the labyrinth and search carefully. Look through every corner of this floor. If there is no route then look for something strange.”

“That’s true. Hey, search in every corner more carefully!”

The soldiers considered Ark’s words and shouted. The monsters weren’t the problem in the Abyss. The dungeon itself was one enormous trap. Who knew how dangerous the Abyss would become if they had to search a few more days? They would rather go downstairs and die than have to go through that labyrinth again. After Ark’s threat, the frightened soldiers used magic to create light and searched the 60th floor again. After a while, the soldiers who were investigating the side the lizards came from came running towards Ark.

“Ark, I found something suspicious!”

The soldier had found a small cave. On the outside it just seemed like a crack in the wall but it was actually quite a wide cave after entering. But the deep cave wasn’t a passage. It was just a room with a wide space. Yet there was something strange on the opposite wall of the cave.

“What the, this is?”

Ark looked at the wall and tilted his head to one side. Unlike the other walls, this one was carved 10 cm inwards. The size was about 3 metres high and 1 metre wide. Although he looked carefully, there was no other device. Just the rectangular structure which had been carved into the wall. And more walls.

“Something like this can’t be naturally created. In other words, someone must’ve made it. Obviously there must be a secret hidden here. Eh? What’s this?”

While touching the wall with his fingertips, he felt something strange. When he removed the surrounding earth, he felt a small iron plate. Small letters were carved into the iron plate. The carved letters were in unintelligible

characters. However Ark knew how to decipher those characters. It was with Knowledge of Ancient Relics! As expected, where he touched the characters there was a shallow light and the deciphered contents appeared.

The beast who was born in darkness and lives by eating.

But uncertain people won't be aware of his presence.

If you have firm belief then inscribe his image here.

But keep something in mind. This existence will cause you endless despair.

‘Beast? Inscribe the image of a beast on the wall?’

Ark was even more confused by the contents of the iron plate. Why was it suddenly telling him to inscribe the image of an animal on the wall?

‘Inscribe on the wall? Then I have to draw an image inside this rectangle? But how do I know what beast to draw? Was there a hint somewhere in the dungeon? Like a mural or something drawn somewhere.....’

It was a serious problem. Ark was presently on the 60th floor of the secret dungeon. In the meantime he had explored dozens of kilometres. If he didn't find a clue on the 60th floor then didn't it mean he would have to search from the beginning again? It was unreasonable to even think it. In addition, the soldiers in Dark Eden wouldn't easily obey.

‘Wait....mural? A mural? Come to think of it....’

Ark tilted his head and looked at the wall for a while. A thought came to his head after remembering the word mural. The recessed wall was in the shape of a rectangle. It was as if someone had taken a mural off the wall.

‘Then there was originally something here. But why did someone take off the mural? That's right, the iron plate didn't say I needed to draw it. I misunderstood the words. Don't I just have to return the original mural here?’

After thinking that, something flashed through Ark's head. The ten stone sculptures in the form of slabs that he collected! When investigating the slab,

he had seen something carved on the surface but he couldn't identify its shape.

“Perhaps?”

Ark quickly pulled out the slabs and placed them in the rectangular recess. That's right. The slabs were the murals that had been taken away from this wall. Once he knew that, the steps afterwards were simple. Ark placed the slabs back in like a jigsaw puzzle. A large image started to form on the wall. But Ark felt more confused after he managed to insert the 10 slabs.

“What, what the? Am I short one slab?”

Even though all ten slabs were inserted, an empty space was left in the centre.

“What the? I need more slabs? Is there another middle ranked boss? No, I can't even defeat the boss on the next floor if I can't solve this puzzle? Nevertheless, the lack of a slab.....is there a boss that is hiding?”

Ark looked at the nearly completed wall mural and scratched his head. Suddenly he felt something strange when looking at the mural. The empty space had an overall triangle shape. The shape and size was similar to something he had seen before. But where? He stared at the wall mural and searched through his memory. After staring for a while, Ark finally remembered what he forgot.

“Wait? This form is....that's right, I'm sure of it! Radun, the Bloody Slate!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun spat out a slate onto the floor. It was a slate with a deep red colour that seemed to drip blood. This slate hadn't been obtained in the secret dungeon. Lumines had handed him this slate after freeing the Draconians from Magura's subordinates. But he had needed 200 Knowledge of Ancient Relics to confirm it so he had forgotten about it. Surprisingly, the Bloody Slate seemed to fit perfectly into the mural.

“Looking at the shape, I’m positive this is right!”

Ark grabbed the slate, causing it to vibrate and a new message window rose.

-You have identified the Bloody Slate using Knowledge of Ancient Relics.

<Knowledge of Ancient Relics +10, Intelligence +10, Luck +5, Fame has increased by 50>

-Bloody Slate containing the secret of the Abyss (Level: 0)

An unknown dark power can be felt from this unrefined stone slate. While the slate looks rough at first, looking closely you can tell that it has been carefully trimmed. A weird shape is depicted on the surface but it cannot be clearly determined. The purpose of this slate is still unknown.

‘Yes!’

Ark inwardly cheered as he checked the information window. After the name was different, the description was the same as the other 10 sculptures he got. In other words, the Bloody Slate was part of the mural.

‘For the slate Lumines gave me to be a part of this mural.....’

Then wouldn’t the dungeon boss be related to Magura who disappeared hundreds of years ago? He had suddenly obtained hidden information about the Lore quest. No, the boss hiding in the lowest layer of the Abyss might even be Magura himself. According to Lumines’ words, Magura was an evil which existed before the Dark Lord. It was obvious after considering the name of the dungeon, Cradle of Ancient Evil.

“Well what matters is that I’ve found the last key!”

Ark placed the Bloody Slate into the empty space. Finally the image of the beast which the iron plate mentioned had been completed. It was the shape of a huge wild dog with black fur. A black wild dog was often considered an omen of bad luck in the old days. When the Bloody Slate was inserted, it

formed the red eyes of the dog. So the image of the beast was finally completed.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

The cave started to shake violently. Rocks fell down from the ceiling like hail.

“What, what the?”

“The cave is collapsing!”

Ark and the soldiers quickly rushed outside the cave. The cave fell almost at the same time.

“What is this? A passage wasn’t created and it just collapsed.....”

Ark looked at the collapsed cave with an absurd expression. Although the cave collapsed, the huge wall mural which was still standing started to crack. Then an enormous rock fell down and a strange shape was shown. Door..... it was a door. An enormous door which reached dozens of metres. But it wasn’t an ordinary door. The door was made from humans. Thousands of humans with looks of suffering on their faces made up the grotesque doors! The soldiers were at a loss of words after seeing the eerie doors.

“Hell door.....”

Someone groaned and muttered. That’s right. It was just like the Hell door described in Dante’s work. The soldiers of Dark Eden were overwhelmed by the terrible door. Even Ark was a bit lost when he thought about it. Only Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were the exception.

“A hell door at the end of the Abyss.....isn’t this pretty fun?”

Isyuram laughed gleefully and approached the hell door. Jjak-tung also laughed and nodded.

“Then hell will be behind this? Good. I always wanted to see it.”

Bul-kkun also giggled and muttered.

“Although it is abrupt.....you would see it sooner or later.”

“What? That is slander.”

“Then you know that you’ll go to heaven?”

“Of course. Do you know how much I’ve donated to the church?”

“Donation? Isn’t that just money laundering?”

“Don’t talk boring nonsense. If other people here it the will think it is true.”

Jjak-tung freaked out and quickly blocked Bul-kkun’s mouth. While it was unsure if Jjak-tung actually did money laundering, Isyuram’s and the rehabilitation members’ words caused the soldiers to relax a bit. But that only lasted a few minutes. The moment Ark entered the huge Hell door, he witnessed an absurd scene. The other side of the Hell door was an extremely bizarre sight. Dark water stretched out beyond the threshold of the door. It stretched into the horizon! It was already weird for there to be a huge ocean underground. But the even more astonishing thing was the ‘thing.’

Kuoooooh, aaaaaaaah!

Humans and beasts, monsters.....transparent beings were entangled everywhere in the ocean. Whenever the waves hit the strange forms, a cry would emerge. It was a literal hell.

“Do we have to get pass here?”

Ark looked at the wide ocean with absurd eyes before trying to touch it. Then a black shape popped up and wound around his arm. His health was sucked out at an enormous pace at the same time a warning message appeared.

-You have touched the Hell River.

<The Hell River contains the cursed spirits who have a deep-seated grudge.

If you touch it then you will lose 100 health per second>

Ark freaked out and removed his arm. Fortunately he didn't lose a lot of health but.....

“How are we going to pass this place?”

“Ark!”

Then Isyuram who had been looking around suddenly shouted.

“Can't we ride this?”

Isyuram pointed towards a small boat that was on the side of the hell door. Although it was a small boat, it would still float on the Hell River. They had no choice but to use the boat if they wanted to pass through the river. But there was one serious problem. The size of the boat was so small that only fifteen people could fit at most. In other words, the people who could enter this place were limited.

‘Then only 15 people can pass through?’

Even when they moved with hundreds of people, there was always a life and death situation. But now only 15 people could go to a place where there was a boss? It was a ridiculous situation. But.....

‘This is a game.’

That's right. Once again this was a game. Although this might be an incredibly difficult dungeon with strong monsters, it was a game so it was ultimately designed to be defeated by users. Then the Hell River and small boat must've been purposely designed. And the purpose was to restrict the number of people.

‘Well I don't know if my guess is correct. There are currently 120 soldiers remaining. In such a situation, if another 1,000 enemies appeared then the odds aren't in my favour. But there's no need to worry about since the number of personnel is restricted. It means I can face the enemy with fewer

troops. Besides.....

Anyway, this was still the last boss of the secret dungeon. In other words, the best loot would drop. If he caught that boss with all his troops then he would've had to divide the loot into 3,800 parts. No matter how good the loot was, Ark would only get a few gold. Yet how much would he get if only a dozen people entered? Of course, he would still have to share the loot with the coalition members that entered. And the people who were entering were Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. He couldn't monopolize it but he would be able to get the yolk of the egg!

'Huhuhu, this is an opportunity!'

There was a greedy smile on Ark's face as he came up with an idea.

"Does anyone want to travel through hell?"

The soldiers shook their heads and stepped backwards. There were no humans who would want to visit hell. Of course, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were the exception. So the group ended up being Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members.

"Now, shall we do a bit of sightseeing through hell?"

Isyuram put his foot up on the side of the boat and said. The boat then slid smoothly through the water.

"What the, that is?"

The boat had been floating for 5 minutes. The horribly distorted and wriggling shape of the landscape was enough to cause motion sickness. Then finally Ark's group arrived close to the destination. But the final destination was an unimaginable place.

"Black.....crystal temple?"

A bizarre island had appeared on the Hell River. A huge temple was located on the centre. The temple looked different from others. The walls, roof and even the floor of the temple was made of a black crystal. The temple was extremely beautiful but also terrifying as it felt like his soul was being sucked in. After landing, Isyuram looked at a crystal pillar and said.

“This temple is beautiful but it feels unpleasant.”

“Is it because it is in hell?”

“My mood was refreshed the moment I entered the hell so it is still strange.”

Isyuram muttered. The mysterious atmosphere of the crystal temple was enough to make Isyuram tense.

“Stay alert. There is a high possibility that the boss is here.”

“Don’t worry. I can enter battle mode when it is necessary.”

Isyuram answered and entered the temple. It was more enormous than it looked on the outside. The structure of the temple looked just like a building in ancient Rome. The sides were lined with thick pillars holding up the incredible weight of the triangular roof. And everything was made of the black crystal. It was like there were floating in a dark space.

“This funny feeling.....”

Isyuram kicked the floor and flinched. He stared at the dark temple with a pensive expression and breathed out lightly.

“.....Ark, do you understand?”

“.....How can I know understand that there is a strange atmosphere?”

Ark gulped and swallowed his saliva. Isyuram’s reaction was natural. There was a strange smell coming from the darkness. It was the unpleasant scent of rotting flesh and blood. The smell stimulated his nerves and caused an eerie feeling! It was impossible for someone like Ark and Isyuram not to sense the hostility present. After Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members sensed

the aura, they instantly changed into battle mode. But despite waiting 1 minute, there was no reaction from the inside.

“It has no intention of coming out. Is it making us come there instead?”

“The monster sees no need to come out....”

“We’ve come all the way here to kill it and now we have to search for it?”

“I’ll go first.”

Ark stepped forward and said. While Isyuram and the rehabilitation members had strong combat skills, in New World Ark was still the strongest among them. When considering level and defense, Ark was the only possible choice to lead. With sharpened nerves, Ark carefully stepped forward. How far did they enter? Once the party arrived at a large hall, they witnessed an unimaginable scene. A huge beast 20 metres in size was lying in the hall. The monster was a black wild dog. It looked exactly like the one shown in the mural. But this black dog had its body ripped to shreds. The lower part of the body was so torn apart that its internal organs were flowing out. The terrible smell of blood drifted about the interior of the hall. Ark looked at the dog’s body and asked with a puzzled expression.

“What on earth happened to it?”

Since it looked exactly the same as the mural, Ark was convinced that this dog was the final boss of the Abyss. But why was there a horrifying body before the battle had even begun?

‘Did another user enter before us and took care of the monster?’

He thought that for a bit. He had often experienced such things when roaming around dungeons. General monsters were a lot more common than boss monsters. After taking care of the general monsters, he went to the location of the boss only to find that another user had taken care of it. But Ark soon shook his head.

‘No. I sealed this dungeon up one year ago. Furthermore, the hell door needed to be opened to arrive here. While they could obtain the other slates, it was impossible for other users to open the door without the Bloody Slate. In that case.....’

“What? It can’t be that we came here in vain?”

“I’m going crazy.”

A rehabilitation member said with an exhausted expression.

“Damn! I can’t even eat fried dog.”

Isyuram loved eating dogs so he complained after seeing the huge, dead dog.

-Kuoh....ku ku ku ku

Suddenly groaning sounds emerged from the beast’s mouth which almost sounded like a laugh.

“What, what the? That bastard is still alive?”

Isyuram exclaimed as he jumped from the shock. It wasn’t just Isyuram. Ark and the rehabilitation members were also staring at the beast with amazed eyes. Then the beast’s eyelids opened and red eyes were revealed.

-.....Humans!

He spoke in a delighted voice. The red eyes scanned the party before he said.

-I need to ask.....my subordinates had it.....the key.....you can’t come to this place without it.....only one key remains.....where did you find it?

‘The last key? Is it talking about the Bloody Slate?’

“From the Fire Draconians I saved in Hwaryong Mountain.”

Ark wavered before answering. He had visited this place yet the boss was already like a corpse. Well, he wasn’t dead but he still wasn’t in a normal condition. Ark was interested in why the boss of the secret dungeon was in such a state. The boss might even lead to a different event. The beast wasn’t

able to fight in this state so did it really matter if he knew? The beast's eyes narrowed at Ark's answer.

-It was like that.....so it was there.

“Are you Magura?”

-I....you know.....there was a survivor from the Fire Draconians?

“Yes, I heard about you from them. I don't know why you look like this but expect me to spare you.”

Ark declared in a cold voice. It wasn't to get revenge for the Fire Draconians that Ark said this. Despite his looks, Magura was still alive. So couldn't he get loot from him when Magura ran out of breath? In the worst case scenario, he might not get any loot but he could complete the quest. Magura frowned at Ark's words. After a moment, the upper part of his body started shaking from laughter.

-Hahahaha! Spare me.....? You....me?

“Judging from your current state, you'll die even if I don't touch you.”

-Those words....this body is dying....is that what you think?

“You're saying it isn't true? Are you trying to make me laugh?”

-You....your current situation.....you still don't understand.

“My current situation?”

-For hundreds of years I....for you guys.....I've been waiting.

What nonsense was he saying? He had been waiting hundreds of years for Ark and his companions? Ark muttered with an absurd expression.

-It isn't possible to understand.....it is natural.....but you'll soon discover why.....the reason I said I've been waiting hundreds of years.....!

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

It was at that moment. Magura's body started convulsing and the internal organs on the ground flew in every direction. They wrapped around the pillars in the temple pulled Magura's body upwards. A cobweb like structure appeared in the centre above Magura's upper body. A red warning message then appeared in front of Ark.

-The boss monster Hands of the Devil
'Magura' has appeared!

"T-this is.....!"

"Hik! M-Master! Above!"

At that moment Racard's scream was heard from behind him. Ark lifted his head with surprise. The internal organs.....the internal organs were wriggling like a snake and fell towards him.

"Dark Dance!"

Ark quickly moved his feet and withdrew dozens of metres. At the same time, there was a loud banging as dozens of strands of internal organs impacted with the place where Ark was. If he hadn't instinctively avoided it then he would've been crushed to death. But there was no time to even sigh with relief.

Syu syu syu syuk.

After Ark avoided it, the dozens of internal organs tentacle stems flew towards him at a tremendous speed.

"Ugh! What is this.....?"

Tentacles? Anyway, they were still heading towards him even after he avoided it. But he couldn't closely examine the tentacles because he had to keep on running away from them. He had looked away for one second and a tentacle had closed around his leg. He lost his balance and stumbled, causing dozens of tentacles to repeatedly hit him.

Pepepepeng!

He became dizzy and also lost 10% of his health. But he couldn't afford to become flustered.

“Dark Blade!”

Ark struck the tentacle that was wrapped around his leg. And he rolled across the floor to escape the rest of the tentacles. After Ark had fended off that attack, he had time to look around the room.

‘Oh my god.....!’

The tentacles hadn't only attacked Ark. Magura had a large number of tentacles attached to his body, the pillars and floor to ceiling. The hundreds of tentacles were also attacking Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. Fortunately Isyuram was using quick footwork to avoid the attacks from the tentacles while the rehabilitation members had only lost 20~30% health.

“Hik, hik! Intestines, intestines! I flew into intestines!”

Racard was also flying between the pillars and avoiding the tentacles.

“D-dammit!”

“Ack! It's coming from all directions.....”

All of this had happened in less than one minute.

‘If we're careless then we'll be wiped out in an instant!’

Then Bul-kkun and Tazza got snagged by the tentacles and fell down. Dozens of tentacles then focused on those two. Ark threw the Saw blade and shouted.

“Transformation off! Iron Fire Wall!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

The Saw blade quickly turned into Razak and stood in front of the two with his shield. Wings of flames poured out and pushed back the

tentacles. Meanwhile Ark used Sprint and cut the tentacles wound around Bul-kkun and Tazza.

“Teacher, hyung-nims! Gather around me!”

“Ugh, understood!”

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members gathered around Ark. Then they formed a back to back circular formation. It was a method designed to limit the directions the tentacles could attack from. Even if dozens of tentacles flew towards them, with their backs protected it was possible to avoid receiving a concentrated attack like before.

“What on earth, that guy? Wasn’t it supposed to be dead?”

Isyuram muttered as he continued attacking the tentacles.

“If we hit it then it’ll die.”

“What?”

“That guy.....only has 15% health left.”

Ark stared at Magura with gold eyes. Shortly after the attack had started, Ark had used Eyes of the Cat to check Magura’s information. He confirmed that Magura was a level 500 elite boss. In a normal fight there was no way 12 people would be able to defeat him. But Ark had discovered why the number of people allowed in the shrine was restricted. He didn’t know the reason yet but Magura’s body was ripped to shreds and it only had 15% health left.

‘That beast only has half his body and 15% health left.’

Ark also only lost 10% health when hit by the tentacles. He had thought Magura would be incredibly strong but he was mistaken. While losing 10% health with one blow was a tremendous attack power, Ark had actually been hit by dozens of tentacles. He had received dozens of hits from a level 500 elite boss yet his health had only been reduced by 10%. In order words, Magura’s stats had also been decreased like his health. On the other hand

Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members had received various buffs from the priests and magicians so they were in great shape. Of course, Magura still wasn't an insignificant opponent.

'But Magura could only properly move his head and one paw. Therefore he can probably only attack with the tentacles.'

And they could somehow stop the tentacle attacks thanks to the circular formation. But there was no meaning in stopping the tentacles if they couldn't damage Magura.

"Teacher, hyung-nims, maintain the formation while I approach that guy!"

Ark struck a tentacle and approached Magura with the circular formation still maintained. The problem was that there were also tentacles hanging above Magura's body like a spider web.

"Razak, transform!"

After approaching Magura, Ark commanded Razak to transform. Then he grabbed the Saw Blade and swung it towards the tentacles. The whip swept past dozens of tentacles at once. At the same time, Magura's body which had been hanging in the air descended.

"This is an opportunity, Demonic Detection!"

It was the skill which originated from Hero Maban! He used the 5th stage skill of Eternal Soul. Ark's eyes instantly turned white and the scenery changed like he was looking through infrared goggles. Then something which looked like black blood was drawn around Magura's body. It was the demonic energy in Magura which had been drawn out using Demonic Detection! Ark swung the Saw blade towards the area where the black blood was thickest.

"Dark Blade!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When he cut the black blood, it caused a change explosion within Magura's body. The burst blood vessel had spread. When attacking the demonic energy discovered with Demonic detection, he could deal between 100~1,000 additional damage. In addition, cutting the blood vessel also temporarily decreased defense. It was indeed a skill for dealing with Demonic monsters.

-Kuuohh....you dare.....foolish human.....!

Maura growled after receiving considerable damage. At the same time, dozens of tentacles sprouted like an arrow from the skin.

“Bah, how do you expect to get past out protection?”

Isyuram and the rehabilitation members were like a barrier protecting Ark from the tentacles.

‘Okay, if this keeps up then I can win!’

But he couldn't be too hasty. Magura was still a boss monster. If there was the slightest slip then the situation could change in an instant.

‘Slowly, I have to slowly decrease that fellow's health!’

Ark maintained the circular formation and blocked the attacks of the tentacles while grasping the timing to attack Magura. Ark never dealt continuous attacks and focused on attacking and defending with Isyuram and the rehabilitation members. So they slowly cut down Magura's health. On the other hand, Magura had lost 5% health from the attacks.

-Impertinent bastards!

Magura gave a strange yell and his body shook. Something unthinkable then occurred. The tentacles flying all over the place gathered and changed to a huge hammer. The huge hammer hung over all of their heads.

“Huck! S-scatter!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a tremendous roar as Ark, Isyuram and the rehabilitation members flew all over the place. Then the tentacles dispersed again and attacked the party. The situation was like when they were first attacked. Bul-kkun and Hae Gyeol-sa were already wrapped in dozens of tentacles.

“Hyung-nims!”

Ark swung his Saw blade and cut the tentacles wound around Bul-kkun’s arms. Just as he was turning towards Hae Gyeol-sa.....

Magura’s neck started to bulge like a balloon and a huge object popped out of his mouth. The huge tongue like object extended like jelly and instantly covered Hae Gyeol-sa’s body. Then the object along with Hae Gyeol-sa was drawn back inside Magura’s mouth.

“W-what, that guy! Surely not.....?”

Crunch, crunch, crunch!

Magura’s jaw moved and a horrifying sound was heard. Then blood emerged from the fangs.....He was chewing. Magura had chewed and swallowed Hae Gyeol-sa! But the truly horrifying scene occurred afterwards.

“U-unbelievable.....!”

A groaned flowed from Ark’s mouth as he looked at Magura. A blissful expression appeared on Magura’s face after he swallowed Hae Gyeol-sa. Then his chest area started twitching and expanding. Fur also grew out from the missing skin on the left, front paw. At the same time, 8% of Magura’s health was restored. He had used Hae Gyeol-sa to revive and restore his health.

-Kukukuku, for hundreds of years.....I finally regained it.

“Regained it?”

Ark used Eyes of the Cat as well as Skill Penetration and the information window appeared.

-Characteristics of Magura's skill: Piece of Flesh

Magura is the immortal existence known as the Hands of the Devil.

Even if Magura's flesh has been completely destroyed, he can restore his body. But Magura can't just remake his body. Magura uses 'Piece of Flesh' in order to absorb living flesh. When Magura uses 'Piece of Flesh,' he can restore his body and abilities.

-Kukukuku.....do you understand now?

Magura shook his paw which had been restored.

-Yes, the slate you found isn't a key.....it is to brand the living sacrifices.

'Living sacrifices? Brand?'

Then Ark recalled the warning message that appeared when entering the Abyss. It had warned about a huge sacrifice! And Magura's body was destroyed. He had confirmed the information about Piece of Flesh after using Skill Penetration. So they were sacrificial offerings for Magura! Magura had spread complex information in order for some sacrifices to come here.

"Don't tell me.....for hundreds of years.....?"

-You noticed.....it is my plan.

Magura laughed and muttered. The worst case scenario instantly rose in Ark's head.

-I.....I've been in this dead body for hundreds of years since the end of the Dark Century.....but I was born in the darkness itself.....I am an immortal existence.....My soul has been waiting in this body for a good opportunity to restore my flesh..... Yet no matter how immortal I am.....I can't restore my body without absorbing a human's flesh.....so I prepared something just in case.

"The Bloody slate containing the secrets of the Abyss!"

-Yes.....kukukuku. Humans are simple.....just slip them some bait about a hidden secret and they will enter.....if I just sit here calmly then the sacrifices will come to me.....warriors and soldiers are strong.....but too much time passed this time.....the bait I cast disappeared before humans could come here.....and after hundreds of years.....I had mostly given up but thankfully you guys came here.....

Ark now started to untangle the secrets of the Bloody Slate.

-Now you know.....the meaning to I've been waiting for you for hundreds of years.....?

It was simple. In order to eat. And that was the main reason why the number of people allowed in the crystal shrine was limited. In Magura's condition he couldn't afford to meet a lot of users. This meant Magura had limited the numbers to an amount he could eat.

That's right. The dungeon, slates, hell door.....the whole thing was a trap!

Magura's Stone

Kuoooooh.

The crystal temple was locked in a bizarre silence. Ark and the rehabilitation group even forgot that they were fighting. The secret behind the slabs was shocking. No, such a thing didn't matter. The problem was that Magura's health and stats had been restored. When slowly chipping away 5% of Magura's health, Ark's group had lost an average of 30% health. It was the inevitable result when facing an elite level 600 boss with 12 people. But it was enough in a battle where Magura only had 15% health left. However Magura had recovered his health after eating Hae Gyeol-sa. Wasn't it comparable to Dragon ball where a person managed to transform themselves to quickly increase their power?

“Damn, this dog wants to eat us?”

Isyuram rushed towards Magura angrily.

“Teacher! W-wait a minute.....!”

-You fool.....it is too already too late.....keuaaang!

Magura opened his mouth and roared. There was a sudden huge storm and Isyuram was thrown back. Isyuram immediately impacted with the ground. Hundreds of tentacles then wound around him.

“Teacher! Dark Blade!”

Ark attacked the tentacles wound around Isyuram. But hundreds of tentacles once again emerged from Magura's body and formed a barrier. Dark Blade was blocked by the barrier and Isyuram was sucked in Magura's mouth. The eerie sound of crunching flesh and bones followed. This time Magura managed to restore 10% of his health. Magura's original health was 15%. His stats were also only at 15%. Now after eating Hae Gyeol-sa and Isyuram, his

health and stats increased by 18%. In other words, he had recovered 33% of his abilities.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The effect showed straight away. Hundreds of tentacles crossed the space at an incredible speed. The speed and power couldn't be compared to before. Moreover, 'Howling' which was used on Isyuram was used again so Ark and the rehabilitation members couldn't maintain their balance and stumbled. When in that state, the tentacles were certain to deal damage.

"Ugh!"

Ark quickly lost 20% health from the continuous attacks of 'Howling' and the tentacles. The rehabilitation members also lost 30% health and some of them were on the verge of death. It was truly overwhelming!

'If this is what Magura is capable of at 33%, imagine 100%.....!'

Ark had forgotten Magura's true identity. Yes, Magura was the legendary devil who devastated the Jackson region and drove the Fire Draconians to their extinction. If he recovered 100% then his power would transcend imagination! No, even reaching 100% wasn't necessary. Ark and the rehabilitation members couldn't even deal with Magura when he was 33% recovered.

'Did I travel all this way just to become that guy's meal?'

Anger immediately surged at the idea. The important thing wasn't if he died here or not. The reason Magura hid here was because he couldn't heal his body. This meant that he wouldn't stay here once his flesh was perfectly recovered. The legendary devil which devastated Jackson hundreds of years ago would once again be set free in the world. The world would become an ocean of fire wherever Magura walked.

'Of course, I really don't care that much if the world becomes an ocean of fire.....'

The problem was the entrance to the dungeon was on Silvana. So the first place Magura would turn to ashes was Silvana. Right now Silvana was rapidly developing in order to be promoted to a B ranked estate. In addition, Silvana was also the core place in his triangular trade route. If it was turned in an ocean of fire then Ark would lose everything. He had to stop Maura from resurrecting.

“Ark, do something!”

He heard Bul-kkun’s voice from behind him. When he raised his head, dozens of tentacles had surrounded the party. Ark freaked out and swung his sword wildly. At the same time, there was a huge pressure on his sword and Ark was thrown into a wall. The tentacles had become as strong as a hammer after Magura recovered 33% percent.

‘Oh my god! How can I win?’

The current odds of winning were only 1%. As more time passed, the chances were slowly reaching 0%.

‘Dammit, I can’t just give up like this!’

Ark spat out blood and raised his body. The battle with Magura wasn’t just a life or death situation anymore. If Ark’s group died here then Silvana would be at risk. Even if he wanted to, it wasn’t possible for him to give up. Ark bit his lip and got up.

Chiing!

A sharp sound resonated from behind him. The crystal wall had cracked where Ark’s sword had hit it and a small splinter had fallen down.

‘What the? Why is the crystal.....?’

Ark looked at the crack in the wall with stupid eyes. The strength of the crystal in the temple was close to steel. It didn’t even crack when hit by one of Magura’s tentacles. Then why did a fragment fall off when his sword

touched it?

‘Wait? That reminds me, the crystal.....?’

Ark recalled the situation from a moment ago and had an idea. After carefully looking at the structure of the temple, Ark sent a whisper to Tazza.

-Tazza, I have a request!

-What? Now?

-Yes, right now!

Ark shouted in an urgent voice. He explained the plan that he had just come up with. Tazza made a strange expression before smiling and nodding.

-Ohhh, that’s brilliant?

-Is it possible?

-It’s possible, no I will make it possible. But the situation is difficult since he already had two people. If you guys die before I’m finished.....

-I’ll somehow hold out until your preparations are finished.

-I understand. I’ll do as you ask!

Tazza rolled and escaped from the tentacles before suddenly running away. When Tazza ran away, dozens of tentacles instantly aimed for his back. But Ark had expected Magura’s behaviour and spun his sword like a windmill to block the tentacles.

“Everyone gather around me!”

Ark explained his plan when the rehabilitation members gathered.

“From now on don’t drink potions. It is better to have less health now. Don’t attack the tentacles unless they wind around you.”

“What? What are you saying?”

“I don’t have time to explain. Just do as I say and you’ll soon understand.”

“Damn! What is this.....?”

The tentacles flew towards where Ark’s group was gathered. Ark and the rehabilitation members scattered in different directions. Ark ignored the flying tentacles and only attacked the ones that wound around him. Their health decreased and all the rehabilitation members were instantly in a critical condition.

“Eh, I don’t know. Just kill me!”

-Uh?

Suddenly Magura’s movements changed. Yapsab only had 2% health left when the tentacles suddenly flew sharply towards him.

‘Huhuhu, indeed.....he’s been waiting hundreds of years so he can’t just let his prey be killed.’

Yes, that was the reason Ark told them not to care about health. Magura’s tentacles were made from intestines and other internal organs. Magura’s goal was to devour Ark and the rehabilitation member. With ‘Piece of Flesh,’ he could eat humans and restore his body. Naturally the tentacles aimed to restrict their movements so that Ark and the rehabilitation members could be swallowed. But Ark and the rehabilitation members just kept running and ignored the tentacle attacks so they couldn’t grasp the timing to wind around them.

-T-these guys.....!

After the situation was repeated, Magura started to realize Ark’s goal.

-For sacrifices to act so daringly.....playing cheap tricks.....

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

At that moment, hundreds of tentacles intersected and seemed to form a huge net. The net was cast out and thrown over Yapsab and Ddeok-dae.

“D-damn!”

Yapsab and Ddeok-dae became puzzled and quickly stepped on it. But once caught by the net, the tentacles just became even more intertwined. Ark and the other rehabilitation members tried to tear the tentacles but more just appeared. In the end, Yapsab and Ddeok-dae were dragged like fish in a net into Magura's mouth. At the same time, Magura's health recovered by 14% and his left side and hind legs healed. Magura's stats had recovered close to 50%.

-Kukukuku. You guys...postponing it is useless!

Magura once again made a net with the tentacles. Then he heard Tazza's voice from the back.

“Ark, it's done!”

Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

“Everybody run out of the temple!”

“Okay!”

-You fools.....you can't get away!

Hundreds of tentacles wound around the pillar pursued them. The hundreds of outstretched tentacles was like a scene from a horror movie. Ark who had escaped to a corridor smiled and said.

“Tazza hyung, now!”

At the same time, Tazza took out a large hammer and shield. Then he struck it and the sound of a gong seemed to resonate through the temple. And the whole temple started to buzz and vibrate. The crystal was a material which reflected sound well. But here was another reason the whole temple vibrated. It was due to the effect of what Tazza did. That was.....

Pejik, pejiijik, jjejjjaejjaek!

The humming continued resonating through the temple and the crystal pillars the tentacles were wrapped around started cracking. At first it was just a

small crack until it suddenly accelerated and spread at an incredible speed.

-What is this.....why.....?

Magura looked at the cracking pillars with confusion. Ark who had escaped into the corridor turned around and laughed.

“Crystal is just like glass.”

-Glass?

“Yes, glass. You’re a dog so you might not understand but it is a substance weak to vibration.”

-Vibration?

Magura looked like he couldn’t understand anything Ark was saying. He then belatedly became aware of the small objects lodged in the bottom of the pillars. It was a bent metal in a U shape. That’s right. This was the core part of the plan Ark had Tazza prepare. The reason there was a small crack in the crystal wall when Ark’s sword hit it was because it was a material weak to vibration. He hadn’t felt it at the time but when Ark was slammed into the wall, the attack had caused his sword to vibrate and crack the crystal. Ark had devised the plan after recalling a simple law of physics.

‘Then can’t I deliver a stronger vibration towards the pillars in the temple?’

Couldn’t he break the entire pillar? The problem was how to focus a strong and continuous vibration on the pillar. Then he thought of the U shaped metal lodged in the pillar. Once there was a resonance, it would continue vibrating continuously. So he had Tazza who changed to a Guardian=Engineer to create the bent pieces of metal. While Ark and the rehabilitation members were running around, he had lodged it in the crystal pillars. Then the gong was hit and the intense sound wave rang out through the temple. The sound struck the metal which changed it to a vibration which passed into the crystal pillar. The result was what happened. The cracks spread over the crystals as they were weak to vibration. Once the cracks spread, it couldn’t be stopped.

When the cracks spread on the pillar, it couldn't withstand the heavy weight of the ceiling and started crumbling.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Magura looked up with puzzled eyes after hearing a roaring sound.

-Ugh! U-unbelievable.....!

Magura wound his tentacles around a pillar close to Ark. The tentacles on the pillars in the rear unwound and Magura's body flew towards Ark. A huge monster was flying towards him! But Ark just laughed and raised his sword. Then he lightly hit the pillar that the tentacles were wound around. A clean sound rang out and there was a smashing sound. The metal lodged in the pillar vibrated even stronger. With the tentacles coiled around it, the cracks spread even quicker. The tentacles fell from the pillar and Magura who was flying towards him was forced to the ground.

-Kuaaaak!

“Now get ready to become flattened like a rice cake.”

Kang, kang, kang, kang!

Ark turned around and ran around the temple knocking the pillars with his sword. More cracks spread until they couldn't resist the weight of the ceiling and the pillars collapsed. With so many pillars collapsed, the weight of the ceiling was a burden on the other pillars in the temple. The pillars were broken like a chain of dominoes while would soon lead to the collapse of the entire temple. It was the end once cracks started to spread on the solid crystal temple. The temple would shatter into thousands of sharp fragments. There was no chance Magura could survive that.

‘With the pillars broken, Magura can't use the tentacles to move. The rehabilitation hyung-nims have taken shelter outside the temple so I should escape soon!’

Ark used Sprint and ran down the corridor. At this point, the temple was already started to collapse as some debris fell from the ceiling. Even just a graze from a crystal splinter decreased his health by 200~300. Being hit by a large crystal would be instant death! While only small splinters had fallen so far, if he looked at the ceiling then he could predict when a large chunk would fall. However, if he ran while checking the ceiling then he wouldn't escape the temple in time.

“Racard, time to do your job!”

“Understood. I'm so lucky to have such a cool Master!”

Racard who had been busy avoided Magura's tentacles during the fight landed on Ark's shoulder. Then he kept an eye on the crystal ceiling.

“Hik! 3 o'clock, there is a large crack in the ceiling! A huge crystal will fall 4 metres from here!”

Ark quickly avoided the crystal thanks to Racard's words. So Ark ran down the corridor with Racard and avoided the crystals. After a while, he arrived at the entrance to the temple and saw the rehabilitation members who had escaped first.

‘That's it! Now we just have to wait and it is our victory when the temple collapses!’

Ark was inwardly convinced of his victory.

“Ark, behind you, behind!”

Tazza pointed to something behind Ark. Ark's face stiffened as he turned his head. A bloody Magura was quickly approaching Magura. Although Magura had recovered 50%, his lower body was still injured. He was also bleeding heavily from following Ark through the falling crystals. Since he couldn't use the pillars to move himself with the tentacles, he was dragging his body along using his paws. It really was a dreadful scene.

‘Damn! At that speed.....’

Even though Magura was significantly injured, he would be able to escape from the temple before it collapsed. And presently Ark and the rehabilitation members only had 5% health left. They wouldn’t survive if Magura escaped from the temple.

‘I have to stop him here!’

Ark turned around and ran towards Magura.

“Racard, take the Saw blade and go outside the temple!”

“Understood!”

He handed the Saw blade to Racard who picked it up and flew out of the temple. Racard never even considered saying something like ‘No, I won’t leave Master!’

-Kuaaaah, disappear!

After Ark blocked him, Magura tied the tentacles into a bundle and attacked him. Ark had no time to worry about the collapsing temple. Just as the bunch of tentacles was about to strike Ark’s body. Ark smiled and shouted.

“Area Declaration, Glory of the Night! Divine skill, Descent of the Fire Draconian!”

It was the only way for Ark to stop Magura’s rush. The dark spirit rose from the ground when he used the skill. At the same time the area was wrapped in darkness. But then flames burst upwards after a short time. The flames formed a Fire Draconian! The Fire Draconian flew upwards before falling like a lightning bolt towards Ark’s head. Ark was wrapped in the flames.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The <Immortal Fire Draconian> effect will be applied for 10 minutes.

- * 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.
- * Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.
- * All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.
- * Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.
- * When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

-D-dragon warrior!

Magura was astounded after seeing the Fire Draconian wound around Ark. Magura was the one who caused the extinction of the Fire Draconians years ago. Naturally he knew the techniques that the Fire Draconians used.

“This is the revenge of the Fire Draconians! Jump!”

Ark kicked the ground and flew towards Magura like a bullet. A line of flames followed Ark as he shot forward. Magura hurriedly used hundreds of tentacles as a shield.

“Not a chance. Dark Blade! Adol!”

It was the chain attack using Jump and Dark Blade, Adol! It was Ark's skill with the strongest breakthrough power. Magura's tentacles were unable to withstand it and broke. At the same time, the sword wrapped with the flames of the Fire Draconians pierced through Magura's chest. Magura let out a tremendous roar and was pushed back 10 metres.

-You won't be able to defeat me even if you become a Dragon Warrior!

“Of course I know I can't kill you with just Descent of the Fire Draconian. But it is possible to catch your ankle using it.”

Ark muttered while blowing flames out. That's right. If Ark had used Descent of the Fire Draconian from the beginning then the battle against Magura

might've been easier. But he was still a level 600 boss so Descent of the Fire Draconian wouldn't be able to deal decisive damage. So he had planned to decrease Magura's health to less than 5% before using Descent of the Fire Draconian. But Magura managed to recover his health and stats using 'Piece of Flesh' so Ark had lost the timing to use it.

-Kuaaaaaah! Get out of my way!

“What will you do if I said no?”

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Magura wildly swung his tentacles and attacked. Even if Ark used Descent of the Fire Draconian, in a 1 on 1 fight against Magura he was instantly driven into a corner. However Ark's purpose was to stop Magura from escaping. Thanks to the 50% increase in movement speed and reaction rate, Ark avoided the tentacles and concentrated his attacks on Magura's ankle. After a while, a huge crystal dropped from the unstable ceiling and blocked the entrance.

“Now it's over.”

Ark smiled and muttered. At the same time, there was a large split in the ceiling above his head. The crystals fell like hail and Ark immediately died.

“.....”

The rehabilitation members who had escaped the temple looked at the wreckage with surprised eyes. The huge crystal temple had been changed to a ruin with dozens of bent iron.

“.....Is it over?”

Tazza breathed out slowly.

“To be honest I never expected to survive that.”

“But Ark is buried together with it.”

“Well, it was a beautiful sacrifice.”

The rehabilitation members nodded with a deliberately solemn expression. Racard picked his nose and murmured.

“It’s okay, he will just appear again like nothing happened after several days.”

“What? Aren’t you Ark’s summon?”

“Che, that’s right. Don’t forget that.”

Racard indicated the temple with one wing and said.

“That dog would’ve dropped loot when he died. Master will be more thankful if you collect the loot than if you mourn him.”

That was correct. The time Ark took to feed and raise his pets wasn’t in vain.

“Well, you’re not wrong. Ark might’ve even dropped equipment as well.”

“At any rate, let’s search the ruins.”

The rehabilitation group sighed and approached the ruins of the temple. But the rehabilitation members had forgotten one important fact. 7 people had survived the battle against Magura. In other words, 7 people had defeated a level 600 elite boss. In normal circumstances, the rehabilitation members would’ve received a windfall of experience and levelled up like crazy. Even so, the experience hadn’t been given yet.....

Tuduk, tuduk, ku ku ku ku!

It was at that moment. The crystals among the ruins started vibrating and a huge presence rose. The rehabilitation members exclaimed with surprise.

“Huk! What, what the, that guy?”

A huge bloody shape had appeared among the crystals. The presence was so torn and bloody that it was difficult to recognize.

“Don’t tell me.....Magura?”

Yes, the blood smeared shape was Magura who had been buried underneath the rubble of the temple. Despite being buried, amazingly he was still alive. Magura looked at the depressed form of the rehabilitation members and laughed.

-Kukukuku, inferior humans.....this body is immortal.....this much.....

After being buried by the crystals, Magura only had 2% health left. However, the rehabilitation members only had between 1~3% health. That’s because they had deliberately lowered their health in order to limit Magura’s attacks. But it was a serious problem now that Magura hadn’t died.

“T-this monster!”

-This much....give me your flesh and blood....it is your fate.

Magura dragged his body and the internal organs towards the rehabilitation members. Creepy tentacles wriggled here and there between pieces of skin. Magura brandished the tentacles and was about to hit the rehabilitation members.

“That’s not it. Your fate is to die.”

A voice was audible from behind Magura. Both the rehabilitation group and Magura flinched and turned their heads.

“Ark!”

“Huhuhu, did you think I committed suicide or something?”

Yes, the person behind Magura was Ark. Ark had been crushed by the crystals when the temple collapsed so how was he still alive? The answer was simple. Razak’s Pledge of Death. It was the reason Ark had Racard escape with the Saw Blade. It was in order to be able to use Razak’s Pledge of Death. If the sword was still inside the temple then Razak would also be crushed to death and he wouldn’t be able to use Pledge of Death. So he had

intrusted the Saw blade to Racard and sent them out of the temple. The reason Ark had prepared for the resurrection in advance was simple.

‘Magura is a level 600 elite boss. If 7~8 people kill it then they will get enormous experience. But that won’t be applied if I die. In order to receive the experience after Magura dies, I need to use Pledge of Death!’

It was the reason he had deliberately ran into the temple and died from the crystals. Anyway, if he was alive when Magura died then he could get the experience. So he had resurrected after being buried by the crystals.

‘I didn’t receive the experience so Magura is still alive! Was his defense that high after recovering 50% of his stats?’

Anyway, he really was a tenacious monster. Well, Ark had also revived so he couldn’t really say anything.

-T.....this bastard!

Magura angrily muttered and moved his tentacles. But Ark just laughed and shook his head. Magura definitely was a strong monster. Currently Ark and the rehabilitation members only had 2% health left. Fighting an opponent in that state wouldn’t be easy.

‘But I don’t have to fight with Magura.’

“Demonic Seal!”

An intense light shot out from Ark’s hands and hit Magura’s body. Yes, Magura had less than 3% health so Demonic Seal could be used on him! It didn’t matter if Magura had 1,000 or 10,000 health remaining. The only thing that matter was that it had less than 3% health.

-Kuak! What? This is....!

Magura yelled and shook his body as a chain of light coiled around him. But that just made the chain of light tighten even more. After a while, a black jelly like lump rolled out from Magura’s mouth. It was his soul.

-You have succeeded in extracting the demonic aura. Please select a destination for the seal.

“Hyung-nims, I’ll make something good so take out some equipment!”

Tazza listened to Ark and took out a piece of armour.

“Now, you’re screwed! Demonic Seal!”

Ark moved the chain of light towards the armour. Then the demonic energy which had been changed to a piece of jelly shrieked.

-Kuuuack! What, what the? This power.....I can’t resist.....!

“It is natural. This is the technique that Hero Maban devoted his life developing to kill guys like you. It is impossible for you to escape once caught!”

-H-Hero Maban? T-then you are.....!

“Oh, you know about Hero Maban? Well, usually what happens now if that you begin to tell boring stories about your previous encounters with Hero Maban.....I don’t have time for that. Just hurry and be sealed!”

Ark twisted his hand and the jelly was sucked into the armour.

“That’s it. I did it!”

Ark clenched his fist and exclaimed. Suddenly the armour that had absorbed Magura began shaking. Then there was a roaring sound and it split open. A black spirit flowed from the shattered armour.

“What, what the?”

-Kukukuku.....this body’s power.....you think it can be locked up in something like that?

Ark realized what had gone wrong. When a demonic monster had their health below 3%, he could seal them in an item. But Demonic Seal had its own requirements. Demonic energy could only be sealed in items that could

handle the energy. If he forcibly shoved the soul of a high ranking demonic monster into a shabby item then it wouldn't be able to handle it. It was the reason why the durability of a cursed item was extremely weak.

Until now, his success rate for Demonic Seal had reached 80~90%. However, the failure rate would increase when the difference between the level of the item and the monster became more than 100. When it was more than 100 levels difference, the chance of Demonic Seal failing was almost 100%. In other words, he needed an item with a minimum level of 500 to be able to successfully deal the level 600 Magura. However Ark and the rehabilitation members had no equipment that was level 500. It meant he couldn't use Demonic Seal!

'Dammit! I failed....but it's not too late. When the soul tries to re-join with the main body, he'll have 2% health left. I've resurrected from the dead so I can use Descent of the Fire Draconian again.

Ark glared at Magura's main body and prepared to use Descent of the Fire Draconian. Then Magura's soul seemed to explode and began to be sucked in by the island.

"W-what?"

-Kukukuku.....I said it before.....this body is immortal.....and this is my resurrection place.....as long as I'm here I can remake my body as I want.....it'll take me hundreds of years to gather the strength to remake my body but.....I will eventually come back after hundreds of years.

"Wait! You're running away?"

-Kukukuku, hahahaha.....! I'll see you hundreds of years later.....you youngling!

The whole island seemed to shake with Magura's laughter. Magura's soul had already been integrated into the island. Ark felt like all his power had left him. They had lost thousands of soldiers coming down to this floor and

Isyuram, Hae Gyeol-sa, Yapsab and Ddeok-dae were even eaten by Magura. Yet Magura didn't even give them one useable item or even experience. Now that Magura was integrated into the island, there was no way for Ark to catch him. In the end, they would have to return without any loot or experience. In a game it was just like being defeated.

“That damn dog.....”

It was at that moment. Ark had been staring at the ground with annoyance when something flashed through his head.

‘Wait? Magura is now a part of the island itself? In the end, it is like the earth has absorbed Magura’s power. Then perhaps?’

After thinking for a bit, Ark took out a bunch of small stones from his bag. He used Excavation all over the place and buried the empty Hearthstones into the holes. That’s right. That idea which came to his head was to use the Hearthstones. According to what Magura had yelled, he had returned to the earth. And the Hearthstones had the power to absorb the surrounding power. Then wouldn’t it be possible to suck Magura’s soul into the Hearthstones? Furthermore, there was no level restriction on the Hearthstones. It could be used to make rare or unique hearthstones. It was a crazy idea.

‘It’s absurd but I have no other choice. This is the only way!’

Ark finished burying the Hearthstones and took out the Phantom Hourglass. After choosing the maximum amount of Time Acceleration, the sand quickly began to fall. After half of the sand had disappeared.

-Ack! What.....why is my power being dragged into the stone.....

The island vibrated and confusion seemed to emanate from it. It was Magura’s voice. The moment he heard Magura’s voice, a smug smile spread on Ark’s face. Didn’t Magura’s confusion mean that Ark’s idea was correct?

“Huhuhu, I’ve now got my hands on the devil so it’s not possible for you to

escape!”

-What the.....? This bastard, what did you do.....?

“Stop talking nonsense and enter the stone!”

-No....you can't do this.....I am immortal....wahhhhh!

Magura let out a cry of distress as the last of the sand fell down in the Phantom Hourglass.

-The number of uses is finished and the Phantom Hourglass has been broken.

At the same time, several message windows appeared in front of Ark.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.....

As expected, he received a huge amount of experience after defeating Magura. Ark gained 7 levels while the rehabilitation members gained the maximum 9 levels. Well, the experience was an inevitable result.....Ark quickly dug out the Hearthstones and checked them. He had buried around 70 Hearthstones 30 of them had shattered while the remaining 40 had turned black. When he checked the name had changed to ‘Hell Stone.’ When embedded on an armour or shield then it had the effect of increasing demonic resistance by 10%. But one of the Hearthstones was emanating a huge amount of energy and seemed different from the others. He grabbed the Hearthstone and the information window appeared.

-Magura’s Stone (Legendary Hearthstone)

The soul of an ancient devil Magura has been sealed into this Hearthstone.

In the past, Magura was an ancient existence which caused the destruction of many species. The ancient history books called him the Guardian of Hell and his power and wickedness was compared to the strongest devils. While Magura was deprived of a lot of power when sealed, the power of this Hearthstone is incomparable to others. But since Magura's curse is also in this stone, a person with no resistance to the demonic element won't be able to use it.

<Used in socket (Weapon exclusive use): When the Hearthstone is inserted into a weapon, there is a 20% chance of manifested Magura's power and dealing 1~1,000 damage to enemies in front of you.

* Additional skill (Summon Magura): For 5 minutes you can call upon the spirit of Magura.

Magura's intense anger will display a continuous 'Taunt' effect which will lure in the enemy. Magura is so obsessed with his anger that he will attack all enemies regardless of friend or foe. But Magura's soul is deprived of his power so he will only show an ability equivalent to a level 300 elite monster. When Magura's soul is summoned, the special effect of the stone can't be used.

<Spiritual Power consumption: 500

Cool down time: 24 hours>

'A legendary Hearthstone!'

Ark read the information window with wide eyes. It was the first time he had seen a legendary item. Well, it was a natural result since Magura was the devil who caused the Fire Draconians' extinction. It had a 20% chance of dealing 1~1,000 extra damage! Well, there was a chance to deal 1 damage but there was also the possibility of dealing the maximum amount of damage.

And Magura's Stone even had an additional skill attached. It was the ability to summon the sealed Magura! The power was equivalent to a level 300 elite

monster. Well, Magura would attack everyone regardless of friend or foe but it would still be quite useful.

“Ark, look over there!”

Jjak-tung pointed towards the hollow shell of Magura’s body. It had started to rot as soon as Magura had been sealed. It finally completely melted and changed to a dark liquid with some items on top. It was the loot that Magura had dropped. Magura had dropped 5 items. There was one unique, one rare item and the remaining three were magic items.

-Hell’s Shoulder Blades (Unique)

Armour type: Leather Shoulder Blades

Defense: 45 (+10)

Durability: 35/70

Weight: 60

User Restriction: Level 450 and more

The Hell’s Shoulder Blades made from the interior of Magura’s body. It possesses the strength of hell. The equipment contained the spirit of hell can deal fatal damage to any enemy’s defense. The Hell’s Shoulder Blades is made from a material stronger than steel. While it has powerful defense, it can also be used as a weapon in emergency situations.

<Option: Defense +10, Strength +10, Stamina +20>

<Special Option: When the enemy attacks or you use a head-butt, the horns on the shoulder blades will pop out and you will deal 100 additional damage. There is only a 30% chance of inflicting a ‘curse.’>

-Eyes of Chaos (Rare)

Item type: Staff

Attack: 45~50

Durability: 56/100

Weight: 45

User Restrictions: Level 400 Warlock

A staff that Magura took from a powerful warlock a long time ago. The Eyes of Chaos is a staff inlaid with the eyes of an ancient hell monster 'Balmaradon.' When the opponent stares into it, the eyes will cause fear and hallucinations.

<Option: Intelligence +30, Mana +500, Dark magic attack +20%>

<Special Option: 10% chance of causing the 'Fear' and 'Hallucinations' state when attacking with the Eyes of Chaos>

"Isn't this awesome?"

Ark's mouth dropped as he confirmed the information on the loot. The staff was quite creepy as it was covered in black hair with a large eyeball stuck in it. The items were the 'Hell's Shoulder Blades' and 'Eyes of Chaos.'

The Hell's Shoulder Blades was a unique item with 45 defense. It seemed like a low number, but it was quite high when considering that most shoulder blades had defense below 30. In addition, it gave 10 extra defense as an option so it was quite good for leather armour. There was also the probability of dealing additional damage or causing an abnormal state when attacking with the shoulder blades. It was very good for Ark who preferred close combat.

'That option is 100 times better than having to keep on activating a special skill.'

But when looking at the performance, the rare Eyes of Chaos seemed better than the unique Hell's Shoulder Blades. The option to give +20% dark magic

attack power was a rare option. The warlocks would go crazy for it in the auction room.

“Can I take these leather shoulder blades?”

Ark grabbed the Hell’s Shoulder Blades and asked.

“It’s your choice.”

The rehabilitation members just nodded. Ark was hunting with the rehabilitation members so he couldn’t just take the items. But if a leather item appeared then the rehabilitation members knew to concede it to him. It was the reason why Ark liked hunting with JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. Of course, Ark still wasn’t able to monopolize all the items.

“The Eyes of Chaos and the magic items will be sold in the auction room and the profits divided.”

That was how he decided to distribute the loot. So Ark packed all the loot into his bag.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Ark felt Radun’s tail touch his leg. When he looked down, there was a book underneath a crystal. He had discovered the item and tried to swallow it and failed, so Radun had asked for help from Ark.

“A book? Wait? Come to think of it....”

Ark was reminded of something and quickly picked up the book. Once again an information window appeared.

-Immortal Book (Special)

An ancient book that had been housed in the shrine of the Fire Draconians. But Magura wanted the secret to immortality and ended up stealing the book from Dragonian. However, so far no one had discovered the secret of the Immortal Book. According to legend, only those who don’t desire

immortality will be allowed to access the book.

“This is the Immortal Book that Lumines mentioned.”

Ark also wandered about the contents of the book which contained the secret to eternal life. But like the information window said, the book was sealed and he couldn't open it.

“Hmm, what do I do with this? Lumines has already died so I probably won't receive anything but the book as compensation. Well, I got the book through an important quest so I will probably be able to use it somewhere.”

Ark put the book away. There was a ringing sound and the quest information window appeared.

-The Lore quest <Devil Magura> has been completed.

You have gained ☆ 3 in the character information window. ☆ is a reward provided to players who had achieved a great historical achievement which can influence New World.

The player who receives a ☆ would become a legend in that area. In addition, the accumulation of a certain number of ☆'s would receive a chance to gain a very special reward.

Currently owned ☆: (10)

After the information window appeared. Ark's head was enveloped in a bright light which shot towards the sky. The light exploded and dispersed, forming 10 stars. It was the stars awarded by the lore quest. The stars revolved around Ark's head before they suddenly disappeared. After that the quest information window was updated.

-Witness the Legend

10 ☆'s are only conferred upon a hero who has changed history through the Lore quests.

You have uncovered ancient history that ordinary people will never know or understand. However, a historian from a great prophet clan in ancient times knows about your work. According to the ancient prophecy, a brave warrior will be selected to gain the power to fight against an evil power.

<Difficulty: –

Quest Restriction: 10 ☆'s acquired>

* This quest can only be performed once.

“Eh? Quest?”

Ark's eyes popped out the information window. In fact, Ark hadn't really paid attention to the stars received after completing a lore quest. He had simply regarded it as a medal of merit. But he never imagined he would get a quest from it. After reading the contents, didn't it seem like it would give enormous compensation? Ark quickly opened his mouth after receiving the quest. The red dot pointed towards an area near the border of the Sinus Principality.

‘I can't possibly postpone this quest.’

Ark had determined his next destination. It was to finally collect the reward for his stars. Anyway, he had managed to 100% clear the dungeon after a fortnight. Now he just had to worry about getting back from the 60th floor.

Emergency Situation

“Hah, that was a really eventful adventure.”

Hyun-woo muttered as he stretched out on a bus seat. Capturing the secret dungeon was really no joke. After a fortnight of repeated fierce battles, he had defeated Magura and finally cleared the secret dungeon. Then he had to climb back all the way from the 60th floor to the ground floor. Fortunately there weren't that many monsters in the Abyss after the destruction of the temple so it was easier to climb back up. Luckily there weren't any serious situation in the upper levels of the secret dungeon. Four days after clearing the dungeon, he finally managed to return to the castle. And all the people who participated in the dungeon capture instantly disconnected. They had no intention of connecting to New World for the next two days.....

It was reasonable. They had played the game around the clock with barely any sleep and only eating rice. Hyun-woo had mastered these abilities since the start of playing New World. Nevertheless, he also felt extremely tired after returning to the castle from the secret dungeon. The original goal had been training and raised his troops' levels, but then it became a fierce battle for survival. He also felt like disconnecting like the coalition members.

“But.....”

He had to endure it for a bit. This time the dungeon was even difficult for Ark. But he had obtained so much benefits that the suffering was worth it. As the leader of hundreds of troops, he had received 20~30% more experience than the coalition members. He had gained an average of 2 levels a day. When he arrived at the 60th floor, he had gained 34 levels. After defeating Magura, that increased by a further 7 levels. That meant he raised his level by 41 in a fortnight. In addition, he had gained two more levels while returning to the castle. When he finally arrived at the castle, he was level 426! But was that all? He also obtained a Legendary Hearthstone and unique shoulder

blades. That was worth not sleeping for 18 days. And there was an additional unexpected benefit from clearing the dungeon.

There had been one doubtful part while Hyun-woo had been managing Silvana. Silvana was an ideal territory with a lake, river and fertile lands. It was the most suitable place to develop commerce and industry. If he just invested a little bit then it would develop faster than other territories. But compared to that, agriculture development wasn't as good. The crops harvested from Silvana were only 60% of what other territories produced. After clearing the secret dungeon, he confirmed that the harvest rate had quickly increased.

“In fact, Silvana's soil quality isn't that good. In the words of an expert, the microorganisms in the earth affect the soil and Silvana has quite a few mutated microorganisms. But a few days ago, the microorganisms in the farmland changed by 180 degrees. If this continues then we can expect a lot of profit from the next harvest.”

Berami explained after Hyun-woo asked him. After hearing Berami's words, Hyun-woo understood the situation. The farmland wasn't that fertile because of the secret dungeon underneath Silvana.....no, to be accurate it was because of Magura. Magura was a strong devil who completely changed the Abyss thanks to his influence. The farmlands were also affected by that influence so the crops couldn't grow properly.

‘But after I defeated Magura, the Hell door was sealed and his influence disappeared. Thanks to that, Silvana's impoverished farmlands had their power restored!’

If the present state was maintained then Silvana's agriculture income would improve by 30%. That meant that Silvana's finances would improve. But the land change didn't just affect the income.

‘New World is a game set in medieval times so the NPCs require lots of things to survive. If the land becomes more fertile.....’

It would also have a huge impact on the value and fame of the estate.

‘If the value keeps on steadily increasing like this then the territory will be promoted to B rank in no time! When the present state is maintained, it is possible to reduce the time for promotion by half!’

Moreover, the secret dungeon was now just a secret dungeon. The elite monsters would gradually resurrect over time. In other words, he could have Dark Eden continuously invade the dungeon in order to train and obtain steady loot.

‘Now I don’t have to hunt in the dungeon so seriously. They can hunt comfortably in the underground labyrinth to raise their levels. If I send 100~200 users together then the NPCs can also safely raise their level.’

After the weary coalition members returned, Hyun-woo intended to send them in with the NPCs to use the dungeon as a training centre. The only reason he had the NPCs retreat was thanks to the distortion of the Abyss thanks to the Asmodian influence. There was no worry about that anymore. But Hyun-woo had other things to do.

‘Now, my remaining work.....I’ve completed the <Devil Magura> quest so now I need to finish the <Witness the Legend> quest. There’s 12 days left until the next siege. That’s plenty of time to go to the Sinius Principality.’

<Witness the Legend> was a compensation quest. There was no reason for him to wait to complete it. He was also really interested in what the compensation would be. Hyun-woo would fly towards the Sinius Principality as soon as he connected to the game today. But he had a phone call moments before he was about to enter the unit.

“There is an important matter so please visit the headquarters.”

He heard Ho Myung-hwan’s desperate voice as soon as he picked up the receiver.

“Why is Global Exos calling me in the morning?”

He had just been about to start the game so it didn't feel good to be interrupted. But it couldn't be helped since Hyun-woo received a salary from Global Exos every month. If his employer told him to go to headquarters then what could he do? While thinking this, Hyun-woo's bus arrived at his destination. It had been 2 years since he first visited Global Exos for the interview. Back then he put on clothes which didn't match and looked around like a village chicken but it was different now. He had bet the candidates with a good academic background and became a rank 'O' candidate, one of the 'Special Management Target.' However, Hyun-woo hesitated at the entrance. 'If I see her face then what should I say?'

Hyun-woo was hesitant because of Lariette, or Kang Mi-su. Kang Mi-su worked at the reception desk in Global Exos. If he entered the building then he would inevitably have to encounter her. The problem was the recent relationship between Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su.

'It's been a fortnight since we've had any contact.'

In fact, Hyun-woo tried to keep in contact with Kang Mi-su once or twice a week. But during the past fortnight, he hadn't made any contact or received any phone calls. Not just because he had been too busy capturing the secret dungeon but also because Lariette and Roco had a conversation during the siege that he didn't know the contents of.

'I don't know what they talked about but Kang Mi-su's expression was strange. So it is a little difficult trying to contact her.....'

Hyun-woo had recently been thinking that he needed to make clear his relationship with Kang Mi-su. He also had to think about Jung Hye-sun. Hyun-woo had known Jung Hye-sun's heart for a long time. But he didn't have a clear answer so he had been cowardly avoiding answering her feelings. And he couldn't give Jung Hye-sun a definite answer before he talked with Kang Mi-su. Thus it was necessary to talk to both of them.

‘But to see her face so suddenly.....’

Hyun-woo sighed and just stood there. On the other hand, he thought that he was being slightly dramatic.

‘Yes, what’s the problem? I’m friends with Mi-su ssi now. I can just say hi if I see her so there’s no need to think about it seriously.’

Hyun-woo let out a large breath and opened the door. Then he swallowed as the reception desk caught his eye. However, he was worried for nothing because Kang Mi-su wasn’t at the desk. Then Hyun-woo remembered that Kang Mi-su only worked afternoons.

“What? Didn’t I just worry for nothing?”

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. The staff at the reception desk sent him a strange look because of his strange behaviour as Hyun-woo approached the desk.

“How can I help you?”

“Huh? Oh, someone called Ho Myung-hwan asked me to come.”

“Can I have your name?”

“I am Kim Hyun-woo.”

The staff member contacted the Planning Department before smiling and said.

“Take the elevator to the 5th floor and sit in the resting room.”

“Thank you.”

Hyun-woo bowed and headed to the 5th floor. The atmosphere on the 5th floor when he arrived was somewhat strange. There were continuous ringing from the phones and the staff were running around with papers.

‘Is the office of a big business always so crazy?’

Well, Hyun-woo hadn’t worked in any big business so he didn’t know if it

was normal or not. While the staff were busy running around, he sat down by himself in a large waiting room and started to feel uncomfortable.

‘What the? If they’re so busy then why did that person call me here?’

Hyun-woo looked around uncomfortably.

“Ark-nim, have you been waiting long?”

Ho Myung-hwan called out as he walked down the hallway. Hyun-woo felt uncomfortable so he spoke in a curt voice.

“Yes, I’ve waited for a long time.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....I’m sorry. We’ve been a little busy.”

“Shouldn’t you have considered that before making me take two buses?”

“Hahaha, that is.....”

Ho Myung-hwan laughed awkwardly.

“Forget it. Why did you call me here?”

“Yes, I’ll tell you the details in the meeting room.”

Ho Myung-hwan guided Hyun-woo to a meeting room. Hyun-woo looked around the Planning Department as he was ushered inside the meeting room.

“Everyone seems very busy. Is it always like this?”

“That.....”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and sighed. Ho Myung-hwan also had dark circles under his eyes like someone who hadn’t had enough sleep in days. Ho Myung-hwan loosened his tie and said.

“Over the past few days, the Planning Department.....no, Global Exos has been in an emergency situation.”

“Emergency? Why?”

Ho Myung-hwan looked astonished at Hyun-woo’s question.

“Why? Ark-nim doesn’t use the internet?”

“Internet? What does that have to do with it?”

“Ha, where have you been for the past few days?”

It had been more than a fortnight since he entered seclusion. He had been killing monsters inside the secluded area. It had been 18 days since he entered the secret dungeon and he had only crept out of seclusion at dawn today. The whole time he had been capturing the dungeon, he had barely eaten or slept and just stayed inside the dark cave. So he hadn’t even checked the internet or even the TV. Ho Myung-hwan sent him a pale look at that explanation.

“But didn’t you see the whole system message which appeared in New World a few days ago?”

“Whole system message? Was it about the episode update?”

Hyun-woo remembered something from a few days ago. He didn’t have any concept of time before there was no sunlight in the secret dungeon, but it had occurred when Ark was capturing the 57th floor. He had been in the midst of fighting the monsters when a message window stating <Episode V: Hidden Legend> appeared in front of him. And less than 10 minutes afterwards, another message window stating <Episode VII: The Complete Continent>. Hyun-woo looked at the messages doubtfully. Hyun-woo remembered that the <Episode III: Emergence of a New Continent> appeared when Seutandal rose. Yet two messages <Episode V: Hidden Legend> and <Episode VII: The Complete Continent> had appeared within 10 minutes of each other. So Hyun-woo had thought the message was because of a system error and ignored it.

“Now you know. That is the reason why the Planning Department and PR Department has been so busy. There have been questions and protests on the home page, various forums and even over the phone.”

“Then it wasn’t a system problem?”

“It would’ve been great if that was the case.”

Ho Myung-hwan sighed and shook his head.

“That problem is why we called Ark-nim here.”

“Huh? I don’t understand at all. What does this have to do with me?”

Why would they consult with Hyun-woo about a system problem? Did they think he was a genius programmer or something? Hyun-woo made a confused expression and Ho Myung-hwan took out a cigarette and said.

“I’ll tell you this first. Everything that we discuss from now on has to be a secret. You can’t talk about it anywhere else. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes, that is.....”

“Based on our conclusions, I believe the message isn’t a system error.”

“It’s not an error? But.....”

“Wait a moment. I know what you’re going to say. Of course it isn’t normal for two episodes to update at the same time and to skip an episode. Yes, that’s right. The current system of New World isn’t normal.”

“It’s not an error but the system isn’t normal?”

What did they call him so early in the morning for? He wanted to have an angry tantrum but it seemed like they weren’t joking with him based on Ho Myung-hwan’s expression.

“I know it is difficult to understand. But my words are correct. This isn’t a normal error. It’s a little difficult but I’ll try to explain. Two continents actually appeared at the same time the episodes were activated. It had been a while since a new episode occurred.”

“Huh? Then the episodes randomly occurred? No that’s not right. The

episodes occur when certain conditions are met. It is common for these conditions to be difficult, for example no one can enter the area, so there is a problem with the restrictions?”

“That’s right. It’s why I said it’s not an error but it also isn’t normal.”

Ho Myung-hwan replied.

“But that’s just the start of the emergency situation.”

“The start?”

“I can’t explain in detail but things have started running out of control ever since the new episodes started. If things progress like this then there is no guarantee a new episode won’t be triggered again. And all the data related to the episodes is focused on the Sinius Principality in the northeast of the continent.”

Ho Myung-hwan entered recall mode as he said this.

Global Exos had been flipped upside down four days ago. The computers in headquarters being hacked was just a precursor to <Episode V: Hidden Legend> and <Episode VII: The Complete Continent>. While New World’s system could handle one episode update, the activation of 2 had caused the system to overload and the other computers to be hacked. But that disturbance was just the beginning of an incident which got bigger.

It wasn’t possible for an episode update to run out of control like that. But since the worst situation the programmer Kim Gwon-tae had talked about, data flowing back into the gamers’ brains, the Planning Department could breathe a sigh of relief. However, confusion spread over Kim Gwon-tae’s face again within minutes.

“W-wait a minute. There’s something wrong. The hacking of the computers

in headquarters has stopped but the system calculations are still running. The calculations are still in progress even when an A ranked seal has been loosened.”

“What are you saying? There are more operations continuing?”

“I don’t know. Just.....”

“Just?”

“The data is concentrated on the Sinius Principality.”

Kim Gwon-tae had been working on the computer for 10 minutes and that was the only information he found out. But Kim Gwon-tae’s efforts were in vain as the Planning Department was able to identify that in real time. Shortly after the episodes were triggered, the monitors of the Planning Department showed a huge dark energy centred on the Sinius Principality and identified monsters raiding NPC villages. While it wasn’t as serious as the Sinius Principality, there were also some reports of unidentified monsters in the Schudenberg Kingdom. It was these monsters and not the episodes update that caused users to complain and make inquiries on the website and through the telephone.

“What on earth? What is happening?”

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed loudly. But nobody in the Planning Department could answer Ha Myung-woo’s question. They also couldn’t understand or guess what was happening.

“Presently everything is unclear. Just.....”

Kim Gwon-tae thought for a bit before replying.

“This situation must be related to the thing we’re looking for.”

“What we’re looking for? Perhaps.....?”

“Yes, the master code.”

Ha Myung-woo flinched at Kim Gwon-tae's words.

“Did someone get their hands on the master code? Did someone get their hands on the master code and is discriminately destroying the system?”

“No, that isn't the case.”

Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

“If someone got their hands on the master code then they would've contacted out company first. Anyone with even a little bit of brains would realize the value of the master code.”

“But what if the master code is in the hands of a child who doesn't know anything?”

“It isn't that easy to find the master code easy and it also isn't easy knowing how to manipulate it. The series of events might seem completely random but it has its own rules. Look at the hidden continents that just appeared.”

“What is it then?”

“Park Woo-seong hid the master code so it must be protected by several layers of protections. This is just an idea....but my guess is that someone is trying to destroy the shields around the master code. It is possible that these series of events will spread as more shields are unlocked. This is what I've grasped from the data. If the master code which controls all the systems is triggered then it wouldn't be like this.”

“Someone is trying to forcibly access the master code?”

Ha Myung-woo's expression became even more serious at Kim Gwon-tae's explanation.

“Until now we haven't even defined what the master code is. But if someone is trying to approach the master code then they must know something about the master code.”

“.....It is like that.”

“They will forcibly penetrate the shields until they get their hands on the master code. That person must have considerable knowledge and the power to act on it.”

“That’s right. The episodes running out of control isn’t something to do with the operating data. Yet the master code didn’t interfere. So someone must’ve met the criteria to trigger the episode. Furthermore, two was triggered at once so there must be two users involved. And they have the same purpose.”

“I have to ask. Is there any chance that it is just a coincidence?”

“The chances are 1/10 million.”

“.....Then there is only one answer.”

Ha Myung-woo bit his lip and muttered. If there was that kind of knowledge and organizational skills then a group had to be involved. The conclusion he came to was that a rival company had obtained information about the master code and was trying to obtain it.

‘If they get their hands on the master code.....’

Global Exos would be destroyed in a day. Anyone who got their hands on the master code was the god of New World. What would they do if they could access all the systems? If they wanted, they could delete all the users’ information or reset the system to the beginning. Only the company who made the game would have the master code. If their competitors found the master code then they could claim legal rights. But what if the competitor made the data flow backwards into the users’ brains to cause brain death? The problem wouldn’t be solved by discontinuing New World. The thought made cold sweat drip down Ha Myung-woo’s back.

“I can’t allow the master code to go somewhere else!”

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed and instantly called for a meeting. Fortunately, nobody had obtained the master code yet. In addition, the Planning Department could guess the location of the master code thanks to this

incident. It was highly likely that the master code was located in the Sinius Principality. The problem was how to find the master code from there.

‘Dammit, in this situation I might need to arrange an army in New World.....’

He hadn’t expected this situation. But Ha Myung-woo couldn’t just throw up his hands and give up. It was different from an army but he had his own secret organization. It was the 2,000 candidates who were top-class in New World. He could rally the candidates to investigate the Sinius Principality and the shields protecting the master code.

“Call the candidates immediately! Focus their attention on the Sinius Principality!”

.....So Hyun-woo was summoned to Global Exos through such a process. Of course, the company couldn’t confess the real situation about the master code to the candidates. They had to hide the information while moving the candidates as they wanted. That was the basic policy of the Planning Department. After recalling all that had happened, Ho Myung-hwan started to talk again.

“So we can’t assume that this is an error but it might be because of a bug. It seems like some users are deliberately exploiting this bug to cause problems.”

“Then shouldn’t you investigate the users’ account information and take action?”

Hyun-woo couldn’t understand what the problem was. In fact, most online games had security programs to hunt down users abusing bugs and track their accounts. This was also clearly stated in the terms and conditions for New World. Ho Myung-hwan quickly misdirected him.

“T-that is.....I can’t go into detail about some of our internal problems. Anyway, I called Ark-nim because I wanted to consult about the problem.”

“You wanted to consult with me about the problem?”

“Because it can only be solved by users.”

“Huh?”

“I told you, this is because of a bug in the game. The problem is that it isn’t a common bug. To be exact, I’m referring to ‘Code Black items.’

“Code black items? W-what is that?”

“You might know this already but designing and creating a game isn’t easy work. Thousands of experts and many trial and errors were required over many years before the game was born. And there had been dozens of beta versions. During the process of testing the beta versions, many items had been disposed of because of a balance problem. The code black items are those that have been discarded during the testing process.”

This was the excuse that Ha Myung-woo had come up with. Despite the situation, they couldn’t possible give the candidates’ information about the master code. But they couldn’t just tell the candidates to go somewhere without giving any information. They also had to give a light explanation or else the candidates might not be able to solve it. So they had come up with the code black items.

“Currently the programmers have searched the data and confirmed that the code black items hadn’t been deleted. But thousands of items were discarded in the beta versions so there is no guarantee that we can find all the items in a few months.”

“So there are several thousand code black items in New World.....”

“Yes, but we’ve managed to narrow down the search criteria. In order to quickly solve the problem, the Planning Department has decided to send

several candidates to the Sinius Principality to gather information. And the same information is been delivered to all the candidates. But the detailed information is only told to special management targets like Ark-nim.”

“I just need to check the information of the code black items?”

“No, you will have to pick up that item.”

“Why don’t you just dispose of it after receiving confirmation?”

“That’s not possible. In this situation, the user didn’t get the item through normal gameplay but through something like jacking. So it is different from a users’ private property. Even if it is obtained in the normal way, it is still an illegal item. So the company can delete it no matter what. But if the user ends up being deleted.....”

This wasn’t really a problem. But Ho Myung-hwan just coughed and continued talking with a crafty look.

“Well, it’s hard to say anything more because of my position. I think that you already understand the situation. I hope the candidates will realize the urgency of this situation and agree to help solve the situation.”

There was a variety of methods used to get the candidates to agree. Ho Myung-hwan looked at Hyun-woo with an expression that seemed to say ‘Please? Won’t you help?’ But Hyun-woo’s reaction was just ‘Ah, really?’ In fact, he didn’t have any reason to agree. Hyun-woo had started playing New World in order to get a job at Global Exos. But that was back in the days when he was cold and hungry. Of course, he still wasn’t rich but he had invested 150,000 into the triangular trade. As the chairman of that business, he could earn tens of thousands of gold in a month. If the business was successful then his dream of being a game tycoon was a dream anymore. So why did he have to worry about a job with an annual salary smaller annual salary? No, he would rather pay more attention to his business then to do a job like this.

‘I have to remain a candidate to receive the monthly salary. But I can’t pretend to do as he asked because Ho Myung-hwan is watching my videos.’

Anyway, there was no reason for Hyun-woo to accept. But Ho Myung-hwan didn’t even flinch at his expression.

“If the situation becomes even worse because of the black code items then we might even have to suspend service.”

“Hik! W-what?”

“Of course, that’s just the worst case situation. That is why we have to request this from the candidates.”

While Hyun-woo took it seriously, in fact it was just a bluff. Millions of users played the game so how could they suspend it for a few months? If that happened then Global Exos would have to pay damage compensation and would suffer astronomical losses. It wasn’t just that. Their external reliability would fall, causing their stocks to plunge. If that happened to a large company then it would have serious ripple effects on the economy. If the person listening was calm then they would realize it wasn’t such an easy thing. However, Hyun-woo’s heart wasn’t calm so he couldn’t question it closely. He had finally gathered all the funds and started his business. Hyun-woo had poured a lot of money into it. But if the game service stopped for several months then Hyun-woo wouldn’t see a single penny. He also wouldn’t be able to obtain money to pay for the costs of living if he couldn’t play the game. So Hyun-woo started to think that this problem also involved him.

‘Now he understands the situation.’

When Hyun-woo’s face stiffened, Ho Myung-hwan realized that he had accepted the situation and smiled before speaking.

“Global Exos is making a collective effort to make sure that situation doesn’t occur. But the solution absolutely requires the help of Ark-nim and the other

candidates. We'll also help so Ark-nim should try your best.”

Hyun-woo exited the meeting room with complex thoughts. He also had some doubts. He understood Ho Myung-hwan's words. But he wasn't completely convinced. Global Exos was a large business known worldwide. Even if they couldn't control what happened in the game, why did they have to ask for help from the candidates? In addition, was it so bad that they would have to suspend service? When considering that Global Exos would receive tremendous damage if service was suspended, it was difficult to completely accept the talk. Ho Myung-hwan said it was a normal item so the game publishers couldn't get involved. But wasn't that nonsense in a situation where the company could lose billions of won? Global Exos wouldn't be that law abiding.

‘It is clearly a situation that can't be told outside the company.’

.....It was natural to reach this conclusion. But there was a problem more important to Hyun-woo. The most worrisome thing was that New World might be temporarily suspended.

‘I can earn hundreds of thousands of gold in a few months.’

In other words, Hyun-woo would lose that much gold during those few months of suspension. Hyun-woo had invested everything into the business. That's because he thought he would get back the profit after the triangular trade route was established. But that money was tied to New World so if service was suspended then he wouldn't even get living expenses. And if such a situation persisted for a few months.....

‘It will become quite difficult. But.....’

Hyun-woo had thought it was serious when he was called by Ho Myung-hwan. He had entered the meeting room calmly but it had progressed in a

direction he hadn't expected. Global Exos said that if they couldn't solve the problem then they would even discontinue service.

'And they want me to go to the Sinius Principality.'

In fact, Ark already intended to go to the Sinius Principality because of the <Witness the Legend> quest. Now Hyun-woo had another purpose after hearing Ho Myung-hwan's words.

'This situation is because of the black code items. These items have the power to disrupt the balance of New World. I don't know what type of item it is and what power it has, but I need to figure out the information!'

This was another reason to fly to the Sinius Principality. If candidates other than Hyun-woo headed to the Sinius Principality then they might be able to solve the problem. If the black code items could affect the balance of the continent then couldn't he get a lot of money for the information? Then it was better to get his hands on the black code items.

'From their words, the company can't forcibly take away the black code items. That means I can bargain with the company. I don't care about the entrance examination anymore so I can extort money from them for the information.'

The gap between the company and Hyun-woo was growing increasingly larger. Anyway, Hyun-woo headed down to the 1st floor in a daze. When he first arrived at the building, his head had been full of Kang Mi-su. Now all he could think about was the previous discussion. He was only thinking about how to make money from the situation that he forgot about Kang Mi-su. Hyun-woo was just thinking to himself as he crossed the lobby. Then he heard someone yelling as he passed in front of the desk.

"It is a request!"

"No.....I mean.....it is difficult....."

'Huh? This voice is Kang Mi-su's?'

Hyun-woo stopped and turned towards the voices. As expected, the person at the desk was Kang Mi-su. And the one making a loud noise was a man in his twenties. The man was squeezing his head and kept on sighing.

‘What’s going on?’

Hyun-woo couldn’t intrude recklessly so he stopped and observed the situation. Then the man made a pleading expression and tried to ask Kang Mi-su again.

“It’s a request. Just tell me the telephone number. That will do.”

“I’ve already told you. Do I have to say it again? I don’t know information about specific users and even I did, it isn’t possible for me to tell someone else.”

“I understand. I really do. But it is an emergency. If I don’t have that information then millions, no several hundred million won would fly away.”

“I’m really sorry. I can’t help you.”

Kang Mi-su sighed and shook her head. Hyun-woo was able to guess the general situation from listening.

‘What the? Why is he creating a disturbance to ask for another user’s information?’

It was natural for the game publisher not to hand out information about their users. If someone had a grudge in the game then they were so made that they would do something in reality. That was the sort of problems that would occur if the company freely gave out the users’ information. Hyun-woo had experienced this with Andel.

‘I don’t know what’s happening but clearly it isn’t the usual problem. Well, it is unrelated to me and I shouldn’t try to talk to Kang Mi-su with this atmosphere.’

Hyun-woo once again delayed the chance to talk to her. Suddenly the man

started to cry and begged.

“I really might die if I don’t get my hands on that person. Please, just that one person. I went to the broadcasting station for that person’s number and was kicked out. This is the only place left.....eh? W-wait?”

The man rubbed his eyes with his sleeves and opened it widely.

“I thought you looked vaguely familiar.....are you Lariette-nim?”

“Huh? You know me?”

“It really is you? No, there’s no doubt!”

The man grabbed Kang Mi-su’s hands and shouted.

“It’s me. I’m Sid. You saw me not long ago in Silvana.”

“S-Sid? The hobbit merchant Sid?”

“Yes, I am that small, cute hobbit Sid!”

Both Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su’s opened widely. This man was really Sid?

‘Sid? That man is Sid?’

Hyun-woo stared at Sid’s face. Sid spoke with an urgent voice.

“Ah, I can’t believe I met Lariette-nim in a place like this. Thank god!

Lariette-nim is familiar with Ark-nim so you can give me his phone number.”

“Ark-nim?”

“Yes, does Lariette-nim know? Ark started the triangular trade not long ago. However the Gold Dream that I left with has flown away! I need to quickly tell Ark-nim! Please give me Ark-nim’s number! I gave my phone number to Ark-nim but I don’t know his.”

“Gold Dream has flown away? What does that mean.....?”

Lariette asked with confusion.

“Wait, explain what you said just now!”

A loud shout rang out across the lobby. Kang Mi-su and the man turned around with surprise and saw Hyun-woo.

“.....Ark-nim?”

“Huck! He is Ark-nim?”

Sid flinched and braced himself. After nodding towards Kang Mi-su in greeting, Hyun-woo grabbed Sid’s shoulder tightly and said.

“Yes, I am Ark-nim. What did you say? What happened to Gold Dream?”

Sid stared blankly at Ark’s face. Then tears tripped down his face again and he cried out.

“Ark-nim.....help me!

Sea Monster Extermination

“I’m really going crazy.”

A sigh naturally flowed out. The reason for Ark’s distress was Sid’s SOS.

“What? You dare say that now?”

Some time ago Ark’s voice had rattled through the lobby of Global Exos. He couldn’t help yelling.

“H-hik! L-Lariette-nim!”

Sid stuttered with panic and hid behind Lariette. The people in the lobby sent them looks as they wondered what was happening. But Ark didn’t see the eyes of those people. The news that Sid told him was too shocking. It was about the disappearance of Ark’s Gold Dream. Two days ago, he had completed his successful first deal in Seutandal and was heading back to Rueben Harbour when it had been eaten by an unidentified sea monster. All of Ark’s hopes and dreams were placed on Gold Dream.

Naturally he bought the fastest ships, and coating the hull with various types of magic protections in order to ensure safe and quick trade. All those expenses cost at least 40,000 gold. It was also loaded with tens of millions of gold worth of trade products from Seutandal. All that had become a meal for a sea monster. The news Ark had heard out of nowhere made no sense. Sid trembled from behind Lariette who looked puzzled but said.

“Calm down. It is not Sid-nim’s fault.”

“Yes, but....”

Ark tried to say something else with an angry expression but then just sighed and nodded. That’s right. Like Lariette said, he couldn’t blame Sid. He had been sailing with no problems when a monster appeared and swallowed the ship. Although Sid knew that monsters appeared in that area, until now he

had never had of monsters showing up on that route. So Sid couldn't be blamed for the problem.

'There's no time to wonder about whose fault it is right now.'

Wasn't there a small bit of luck? Fortunately, there was still some time before Ark's Gold Dream would be finished. According to Sid, the monster was so huge that it swallowed Gold Dream in one bite. Therefore it was likely that Gold Dream had arrived in the monster's stomach in a perfect state. He had invested a lot of money on the magic coating so it should survive for a while in the stomach.

'In this situation, there is still a chance to take back Gold Dream!'

Of course, there was a limit to how long the magic coating could last in the monster's stomach. If Gold Dream was digested then that was 40,000 gold flying away. Sid had managed to survive but he had no method to contact Ark so he had to go all the way to Global Exos.

"I have to find it before my dream becomes that monster's excrements!"

He didn't pay any attention to Sid and Lariette anymore. Ark returned to his house immediately and entered the unit. While the exact identity was unknown, the sea monster that swallowed Gold Dream was huge. The place was also the middle of the ocean. No matter how urgent it was, how could he deal with it after swimming there? Ark needed to make his own preparations before facing the opponent. The moment he heard sea monster, the Seutandal navy came to mind.

The Seutandal navy had a lot of experience fighting against pirates. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were the leaders of the autonomous group so he could ask them for help. So Ark went to Isabel and asked for the help of the Seutandal navy. But a problem he hadn't thought about occurred. The water that the sea monster appeared around was in Schudenberg. If the Seutandal navy entered those waters then a serious

diplomatic problem could develop. So he flew to Reuben port and asked for a direct conversation with the Lord to solve the problem. Since he was also a nobleman, he was able to meet with the Lord straight away. But.....

“I’ve heard about Sir Ark’s reputation. Although I manage areas concerning the sea, I am really sorry. I would like to help you. But I’m not able to judge your request. The only person who can agree to allow foreign troops in these waters is His Majesty the King.”

“Then could you ask the King for me?”

“Of course I can do that. But it is better not to expect too much. These days the political situation both domestically and abroad isn’t very calm. It would be difficult to accept foreign troops in territorial waters in this situation. Even if it is accepted, it has to be decided at a meeting between aristocrats and could take more than a week.”

Ark instantly became gloomy after hearing Reuben’s answer. No matter how much magic coating he placed on Gold Dream, it was impossible to endure the monster’s stomach for more than one week. It had already been two days in reality so didn’t he only have a few days left? Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the result would be positive. Ark was worried for a while before he made a suggestion.

“Then what about the troops from Reuben? As the Lord in charge of nearby waters, wouldn’t you also have a navy? The sea monster is within a dozen nautical miles (1,852 metres) of Reuben so there is no guarantee that it won’t attack the harbour.”

“Of course we will fight if that happens. But.....”

The Lord of Reuben placed a weary finger on his forehead and replied.

“Based on the news, this problem isn’t just occurring at sea. After the black obelisks appeared on the continent, unidentified monsters have been infested Schudenberg. A lot of villages and people have received serious damage.

We've stopped the damage from sea monsters for the moment but that isn't the case on the land. So most of the Reuben troops have been dispatched to the attacked villages."

The black obelisks and unidentified monsters that the Reuben Lord talked about had also been mentioned by Ho Myung-hwan. Once again he realized that the bug had a huge impact on New World. Anyway, the continent being overturned wasn't important to him at the moment. The most important thing for Ark was to recover his Gold Dream before it was too late.

"Do I have no choice but to let go?"

Ark thought with despair as he exited the Lord's castle.

-Ark, how was it? Is it done?

He had arrived at Reuben with Isyuram, and he received a whisper from him after Isyuram finished disposing of the japtem from the secret dungeon at the merchant's guild.

-No. There's been a little problem.

-Really? I thought so. Based on what I heard from the merchant's guild, the continent isn't ordinary these days. I thought it wouldn't be easy to allow the Seutandal navy into these waters or to borrow troops from the harbour. But there's no need to do that.

-Huh? There's no need?

-It is difficult to describe so just come to the merchant's guild for the moment.

Ark listened to Isyuram's words and visited the merchant's guild. After Seutandal rose, Reuben became the centre of trade so there was an especially large merchant's guild. The building of the merchant's guild was several times bigger than the warrior's guild and the Magic Institute next to it. But when he arrived at the merchant's guild, there were strangely a lot of warriors and magicians gathered in front of the building like a cloud.

“Ark, you came?”

Isyuram pushed through the crowd and waved his hand.

“Yes, but why are there so many people? And what do you mean by there is no need to request help from the navy?”

“If you look at that then you’ll understand.”

Isyuram pointed towards a bulletin board in front of the merchant’s guild. It was the bulletin board the merchant’s guild used to give information about the current prices of surrounding areas. But now a completely different type of notice was stuck on it.

-Commission to investigate the disappearance in the Uldun Mountain Range.

Two days ago, there was a report that a guild leader Berdin disappeared in the Uldun Mountain Range. Based on the report of the inspector dispatched to the mountain, several unidentified monsters had appeared and seem to be raiding several places. Therefore the merchant’s guild Midus is hiring mercenaries to investigate this incident.

* Hunters with tracking and detection skills as well as thieves have top priority.

Difficulty: ???

Number of Personnel to be Recruited: 60 people (Currently 52 applicants)

Pay: 30 gold (Successfully kill the boss +10 gold)

-Commission to investigate the transportation fleet that disappeared.

Yesterday a transportation fleet from the Midus guild left Bristania only to disappear at 85 degrees latitude in the north. Currently no information related to the disappearance of the fleet has been confirmed. The merchant’s guild determined that it is likely seized by pirates. So headquarters is organizing an armed fleet to investigate the disappearance and wipe out the

pirates if necessary. Recruiting warriors to help the merchant's guild.

* Seamanship or the knowledge to steer ships is a plus.

Difficulty: ???

Number of Personnel to be Recruited: 800 (Currently 785 applicants)

Pay: 40 gold (Success +15 gold)

'I see!'

Ark's eyes flashed as he confirmed the mercenary recruitment. Ark had overlooked an important part of the confusion caused by unidentified monsters suddenly appearing throughout Schudenberg and around Reuben. The one who would receive the most damage was the merchant's guild that operated in various places on the continent. The surprise attack from monsters came out of nowhere so most villages only had the minimum defences. And the fleets also had no protection. Thanks to the appearance of the monsters, various fleets and carriages related to the merchant's guild disappeared. Normally the Lords of the related territory would've been petitioned and they would've taken care of it. But currently the Lord were preoccupied with the subjugation the monsters attacking the villages. The merchant's guild would lose a lot of money so they hired mercenaries to solve the case. And Ark noticed the <Commission to investigate the transportation fleet that disappeared> on the bulletin board.

'85 degrees latitude to the north is near the place where the sea monster attacked Sid!'

The merchant's guild seemed to think they lost contact with the transportation fleet because of pirates. But after hearing Sid, Ark was convinced that the disappearance of the transportation fleet was related to the sea monster. No, such a thing didn't even matter. If he participated as a mercenary in the armed fleet then couldn't he strike against the sea monster?

‘Besides, they’ve already gathered 785 applicants. They’ll probably leave after a few more minutes!’

Ark immediately visited the NPC in charge and asked for an application form. After the NPC checked the submitted application form, the NPC stared at Ark with surprised eyes.

“A-A nobleman?”

“Yes?”

“Why is nobleman doing the work of a mercenary.....?”

The NPC looked at him with confused eyes. This was a game but the situation would’ve been absurd in real life.

‘What the? Is there a penalty when applying for something like this as a nobleman?’

Ark was anxious about this so he explained.

“Actually a ship I own went missing from near here. I’ve asked for help from Reuben’s navy but at the moment they can’t promise me anything. So I’ve decided to apply after seeing the merchant’s guild recruitment advertisement.”

“Ah, I see. Um.....please come with me.”

The NPC said after thinking for a while.

“Then I’ll go.”

“Yes, be sure to find it.”

Ark then parted from Isyuram. Isyuram had wanted to go with Ark but he had promised to meet the criminal organization who was meeting again. Ark separated from Isyuram and followed the NPC towards the dock dedicated to the merchant’s guild.

‘Amazing!’

Ark's mouth opened absent-mindedly as he saw the dock. Eight battleships were anchored at the dock. But the eight battleships were a completely different standard from the ones Ark had seen so far.

“This is the new armed fleet of the merchant's guild. It is 1.5 times bigger than ordinary battleships and the endurance is 30% more. The exterior walls are also made of padded steel sheets so it won't even be scratched by weak attacks. When just sailing normally, it won't even get a scratch. The ships also have a separate magic engine that can be used in emergencies.”

The NPC looked at the battleships with pride filled eyes. Then the voice of another NPC could be heard from the back.

“Hey hey. You will continue exposing all the secrets if you keep on chattering like that.”

A youth wearing a flashy badge on his armour approached. Then the NPC coughed and introduced the person.

“Ah, this is the admiral of the fleet Wagner-nim.”

Then he approached Wagner, pointed towards Ark and whispered something. Wagner looked at Ark and smiled pleasantly.

“Ah, you are an aristocrat of Schudenberg kingdom. Well, then there is no problem if you know confidential information about the armed fleet.”

“Confidential?”

Ark couldn't understand what the person was saying. Wagner just laughed and explained.

“Actually, this battleship is a joint project between the Schudenberg navy and the merchant's guild. These battleships took several years to make.”

That's right. Then battleships in the dock were Schudenberg's next generation battleships. No matter how much influence the merchant's guild had on the continent, they weren't powerful enough to build such strong

battleships. Anyway, the battleships anchored at the dock had been completed not long ago. Now the only thing left was to test out the performance of the battleship. Then the incident with the missing transportation fleet occurred. So the Schudenberg navy decided to test the performance through this search operation. That was why an aristocrat of Schudenberg was the admiral. But several problems had occurred at this point. The ships were newly built so there was a lack of sailors. So they had to hire mercenaries to solve the problem and the captain of the battleships was responsible for them. So not anyone could be the captain.

“Normally the merchant vessels will have someone from the merchant’s guild in charge of them. But entrusting the battleships to merchants is a little worrisome. Now we don’t have time to find a qualified person.”

Wagner sent the NPC an arrogant look and muttered. Then he moved his eyes back to Ark and the arrogant expression faded away.

“Shouldn’t an aristocrat of Schudenberg have the honour of such an important task? You became an aristocrat through your military exploits so please take control of the battleships.”

“Huh? Me?”

“An aristocrat has the obligation to maintain the glory of the nobility. So how can a Schudenberg aristocrat possibly work like a common mercenary?”

Wagner was a human who believed that status was everything. Frankly, Ark disliked that type of personality whether they were users or NPCs. But now wasn’t the time to question it closely. Ark’s purpose in participating was to rescue his Gold Dream and the shipment. It was the reason he flew to Reuben.

‘If I participate as a simple hired soldier then it will be difficult to get an opportunity to recover the ship.’

That was the part Ark was worried about. But that wasn’t a problem if he was

captain of a battleship.

“If you believe in me then I will do my best to return your expectations. Wagner-nim!”

Ark grasped Wagner’s hand and replied. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-You have accepted the request from Admiral Wagner to become the temporary captain of a ship.

As a captain, you have decisive power over the corresponding battleship. All soldiers on the battleship will be automatically added to Ark-nim’s attack party. In addition, as captain of the battleship you have a variety of skills able to be used.

<If you become captain and complete the request successfully then 200% of the fee will be paid>

‘Okay, things are being arranged better than I thought!’

He was delighted about being able to become captain thanks to his barony.

“Hahahaha! Are you worried about suddenly becoming a captain? There’s no need to worry. You just have to obey my orders. The pirates are called losers of the sea so defeating them is as easy as peeling off a woman’s underwear in bed.”

Wagner laughed roughly and struck Ark’s shoulder.....Ark suddenly felt like beating him up.

‘I’m really going crazy.’

A sigh flowed from Ark’s mouth as he sat on the dock. As Ark expected, the remaining mercenaries were quickly gathered. With so many gathered then the fleet could also depart early. After distributing the troops between each

battleship and arranging the necessary supplies, they finally departed. Until now there had been no problem. The actual problem was the bat sitting on Ark's shoulder.

“.....Hahahaha, this is so great I want to die. You are an aristocrat of Schudenberg. No matter what kind of situation it is, you must not despair and fight with honour. After all, your life is trivial when compared to an aristocrat's honour. No matter how injured your body gets, you must not defile the honour of the nobility when righting pirates.....hey, are you listening?”

“Ah, yes yes. I'm listening.”

‘Damn! This is complete torture!’

Ark scratched his head with irritation. But who could he blame? This whole situation started from one mistake.....

The bat sitting on his shoulder and making noise wasn't Racard. The existence of the bat occurred while Ark was invading the secret dungeon. Ark had found a lot of magic ingredients that he had never seen before. At that time, he had needed Racard's help with scouting more than Razak or Radun. Therefore he had concentrated on making food for Racard. Thanks to that, Racard's stats reached an equivalent of level 380.

-Your summon Racard has manifested a new vampire ability.

Racard has absorbed Karakul's strength and abilities and has been reborn as a high ranking vampire. However, Racard lacks the ability to properly absorb Karakul's blood flowing through his veins. When this blood is perfectly absorbed then Racard will obtain all of Karakul's power and knowledge.

Once Racard reaches a certain level, he is able to awaken some of Karakul's abilities.

+ Summon Stud: The vampire is able to summon his blood relatives who

made a contract with him.

<A high ranking vampire is able to make a stud contract with relatives who have inferior rank. The blood relatives who sign a stud contract can be summoned anywhere when the vampire calls. In addition, a summoned relative will be able to display 100% of their power.

Spiritual Power Consumption: 50 per summon>

Once Racard's abilities reached a certain level then he would absorb more of Karakul's blood and sometimes a new skill would occur. Then skill that occurred was random and depended on certain conditions. There was a reason Racard developed the Summon Stud skill. In fact, during the secret dungeon invasion Racard had been the busiest person. Reconnaissance and contacting the different troops scattered around had been entrusted to Racard. So Racard had really been busy flying all over the dungeon. Naturally Racard was dissatisfied so he had created the Stud Contract skill. The Summon Stud skill allowed a high ranking vampire to summon lower ranking vampires from their territory. All of Racard's lower ranking relatives signed the contract and were summoned into the cave.

'What is this? The bats are only level 20 so what use will they be? Furthermore, summoning just one costs 50 Spiritual Power? Doesn't that mean I can only summon 15? Is this a joke?'

It was so pitiful that Ark couldn't even laugh about it when the skill first occurred. However the summoned bats were surprisingly useful.

"Count!"

"One, two, three, four....fifteen!"

"Okay, now everyone move to your positions and stay faithful to your role. Go!"

"Yes Lord-nim!"

The bats scattered all over the dungeon at Racard's command. Ark had thought they were useless just by looking at their levels but the bats had their own specialties. It was the remote communication. Even if they were far away, the bats were able to communicate with each other through something like ultrasound waves. If Ark placed the bats with the leaders of each unit then he didn't need to use Feather of Whispering to communicate. The bat with Ark could communicate with the bats near the unit leaders. They were like living mobile phones!

This had been weighing on Ark's mind with the armed fleet departed. Currently communicating between ships required using flag signals or voice amplification magic. However, the flag signals couldn't give detailed information. In addition, voice amplification magic wasn't really audible over cannon fire and if the ships were really far away. The movements of the fleet would have to slow down. This wasn't a big problem if the opponents were ordinary pirates. However, wouldn't fighting sea monsters be difficult with a slow response?

"Using the Feather of Whispering would solve that problem but I can't give one to every person. It also can't be used with NPCs."

Ark was the only user that was a captain so he couldn't communicate with the other ships via Feather of Whispering. That's when he remembered Racard's Stud contract. So Ark had placed on bat with the captains of each ship. Of course, Ark had to ask Admiral Wagner first. In fact, Ark hadn't thought that Wagner would easily accept his proposal. But surprisingly Wagner had easily accepted.

'I should've noticed then.....'

At the time, Ark had thought that Wagner was just a person who listened to people's opinions. It was a huge mistake. Wagner had accepted Ark's suggestion for another reason.

"In the end I broke the necks of all the pirates and returned grandly. Can you

believe it? I cleaned up 500 pirates with just 100 people. It would be impossible for people other than me. The King even honoured me with the title ‘Conqueror of the Sea’ and put me in charge of building the next generation of battleships with the merchants. Ah, I’ve done the work of fifteen people. I was also a knight candidate.....”

The reason Wagner accepted Ark’s suggestion was to brag to someone. Wagner’s self-praise was really endless. Wagner didn’t stop talking in the 24 hours since they left Reuben harbour, which was like three days in the game. He heard about Wagner facing several hundred people by himself, challenging a dragon, the many times he became a hero in Schudenberg and Bristania, etc.

‘Did he solve all the problems in the world by himself?’

Hyun-woo thought as a huge lump rose in his throat. But Wagner was the Admiral of the fleet and he would be in charge of all decisions in a battle. He couldn’t afford to anger Wagner. There were other reasons why Ark had no choice but to accept Wagner’s nonsense.

“I still haven’t seen any signs. Maybe I should.....”

Wagner finally muttered after chattering for ages. Ark suddenly asked him through the bat.

“Ah, I heard about your exploits defeating some pirates. After hearing your earlier talk, can I ask a question?”

“Uh? Alas, that saga. Hahahaha, good. Educating yourself is only an aristocrat’s important mission. An aristocrat who has a lot of achievements like me will be a good role model. You may ask me anything you like.”

Wagner yelled after praising himself. The reason he was doing this was because Ark still hadn’t found the sea monsters. Sid had been eaten by the sea monster which was how Ark knew there were some in this area. However, Wagner still thought the transportation fleet had disappeared due to pirates.

Therefore he just moved to other areas to search when he couldn't find any traces of pirates. If that happened then Ark's reason to come here might disappear. Therefore Ark desperately made an effort to listen to Wagner's bragging and desperately tried to turn his attention to other matters. Meanwhile Racard had been using satellite surveillance mode to look for signs of a sea monster.

'Damn! How long do I need to listen to this guy talk? Racard!'

"I haven't seen it yet."

But he couldn't find any signs of the sea monster.

'I'm really going crazy. It will be difficult to keep Wagner talking. I have 10~15 minutes at most before moving to another place.....'

He really couldn't think. Ark had thought the sea monster will show up when he neared it. But contrary to what he thought, the sea monster didn't appear.

'Do I have to enter the ocean to look for it?'

That was Ark's thought after enduring for so long. Using the Mermaid Scale and looking under the water was 100 times better than listening to Wagner's bragging any longer. But if he did that then things would become more complicated. Under like areas, the waters here were so dark it seemed black. It didn't matter how large the sea monster was if he couldn't distinguish it in the water. He had no choice but to hope the sea monster appeared first.

'I have to find it before Wagner moves the fleet.....'

Ark thought impatiently as he bit his lip.

"Eh? What's that?"

Racard suddenly wondered while flying through the sky. A brilliant object was shining in the dark water. Racard thought it might be an object from the missing transportation fleet so he flew closer.

“What? Is that a fish?”

Racard confirmed the object with a disappointed look. The shiny object in the ocean was the scales of a fish.

“It is so shiny even after it died....it looks strangely delicious.”

Racard laughed as he looked at the fish. The sight of the fish floating in the ocean had stimulated his appetite. Racard was hungry after hours of searching with satellite surveillance mode.

“Shall I eat it in one bite? I’ll eat well!”

Snap!

Racard drove his teeth into the fish. Suddenly the ocean started to shake. It was just a light ripple at first before it gradually grew to huge waves.

“What, what the? What happened?”

Racard avoided the wave with a puzzle expression and flew into the sky. All of a sudden the fish started to rise into the sky. Then a giant pillar of water soared up. The water then fell back into the ocean like a snake shedding its skin. It wasn’t just a pillar of water.

“M-Master!”

Racard cried out after looking at an object in the ocean. But Ark and the sailors in the fleet were already looking at the object.

“W-what is going on?”

“Huge.....snake?”

That’s right. The pillar of water which rose up was an enormous snake. It was a sea snake 20 metres thick. When the huge snake craned its neck and looked at the dark water, Ark had an eerie feeling. It was just the beginning.

Chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa!

At that moment another 4 pillars appeared around the snake. After the water

poured down, four more identical snakes had appeared. Five huge sea snakes had risen from the ocean! A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

-The boss monster, Devil of the Sea
'Leviathan' has appeared!

Conqueror of the Sea

‘It appeared!’

Ark looked at the sea snakes with bright eyes. The sea monsters had appeared! The armed fleet scattered around were forced into a position where they had to fight the sea monsters.

“Master, it’s moving!”

Chwa chwa chwa chwa, chwa chwa chwa chwa!

The five sea snakes had started moving their bodies when he heard Racard’s voice. They opened their mouths and something dark bubbled inside.

‘An attack!’

His instincts warned him. Ark turned his head and looked at Wagner on the flagship. When the Leviathans started moving, the armed fleet was plunged into a combat situation. And the current admiral of the fleet was Wagner. The captains of the other ships had fallen into a state of panic and contacted Wagner for orders. But when Ark looked at Wagner’s face, it looked somewhat strange.

“Waaahhhh.....”

The sound continuously emerged from the bat phone. Wagner had collapsed on the deck of the flagship and was moaning. He looked pitiful to Ark. Wasn’t he just telling Ark about how he cleaned up thousands of pirates and rescued the kingdom from a hopeless crisis? Of course, Ark knew it was a pile of nonsense after talking to the captains of the other ships. The captain and crew from the merchant’s guild knew that Wagner had received the position of being in charge of the next generation battleships through his family background. But no matter what, he was still the admiral. If Wagner who was the Admiral of the armed fleet shook with fear then the crew would

also panic.

‘That fool!’

Curses rose in his throat. Before the curses could emerge from his mouth, something similar to an arrow shot from the Leviathan’s mouths.

Syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk, syu syuk!

There was an intense explosion sound. Something like a black line had shot from their mouths. The result couldn’t be ignored. When the black line hit, the outer wall of a battleship was smashed like tofu. It also pierced through the hull that it touched. It was to the extent that the steel which padded the hull was cut in half.

“What on earth?”

The soldiers stared with shock. Ark used Skill Penetration and the information rose in front of him.

-Leviathan’s skill: Water Pressure Gun

The Leviathan draws in a huge amount of water. Using its long body, it is able to create a high pressure spray. The enormous pressure turns the water into a sharp sword.

‘Water Pressure Gun!’

Ark now figured out the identity of the Leviathan’s black line attack. That line wasn’t an arrow or an explosive. It was simple saltwater. The problem was the enormous pressure that the Leviathan had placed on the saltwater. When spraying water with thousands of tons of pressure on it, it was like a laser. The high pressure of the water was enough to cut steel. Anyway, the Leviathan’s Water Pressure Gun was no joke. It was rare for any equipment in New World to have more than 500 durability. Even the metal armour of warriors only had around 200~300 durability. However, the Water Pressure Gun had a 100% cutting effect which decrease durability by 500. If either a

user or NPC was hit by the Water Pressure Gun then they would have severed arms or legs. The ship was also the same. There was little damage thanks to the hardness of the steel plates but the Water Pressure Guns still cut the sails and other parts of the ship. The sails of five battleships and dozens of sailors were severed.

“What is this type of ridiculous attack.....?”

But what was the point of complaining about the monster?

-Grrrrrr!

Then the Leviathans cried out and raised their body. The bottom was swollen like a balloon and that swollen part was gradually being pushed up. In order to use Water Pressure Gun, they needed to pull a lot of water into their mouths. The battleships that had been hit directly by the Water Pressure Gun were defenseless so another hit would destroy it.

“Battleship magic engine! Quickly use the power to escape!”

Ark shouted into the ears of the bat.

“Did you hear? Deploy the magic engine!”

The captains of the ships repeated the order to their sailors. In fact, the captains and crew of the ships didn't like listening to Wagner. Now Admiral Wagner had fallen into a state of panic from the Leviathans' attacks. Since Admiral Wagner couldn't perform his duties, the captain and crews of the ships couldn't do anything when they were being attacked. When Ark gave an order, the captains of each ship instantly gave him the authority of 2nd commander. The evidence was that they obeyed his order and used the magic engine. Anyway, five Water Pressure Guns roughly flew out at the same time. The high pressure jets of water crossed the ocean. It tore through the ocean like a laser and rushed towards the battleships.

“Quickly use the magic engine to avoid it!”

It was at that moment. There was a mechanical sound as the mast was folded automatically and disappeared into the deck. Then something that looked like a long tube popped out on both sides of the hull. At the same time, there was a roaring sound and the battleships raced through the ocean like a speedboat.

“Huk, what is this?”

The users on the deck stumbled from the quick acceleration. That’s right. This was the magic engine of the next generation battleships. When the magic engine was used, the battleships moved at a speed that couldn’t be compared to when there was wind in the sails. The speed was like riding a motorcycle on the ocean!

“The Water Pressure Guns are coming! Battleship starboard, all sailors prepare for the impact.

Ark commanded as the battleship suddenly turned. When the huge battleship turned sharply, a large amount of water was sprayed. Some of the sailors lost their balance and fell into the ocean. Even with that evasive movement, the ships couldn’t completely avoid the pursuit of the Water Pressure Guns. The Leviathans could control the Water Pressure Guns by simply moving their heads.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Water Pressure Gun skimmed past the stern of the ship. At the same time, the part of the deck that had been hit fell off. However, that wasn’t the end of the Water Pressure Gun’s attack. The Leviathan that was attacking Ark’s ship once again turned its head and the Water Pressure Gun started heading towards the centre of the ship.

“It’s the end if we get hit by that!”

Ark felt a sense of urgency. Only a part of the stern had fallen so it didn’t really matter. But the ship would be destroyed if the Water Pressure Gun hit the centre. Of course, the exterior walls of the battleship were padded with

iron so it wouldn't break in half. However, the wooden deck would have no choice but to be cut in half. Even the magic engine below the deck was likely to receive damage.

“But it isn't possible to avoid the attack. Then.....!”

Ark clenched his teeth tightly and shouted.

“Keep moving forward at full speed away from the Water Pressure Gun!”

“Huh? It is aiming for the centre of the ship.....”

“Does the captain have to explain the reason for all his commands?”

“Ah, no. Full speed ahead!”

The magic engine let out a roar and increased its speed. The Water Pressure Gun was approaching! Even if the Water Pressure Gun only passed through the deck for a few seconds, the magic engine would be severed. When the Water Pressure Gun was halfway to the ship...Ark opened his bag and shouted.

“Demonic Manifestations!”

After he used the skill, an information window appeared.

-You have used Demonic Manifestations. Please select an offering to extract the demonic energy.

“Shield. Shield. Shield. Shield. Shield!”

Shields soared out from the bag at Ark's scream. 5 shields flew into the sky. Black sparks flew from the shields and formed a pentagram in the sky. Then the shields exploded and a massive shield insignia appeared on the battleship.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shield, shield, shield, shield, shield).

The effect exercised by this combination is 'Physical Shield.'

[Physical Shield]: When Physical Shield is exercised, the centre of a 100

metre space will have its defense increased by 500. The defense shield will have a durability of 1,000. The effect of the shield lasts for 10 minutes or until the 1,000 durability is consumed. However, the defense shield doesn't move. It also isn't possible to make the same effect overlap.

It was the new skill he learnt after a seal of Eternal Soul was released. Ark had learnt the secrets behind Demonic Manifestations while hunting the monsters while climbing back up the secret dungeon. It was a new skill so he wanted to test it immediately. He realised that Demonic Manifestations was different from the other skills learnt from Eternal Soul.

When Demonic Manifestations was triggered, the effect depending on the type of equipment sacrificed. The first combination Ark tried was 'sword, sword, sword, and sword.' It gave the effect 'Braid Blade' which increased attack by +20%. If only shoes were sacrificed then it increased movement speed while gloves increased attack speed.

.....That was the simplest example of such a combination. Sometimes the different combinations of 'swords, shields, armour, shoes or gloves' didn't even give an effect. The good point about Demonic Manifestations was that it had a wide effect. The accessories offered automatically flew over everyone and a strong special effect was applied to his allies. Anyway, Physical shield now made a transparent shield around the battleship.

"Everybody prepare for impact!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At almost the same time, the Water Pressure Gun hit the centre of the ship. To be exact, it hit the surface of the transparent shield. There was a huge impact and the shield had its durability drained.

-The durability of the 'Physical Shield' fell to 900.

-The durability of the 'Physical Shield'

fell to 800.....

The durability of the Physical Shield fell to 500 in seconds. If this continues the Water Pressure Gun will pierce through and hit the ship. But because Ark had already ordered for the ship to move forward at full speed, they already managed to get out of range of the attack.

‘Even the Physical Shield won’t be able to hold up for 30 seconds.....’

It really was enormous damage. After avoiding the Leviathan’s attacks twice, the attacks stopped. With the amount of water the Leviathan can hold, the Water Pressure Gun could only be used 2~3 times. However, those 2~3 attacks were enough to cause the armed fleet to be in total chaos. Since the attacks only grazed the ships thanks to the magic engine, there were ships with railings and sterns split apart while some players had fallen into the ocean. The armed fleet had been seriously damaged with just one blow.

‘But there is a way to defeat them!’

Ark looked at the Leviathans floating on the ocean. The Leviathan’s attacks caused immense havoc. However Ark had discovered a weakness in the Leviathan’s attack. Once the Leviathans’ Water Pressure Gun was used, it took a long time to inhale the required amount of water. And when the Water Pressure Gun was used, it couldn’t be stopped until the water ran out.

‘I don’t know why but the Leviathans haven’t moved from the spot where they first appeared. If the Leviathans had moved then the battleships would be completely devastated right now. Something must be keeping it immobile.’

They couldn’t move. In other words, they were a good target to attack.

‘In addition, the Water Pressure Gun follows the movement of their mouth. If they just turn their head lightly then the Water Pressure Gun can chase after the battleship that has moved dozens of metres. It is impossible for the speed of the battleships to escape from the gun. It is an attack that is 100%

impossible to escape. Then.....

“Battleships use your magic engines to stabilize the hull!”

“What? What does that mean?”

The captains of the battleships asked Ark in an amazed voice. They had seen the incredibly power of the Water Pressure Gun so all they wanted to do was run away. If they didn't then wouldn't the next attack by the Water Pressure Gun smash the ships to pieces? Then Ark answered through the bat phone.

“If we use the magic engine then the hull won't shake and we can directly counterattack.”

“Of course. But if we can't avoid the attack then how will we counterattack.....?”

“This plan will allow us to counterattack.”

Ark smiled and explained the way he devised to defeat the Leviathans. The Leviathans inflated their bodies to suck in seawater and condense it to a high pressure.

“This is the only way to stop their onslaught. Believe in me and follow my commands.”

“.....Understood. There is no other way since the Admiral is currently soulless.”

“All battleships, use the magic engine to stabilize the hull!”

“Prepare the cannons for precise shooting!”

The armed fleet finished all their preparations according to Ark's commands. The Leviathans had also finished condensing the water and opened their mouths.

“Now. Shoot precisely!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

At the same time, the armed fleet fire simultaneously after hearing Ark's order. It was the basic 'Salvo' of an ordinary naval battle. The attacks would be concentrated on one opponent in order to decrease the enemies and the damage. So the basic tactics was to concentrate all attacks on point and use the maximum amount of attacks in a short time. However, Ark had chosen the opposite strategy. The eight battleships attacked all five Leviathans. Furthermore, not all the cannons were mobilized. It was separated into two or three attacks at a time. The reason why.....

-Kiaaaack!

-Kueeeeh!

The shells crossed the space and hit the Leviathans' heads. Thus the attack from the Water Pressure Guns flew into the sky. The shot flew a few kilometres into the air before falling back to the sea with all its power lost. That's right. It was the reason why Ark chose this method. The Water Pressure Gun was an attack while flew like a laser from the mouth of the Leviathan. Thus their heads became Ark's target. Instead of running away, couldn't he use this method to make them waste the water guns?

'If we keep this up for 2~3 minutes then the Water Pressure Guns will be used up during that time!'

That was Ark's thought. It didn't matter how big the sea snake was. In addition, the long body stretched over the sea.

It was easy for dozens of shells to hit such a large target. If they hit the target then it was enough to change the direction of the Leviathans' jaw. So there was no worry about the Water Pressure Gun hitting the battleships! Ark used the magic engines to stabilize the hull and the cannons for a precise bombardment.

"It is a success. Their attacks have been blocked!"

Ark's operation was a great success. The battleships continuously attacked

the Leviathans using 2~3 shots at a time. It was only 2~3 attacks but the health of the Leviathans decreased little by little.

“The battle is in progress and it is only a matter of time until we beat them. But.....”

Ark looked at the Leviathan and tilted his head to one side. Ark was certain that this area was where Gold Dream had been swallowed by a sea monster. And the message window said that the Leviathan was the boss monster of this area so there couldn't be another one. But he couldn't imagine that the Leviathans were the ones that swallowed Gold Dream. The Leviathan was huge but it was only 20 metres in diameter. There was no way they could swallow Gold Dream. Ark's question was soon settled within a few minutes.

“Keep on attacking!”

“Continue hitting those guys!”

“There's no time for a break. Reload as quickly as possible after the artillery is launched!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

-Kuaaaa!

The cannons continually fired with no breaks and one Leviathan shrieked before shrinking.

“We did it!”

“We defeated a sea monster!”

“Okay, concentrate the attacks on the other four!”

The morale of the sailors increased even more after a Leviathan fell. They once again concentrated the precision shooting on the remaining Leviathans.

“Hahaha! The huge opponent is no match for my strategy! Okay, continue attacking like I commanded. Victory will be ours!”

Wagner's laughter flowed from the bat on Ark's shoulder. The Admiral who had fallen into a panic when the Leviathans first appeared now showed his face when the situation seemed to improve. He was a shameless person. The crew were stunned but fortunately they concentrated on firing the cannons.....a Leviathan had just been knocked down.

“Don't worry about it and continue to attack!”

“We can't be careless! Don't give them any room!”

The captains of the battleships ignored Wagner and just kept attacking. It continued for another 10 minutes. Under the continuous bombardment, another two Leviathans sank under the water. Four of them had fallen and now there was only one left.

“Now, it's almost finished. Concentrate all the attacks!”

Kwaaaaaaah-!

Then the water underneath the Leviathan started to become unstable. The water shook like an earthquake was happening. Then the sea suddenly divided and a huge sleeping form could be seen.

“Huk! What the, that is?”

“Wait? That.....that huge sea snake.....”

“Such a thing! It isn't five sea snakes.....”

The sailors who had been preparing for the bombardment suddenly opened their mouths absent-mindedly. The form underneath the Leviathan was a huge monster which exceeded several kilometres. It was a huge monster resembling a fish! Ark finally answered his question after seeing the huge fish. Ark and all the sailors had thought there were five Leviathans. They were mistaken. This was the reason why the Leviathans didn't move at all. It was because the sea snakes were attached to the giant fish underneath. No, to be exact the sea snakes were attached to the Leviathan but seemed to be the

Leviathan's tentacles. The Leviathan's true identity was a giant fish several kilometres long. It had been impossible to discover in the black ocean. In the end, the attacks of the armed fleet hadn't dealt any damage to the Leviathan.

"Fish! That is the fish I tried to eat!"

Racard shouted as he pointed to a part of the Leviathan's body. The Leviathan had something growing like hair on its forehead. And various things were dangling from the hair. There was the fish that Racard had discovered, a small box, the corpse of a mermaid and even a human body. Ark noticed all that with one glance. Lure.....yes! The Leviathans used the lures on its forehead to draw in food to eat. And a huge mouth that could completely swallow the battleship was right underneath the lures. Its mouth opened and the surrounding seawater seemed to drag everybody in.

"I-it is trying to swallow the battleship!"

"Deploy the magic engine!"

Screams rose from the ships as the battleships were being dragged. But the Leviathan didn't seem to want to swallow the battleships. The crew sighed with relief when they realized this but they were consumed by fear again in one second.

"Hik, what is that?"

"Something is coming out of that guy's mouth?"

"Huck! It's different from the Water Pressure Gun!"

"M-monsters! Thousands of monsters are emerging!"

A sailor said in a trembling voice as he checked it with the telescope. After a while, the other sailors were able to confirm the identities of the things spilling from the mouth.

-Kuruk, kuruk, kuruk!

The things which emerged from the Leviathan's mouth looked like black

worms. The size was approximately 2~3 metres. It was a level 300 monster called 'Parasite.' A level 300 opponent wasn't difficult when considering the average level of the users who participated in the armed fleet. The problem was the numbers! There were tens of thousands of Parasites that exited from the Leviathan! It was to the extent that a few kilometres of the ocean was covered by them.

“Unbelievable.....!”

Ark also felt overwhelmed by the huge number of monsters. But Ark had no choice.

“Battleships, maintain a horizontal battle formation and attack!”

“Everybody brace themselves!”

The battleships started to steadily line up after Ark's command. The ships lined up and simultaneously fired. Hundreds of shells flew towards the monster! However, hundreds of pillars of water soared up and the Parasites overturned the ship. The Parasites had used human wave tactics to cause a tidal wave like surge. They instantly surrounded the battleships and crawled onto the deck. Dozens of Parasites also crept onto the deck of Ark's no. 8 battleship.

“Ugh, dammit! Dark Blade!”

Ark wielded his sword tirelessly while holding onto a rope hanging from the sails. The Parasites were sea monsters so they were quick while swimming but extremely slow on land. But they had a lot of defense. Despite Ark's continuous attacks, the Parasite only lost 20% health.

“Don't kill them, just push them back into the sea!”

They couldn't endure the number of monsters creeping onto the ship so Ark changed strategies. The crew of the battleship ran around the outskirts and pushed them back into the water.

“That’s it, now! Drop a bomb!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When the bomb exploded, there was a pillar of flames in the vicinity of the battleship. A number of Parasites were engulfed by the flames and fell into the water. Although the explosion occurred on the ship, the steel acted as a barrier and the battleship only received a little damage. Anyway, now wasn’t the time to worry about the damage to the battleship.

If the thousands of Parasites attacked at once then the armed fleet would be smashed to pieces. The other battleships also used the same bomb tactic as Ark on the Parasites. After an intense 3~4 minute battle, the area was covered in black corpses. Then a black line suddenly crossed the sea. It was the Water Pressure Gun from the mouth of the remaining sea snake. It quickly tore through the no. 5 battleship. The two ships had already received considerable damage from the bombs so it collapsed like tofu and the sailors fell into the sea. The Parasites then swarmed around the sailors like cockroaches.

“P-Parasites!”

“Ugh! Help!”

The mercenaries and sailors screamed as they fell into the water. It was impossible to properly fight the level 300 Parasites in the water. Sailors who fell into the water were encircled by hundreds of Parasites and eaten. The sailors on the armed fleet could only watch in horror. There was pure silence on the deck of the armed fleet. The fear they imagined was occurring in reality.

“Hiiiiik! It’s the end! They don’t stop no matter how many times we step on them. It’s either being swallowed in one bite by that big fish or be eaten slowly by those worms. Kuaaak!”

Wagner’s voice came from the mouth of the bat. He already withdrew with fear when the sea snakes appeared and left the command to Ark, and now he

was decreasing the morale of the sailors?

“Damn! Racard, shut that guy up!”

“Got it!”

At Ark’s command, Racard shot down like a lightning bolt and struck the back of Wagner’s head. Wagner had a huge lump on the back of his head but unfortunately he didn’t faint.

“Ack! I can see stars.....is this guy’s head made of stone?”

Racard staggered back and Wagner turned his head. Then he turned and rushed at Racard.

“What, what the? This guy. Do you want to try me?”

“Yes, I do! Please make me faint!”

Wagner shouted towards Racard.

“I’ll rather be stunned than eaten by those guys!”

“W-wait a minute! Uwak!”

Pakak, pakak, pakak, pakak.

Wagner then repeatedly slammed his forehead into Racard. After a while, both Wagner and Racard were covered in large lumps. However, the one who fainted wasn’t Wagner but Racard. When Racard fainted, Wagner screamed before crashing into the mast. He had completely gone crazy from fear. Anyway, slamming against the mast worked this time as Wagner got a nosebleed and fainted. However, no one cared about Wagner anymore.

“Ugh, damn! That stupid snake.....!”

Ark glared at the sea snake.

“They’re preventing the cannon attacks!”

“It can’t be. Those worms are blocking the muzzle of the cannons and we

can't fire!"

"What?"

Ark ran to the railing and looked down. Like the sailors said, the Parasites were blocking the muzzle of the cannons. If the cannons were just fired like this then it would damage the battleship.

"Captain-nim, the Water Pressure Gun is heading towards our battleship!"

Ark heard the voice from behind him and turned his head. The Water Pressure Gun was flying in a straight line towards the no. 8 battleship. With the Parasites blocking the ship, they couldn't even use the magic engine!

"Ah, no.....Demonic....."

Ark hastily used Demonic Manifestations to form the Physical Shield. But the Water Pressure Gun was quicker and hit the centre of a battleship. The deck split apart like it was cut by a knife. The Water Pressure Gun didn't completely pull the hull apart. But more than 2/3rds of the hull was cut, throwing off the balance of the battleship and it gradually began to sink into the ocean.

"If this sinks then it is dangerous. Jump into the sea!"

In the end, Ark was forced to escape from the battleship.

-You have entered the 'Demonic' sphere of influence.

<The abilities of all players within the sphere of influence will decrease by 10%. On the other hand, all monsters with the Demonic attribute will have their stats increase by 10%>

That warning message appeared when he fell into the sea. That's right. The water had turned black thanks to the demonic influence of the Leviathan. The Leviathan was a sea monster so its effect was limited to the water. But Ark still didn't give up on the battle. If he gave him then his Gold Dream which was worth 40,000 gold would just become excrement.

‘The Water Pressure Gun only comes from the Leviathan’s tentacle. If we deal with the sea snake then we can somehow deal with the Leviathan!’

Of course, the thousands of Parasites are still a problem.....

“I have no choice but to try!”

Ark blew the Flute of the Merpeople and called dozens of dolphins. Ark and the other sailors got on the back of the dolphins and headed towards the Parasites that were blocking the no 2, 4 and 7 battleship.

“Okay, defeat the Parasites blocking the flagship and the other battleships! It should then be possible to handle the remaining sea snake!”

However, penetrating through thousands of Parasites on the dolphins wasn’t easy. The Parasites had flocked around the sailors after they fell into the only so only Ark and less than one hundreds users were trying to penetrate the Parasites.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Meanwhile another two ships were hit by the Water Pressure Gun and split in half.

“Damn, is it going to end here.....?”

Despair entered Ark’s eyes. There were only two battleships left. Even if they wiped out the Parasite, they wouldn’t have the power to deal with the Leviathan. Even if the remaining tentacle was destroyed, decreasing the enormous life of the Leviathan with two ships was nonsense! Even with the Admiral unconscious, the remaining sailors on the two ships determined that there was no hope left.

“Ack! Then it is time for a plan of desperation! Let’s show our commitment as we go to hell!”

The captains of the ship commanded as they dropped bombs. A chain explosion occurred on the exterior wall of the hull and the attached Parasites

were engulfed in flames. It was damage the battleship couldn't recovery from but luckily several cannons survived. The captains of the two ships chose to throw away their battleships to fire artillery at the Parasites.

“Aim the muzzle of the gun, fire!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a ringing sound and the sea started shaking.

“Eh?”

Ara?”

Both Ark and the crew of the no. 2 battleship looked confused. The ringing sound didn't come from the cannons. The cannons of the no. 2 battleship hadn't been launched yet. The rocking and ringing sound was coming from underneath the water. After a while, an explosion occurred and several hundred columns of water shot upwards. The Parasites that were at the site of the explosion were blown away.

“W-what is this.....?”

“M-Master! Over there!”

Racard who had recovered pointed to one side.

Chwa chwa chwa chwa! Chwa chwa chwa chwa!

When he turned around, there was a spray of water coming from the sea. At first it was just a small spray but it gradually became larger as it approached. After a while, a huge object comparable to the size of the Leviathan appeared.

“M-monster.....it is another monster.....!”

“Hahaha! I'm not even afraid anymore.”

“Damn, I never expected to see two of these monsters.....”

The crew of the flagship and the no. 2 ship murmured to each other. But only

Ark's eyes sparkled as he looked at the new sea monster.

“Surely that is.....there's no doubt! It is definitely Gallic!”

That's right. It was a giant sea monster. The monster was the patron guardian of the merpeople that Ark had met a long time ago. It was the white whale Gallic.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Gallic crossed the water and rammed into Leviathan. The Leviathan who was about to use the Water Pressure Gun on the no. 2 battleship wobbled and was pushed back several metres. When the two bodies collided, it seemed like a tsunami had occurred.

“How did Gallic get here? No, why is Gallic here?”

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Then dozens of water pillars shot up again. The Parasites that were blocking the ship turned white.

“Go down....something is helping us at the bottom of the sea!”

Ark commanded and quickly dove into the water. The water was dark so it was difficult to see anything underwater. But after looking for a long time, he started to distinguish vague shapes. They looked like shadows at first. But the shadows started to increase to a huge number around Ark.

Ark's eyes then widened.

“That.....the merpeople!”

That's right. The shadows approaching underwater were the merpeople. Thousands of them were approaching. The whole group of merpeople swam to where Ark was located. There were thousands of merpeople warriors! And leading them was the Mermaid Queen wearing splendid armour.

“Brave warriors of the sea, exterminate the parasites that are dirtying these waters!”

The Mermaid Queen shouted as she raised a jewel encrusted stick. It was a trident like weapon with three prongs. When she moved it, a shock wave emerged from the trident and shot towards the Parasites. An explosion instantly occurred around Ark. Then 1,000 merpeople attack the Parasites around Ark.

“Q-queen?”

Ark stared at the reinforcements with a stupid expression. Then the Mermaid Queen laughed and greeted him.

“Fortunately we made it in time.”

“Why are you here? Didn’t you leave for another ocean?”

“We can talk about the details later.”

The Mermaid Queen muttered as she looked at the Leviathan.

“Anyway, I’ll now take care of the devil in the water.”

-Kuruk, kuruk, kuruk!

The Parasites started to be pushed back. The Mermaid Queen looked around with cold eyes and brandished her trident.

“Bah, filthy parasites! Great sea goddess.....wave!”

The environment suddenly became dark and the shape of a giant goddess floated in the air. The beautiful goddess was wrapped in a shiny veil. But the goddess looked angry and the sea started to vibrate. In the next moment, dozens of tornados appeared at sea and swept up the Parasites.

“Enemies of the clan, kill all of the Leviathan’s followers!”

“Waaaaahhhh!”

The merpeople also wielded their tridents and cornered the Parasites.

“Okay. This is a chance. Let’s get revenge along with the merpeople!”

Ark led the dolphin unit and began attacking the Parasites. With thousands of merpeople and Ark's group violently attacking, the number of Parasites quickly reduced. The wide area magic of the Mermaid Queen reduced dozens of Parasites to a critical condition. With the merpeople lending their help, the situation quickly tilted to their advantage.

Meanwhile, there was an unimaginable battle occurring several hundred metres away.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Ku ku ku ku! Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

It was the fight between Leviathan and Gallic! When the two ocean monsters collided, constant tidal waves occurred. Whirlpools would also appear here and there every time a wave occurred. But in the battle, Gallic was slightly losing. Leviathan was a combat monster while Gallic was just an NPC. Furthermore, Gallic didn't have any weapons like the Leviathan's Water Pressure Gun. Therefore he had many bleeding wounds after the long battle.

'But if this continues then we can beat the Leviathan!'

Ark stopped attacking the Parasites and looked around at the situation. Gallic might be losing to Leviathan but the merpeople were dominating the Parasites. If this kept up for 20~30 minutes then all the Parasites would be wiped out. With only two battleships left, it wouldn't be difficult to defeat the Leviathan.

'But my purpose isn't to kill the Leviathan.'

That's right. Ark's goal was to recover the Gold Dream that Leviathan swallowed.

'The problem is that it will be difficult to rescue Gold Dream if the Leviathan is killed. Judging from previous experience.....'

When the monster was killed, the body would just become chunks of flesh. It would be impossible to obtain anything except for the loot the monster dropped. There was a high chance that Gold Dream would be destroyed when

Leviathan was killed. So Ark made a separate plan to rescue Gold Dream. But that plan would be insignificant if the Leviathan was killed in the middle of it.

‘This is my last chance to execute the plan!’

If the battle proceeded then the Leviathan would disappear in 20~30 minutes. In other words, he only had 20~30 minutes to rescue Gold Dream.

“Mermaid Queen, please listen to my request!”

Ark explained his decision to the Mermaid Queen. He requested what was needed to rescue Gold Dream. The Mermaid Queen couldn’t understand Ark’s request but she just nodded and accepted.

“I don’t understand but if it is a favour for Ark-nim.....”

The Mermaid Queen nodded and closed her eyes. It was in order to mentally communicate with Gallic. Gallic avoided Leviathan’s attack and swung his tail. Leviathan who had been trying to bite Gallic shrieked. The open mouth was inundated with spray from the water. That was the moment Ark aimed for.

“That’s it, let’s go!”

Ark shouted after seeing the chance. Then the dolphin carrying Ark rushed through the sea at an enormous pace.

“Huh? This.....?”

The Mermaid Queen, merpeople and sailors were all confused at Ark’s action. Ark had rushed into Leviathan’s open mouth.

When he rushed in the mouth was like a huge cave with a horrible smell. Ark avoided the fangs as he entered the mouth. By the time he arrived at the enormous tongue, Leviathan’s mouth had started closing. Ark stepped on the back of the dolphin, pushed off and threw his body.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a roaring sound and the huge mouth closed. At the same time, Ark was sucked down Leviathan's oesophagus along with the saltwater.

Eat until you throw up!

“Puak!”

Ark spat out some seawater. Ark was currently inside the Leviathan.

“Being inside here feels dirty.”

Ark muttered as he looked around with an uncomfortable expression. Ark had entered a huge sea creature, Gallic, before. It wasn't a good feeling but Leviathan felt even more unpleasant. The oesophagus had reddish black walls while the absurdly thick blood vessels had a black liquid like waste water flowing through it. But the thing that dampened Ark's mood the most was the dirty smell. It was difficult to express in words but it smelt like a food rubbish bin in the middle of summer. However he had no time to think unpleasant thoughts. There were constant booms and the space vibrated. It was the impact from Gallic and the merpeoples' attacks. The intervals between the vibrations became shorter as the battle became more intense. It was troublesome for Ark because if Leviathan died then it would be difficult to find Gold Dream.

“Damn! I wanted to go straight to the stomach.....”

Ark had entered the oesophagus along with a lot of seawater. So Ark had thought he would be swept straight to the stomach along with the seawater. But Ark had become stuck in a mud puddle along the way.

“I've still gone quite far riding the seawater. There's only a bit left until the stomach.”

Ark stepped out of the mud puddle continued. No, he was about to dive. Just as he stepped out of the mud puddle, the space started to shake. Then the blood vessels entangled like a spider web pulsed and something floated in the black blood. It was a monster with sharp teeth and a long body, the Parasite. After discovering Ark, the Parasite tore through the blood vessel with its

teeth and popped out. It wasn't just one. 10 Parasites had popped out of the blood vessel!

"I didn't expect to find them here."

Ark hadn't expected this situation when he entered Leviathan.

"Summon Demon, Razak. Summon Demon, Racard!"

His pets appeared on either side of Ark after he called them. Racard on his right, Razak on his left and Radun wrapped around his waist.

'Hasn't it been a while?'

Ark smiled as he looked at his summons. Summoning his pets wasn't a new phenomenon. But during the last month he had been busy commanding users and NPCs, so it hadn't really felt like he had been fighting with his pets. He only sent Razak to support the assault troops while Racard was used as a scout. Racard and Razak also held similar thoughts.

"Hmm, doesn't this remind you of the old days?"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak laughed and nodded his head like he also agreed.

"Then shall we do this after such a long time? A-1 plan!"

Ark drew his sword and shouted. Racard and Razak split to the left and right and rushed at the Parasites. The A-1 plan was to attack the enemy from the front and sides! Unlike the past, his pets' abilities to carry out the strategy had greatly improved. Racard had recently raised his stats to level 380 while Razak had also reached level 350. After so much combat training with Ark, they weren't inferior to other users. Ark was the same as well. After training in Dragonian and the secret dungeon, Ark was now level 426. He had been so busy commanding the troops that he couldn't really fight properly. So he felt lively at the long awaited chance to wield his sword. Besides, the 50% dark attribute bonus was also applied! Even if there was a 10% penalty from the

demonic influence of the Leviathan, it didn't really matter.

“Dark Dance, Dark Blade!”

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Ark moved between the Parasites like a ghost and swung his sword. He didn't have to worry with his summons there.

-Chiiik!

The Parasites showed their poisonous fangs and rushed towards him.

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack! Ttang kang!

Razak had swung his shield and blocked the Parasite before it attacked Ark. Meanwhile Racard flew over their heads and cursed, luring three or four Parasites. Ark attacked, Razak defended and Racard took care of crowd control. This was Ark's true battle style. Then Radun suddenly dropped down from his waist. As soon as his body touched the ground, it became red hot as he crawled towards the Parasites. Then flames appeared around the Parasites and drained their health. It was the Fire Aura skill Radun received after digesting 50% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. The Parasites who were in a critical condition died after being hit by Fire Aura. Radun's eyes sparkled as he looked at Ark after taking care of the Parasites. His look seemed to be asking Ark if he was useful.

“Yes, you were excellent. As expected of our mascot Radun!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun waved his body with pleasure at Ark's words. With the help of his summons, Ark managed to take care of the 10 Parasites within 3 minutes. But that was just the beginning of the Parasites' attacks. After he finished taking care of the original Parasites that appeared, dozens of them once again popped out of the blood vessel. When he took care of those ones, more Parasites appeared. In addition, the Parasites inside Leviathan had special

skills which the ones outside didn't have. When they fell into a critical condition, they could bite the wall or the ground to recover. As the name suggested, they really were like parasites. If he gave them even a bit of space then they would recover and counterattack.

'A level 300 monster isn't really a problem. But no matter how many of them I kill, they keep on appearing from the blood vessels. I have to stop them before Leviathan dies.'

Yes, the reason Ark entered Leviathan was to reclaim Gold Dream. He had approximately 25 minutes to rescue Gold Dream. 3 minutes had already passed so he had approximately 22 minutes left.

'I don't have time to play around.'

"Radun, return. Razak, Racard, let's breakthrough straight to the stomach!"

Ark opened his bag and shouted.

"Demonic Manifestations. Spear, spear, spear, mace, mace!"

When he used Demonic Manifestations the equipment sprang out of the bag. It then formed the shape of a mace. The mace then broke apart and was absorbed inside Ark and his summons.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Spear, spear, spear, mace and mace).

The effect exercised by this combination is <Power Charge>.

Power Charge: The users will gain the effect of 'Power Charge' for 10 minutes. When Power Charge is in effect, assault speed will increase by 50% and there is a chance of pushing the opponent back 5 metres. However, this effect only applies to the enemy in front.

It was the Power Charge that he discovered accidentally! 50% increase in assault speed and a chance to push enemies back by 5 metres seemed simple but it could wreck tremendous havoc. Ark had discovered this skill during the

four days he took climbing back up the secret dungeon from the 60th floor.

“Let’s go!”

When Ark went rushing towards the stomach, the parasites instantly ran up to him. But Ark swung his sword and three or four Parasites were caught in an explosion and blown back. It was the same with Racard and Razak. The moment they used Shield Stroke or Dark Dash, the Parasites were blown away. It was no use no matter how many of them were camped in front. There was no way to stop Ark when a swing of the sword would just blow them away. But Power Charge had a side effect.

-Chiiiiik!

-Chiiiiik!

Dozens of Parasites were blown back every time he moved. But Ark had to keep moving forward with Power Charge, so the Parasites behind him could just get back up. Thus there were 150 Parasites chasing behind him. In addition, this place was inside Leviathan’s so there was no place to escape. Of course, Ark’s current level was 426. With the dark attribute bonus, he reached level 639. That was enough when fighting 150 level 300 monsters. But even if he was level 639, handling those many numbers was time consuming. It was too stressful for Ark who only had a time limit of 20 minutes left.

“But.....”

After a short time he entered the vicinity of the stomach. Ark confirmed that no more Parasites appeared in front of him so he turned around. Meanwhile the number of Parasites had increased to 200. Seeing the gathering of 200 Parasites really caused goose bumps to rise.

“Now it’s your turn. Summon Magura!”

Ark lifted his sword and yelled. One of the four Hearthstones on the sword emitted a black smoke. Just like a genie emerging from a lamp in a fairy tale,

the smoke from the Hearthstones changed to a black dog. It was the summoning of the legendary devil Magura! In fact, a condition was required in order to summon Magura. It was only possible to summon Magura in a place filled with demonic energy. Leviathan was a demonic monster so naturally its interior was filled with abundant demonic energy.

-Ooooooh!

Magura who had escaped from the Hearthstone cried out. It was Magura's wide area skill 'Howling!' The Parasites that were approaching were blown away.

"Now, shall I leave?"

In the meantime, Ark and his summons left. Magura who was confined to the Hearthstone had no memory. When he was summoned, he would attack indiscriminately regardless if it was Ark or a monster. Therefore Ark quickly ran away.

'Anyway, the Parasite was only level 300 so I can't get experience or loot even if they die. It is better to leave them to Magura.'

Therefore Ark escaped the parasites and rushed towards the stomach. Magura attacked everything around him for 5 minutes. It might not be enough to kill all of them but it should be sufficient to block the Parasites And Magura also continuously used Taunt thanks to his endless rage. So the Parasites naturally gathered around Magura and a fierce battle began.

-Kuaaaang!

Magura roared and attacked the Parasites. Magura was level 300. The Parasites were also level 300. But Magura was a level 300 elite monster. Magura wasn't pushed at all by the 200 Parasites. Well, Ark had already escaped so he didn't care whether Magura or the Parasites won.....

Anyway, Ark left the Parasites to Magura and ran through the oesophagus. How much time passed?

“Gold dream!”

Ark stopped moving and shouted. At the end of the cave was a huge underground lake. On the outskirts of the lake was the ship Gold Dream.

“.....Damn, that stupid Leviathan!”

Anger welled up at the sight of Gold Dream. Once again, this place was Leviathan’s stomach. And the underground lake was probably made of seawater and gastric juices. Gold Dream had been floating in the lake of gastric juices for three days in real time. It was impossible no matter how much money he spent on magic coating. The sails were full of small holes while the paint of the merchant ship was peeling.

‘I guess I have to pay for repairs.’

Ark sighed and mumbled. It was a new merchant ship and he already had to pay for repairs.....well, it was 100 times better than buying a new boat.

‘By the way, those boats?’

Ark looked at the other boats on the underground lake. Gold Dream wasn’t the only ship inside Leviathan. There were an additional five ships scattered around. It was immediately obvious that the ships belong to Midus, the merchant’s guild. That’s right. It was transportation fleet that had disappeared near this area. The transportation fleet had also been swallowed by Leviathan.

‘Aha, I see. Is this why Leviathan didn’t swallow the armed fleet when it appeared?’

Ark struck his palm with his fist as he confirmed something and muttered. He finally understood why Leviathan didn’t appear when the armed fleet showed up. And also the reason why it didn’t swallow the battleships after it appeared. It was because of Gold Dream and the transportation fleet on the lake. Leviathan hadn’t digested the six ships yet so it didn’t want to swallow any more.

‘Anyway, let’s go look at Gold Dream for the moment.’

In addition to the ships, wine kegs and small planks were also floating on the underground lake. Ark stepped on the planks and kegs and climbed onto the deck of Gold Dream. It felt like he was standing on the deck of a ghost ship. The deck was corroded here and there while the sails and ropes were decaying. He also couldn’t find any of the NPCs he employed to manage Gold Dream. All he found was splatters of blood left on the deck. Perhaps they were attacked by the Parasites after being swallowed. He didn’t see the sailors on the other merchant ships so he assumed the same thing happened to them.

‘How on earth did Sid survive in this place?’

Ark felt doubtful after seeing the terrible sight. But the question was easily solved.

“Sid!”

Ark found Sid after entering the captain’s room. Something underneath the table moved. It was Sid. But Ark flinched as he moved closer and confirmed Sid’s appearance. Sid looked like someone who had encountered disaster in the Himalayas. Ark couldn’t even recognize him properly. He just trembled and clutched three scrolls tightly. The scroll was the reason why Sid could live.

“[Safe Travel] scroll.....”

That’s right. Sid was able to survive in a place like that because of the scrolls. The [Safe Travel] scroll meant that monsters couldn’t attack for 2 hours. When the Parasites attacked, Sid quickly used the [Safe Travel] scroll and continued to renew it every two hours. But now he only had three scrolls remaining. He was afraid that the Parasites would catch him after the next six hours which was why he kept on trembling.

“Hey, Sid! Wake up!”

Ark tapped him and Sid opened his eyes with a dim expression.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid looked around stupidly for a while before shouting. He then hurriedly looked around and said.

“Huk! You’ve come. Have we already exited? Is this the outside?”

But then he belatedly confirmed that he was still in the stomach and Sid’s face stiffened. He weakly sat down and started shedding tears.

“Kuak, I made a mistake. We’re screwed!”

“What are you going on about?”

“What am I saying? Didn’t Ark-nim also get swallowed by the sea monster? I’ve been waiting for 3 horrible days for Ark-nim to rescue me, and now Ark-nim has been eaten as well.....ohh, it’s over. I’ll be eaten by those worms!”

“What nonsense are you talking? Why will we be eaten by monsters?”

Sid lifted a tearful face at Ark’s words.

“We’ll either be digested or eaten by the monsters.”

“This is different. I came in on my own.”

“Came in on your own?”

“Yes, so that I can rescue Gold Dream.”

“Rescue Gold Dream?” Is there a way to get out of here?”

“Of course. Do you think I came in here to become excrement?”

“H-how?”

“That.....”

Ark smiled and explained the method. Then he suddenly saw the merchant ships through the window. Ark had an uncomfortable feeling the moment he saw the ships.

‘What the?This feeling? I feel like I’ve forgotten something very important.....’

Ark frowned and remained locked in thought.

‘I see! That’s what I forgot!’

“Wait here a moment!”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid freaked out as Ark jumped off Gold Dream and headed towards the other ships.

‘According to the information obtained by the merchants’ guild, the ships that disappeared in these waters are carrying imports towards Bristania.....’

Ark jumped onto the deck with a large smile on his face. Spices and silk, porcelain objects etc.....it was a huge amount of piled goods! That thought weighed on Ark’s mind.

‘This is equivalent to 15,000 gold!’

And there were 5 ships carrying such goods. That was equivalent to 75,000 gold. It was truly a treasure. Before entering Leviathan, Ark had already been equipped with a number of plans to rescue Gold Dream. But he didn’t know that the merchant’s fleet was associated with Leviathan. Of course, Ark’s plan wouldn’t fail if the merchant ships were there. There was another reason why he felt uncomfortable when seeing the ships. No, to be exact it was the 75,000 gold worth of goods.

‘If my plan succeeds then I can also rescue the merchant ships from Leviathan.’

Therefore Ark would’ve recovered 75,000 gold worth of assets for the merchant’s guild. But there would be no profit for Ark if he did that. Of course, if he returned the missing fleet then his intimacy with the merchant’s guild would soar and the commission considered successful. However the fee

was only 15 gold. Even if he received an additional 200% as the captain, it would only be 45 gold.

‘I found 75,000 gold and can only receive 45 gold?’

What on earth? Wasn’t it a very unpleasant feeling? Of course, Ark never expected to find the merchant’s fleet in the first place. But the sight made his heart ache. It would be regrettable if he had to politely return the goods to the merchant’s guild after seeing such a huge amount.

‘Moreover, there are no surviving sailors.’

Since Ark found the transportation fleet, he could lay claim to it. When stolen goods were taken away by pirates and the pirate’s ship was wrecked at sea, the person who discovered or salvaged the ship would claim ownership of it. It was similar to how Seutandal seized the stolen goods from the lawless port. But now the situation was different. The armed fleet had been dispatched to recover the transportation fleet. Ark was also a member of that armed fleet. So Ark was currently contracted to return the recovered assets to the merchant’s guild. Even if Ark found the transportation fleet, the ownership would automatically shift to the merchant’s guild. He couldn’t think of a way to embezzle the goods.

“In the end, do I have to let go of that huge amount?”

Ark clicked his tongue and murmured with a regretful expression. All of a sudden he felt a flash of lightning in his head.

“Wait? Wouldn’t the transportation fleet be prepared for pirates? Then perhaps……?”

Ark started to search the ships for something. A satisfied smile spread on Ark’s face after he found what he was looking for.

“Huhuhu, the heavens are truly on my side.”

“Attack its flank!”

“Waaaaahhhh!”

While Ark was progression with his plan, the merpeople, Gallic and the two battleships had combined forces to attack Leviathan. While Gallic blocked the Leviathan’s movements, the merpeople combined to take care of the Parasites. Meanwhile, the two battleships kept a sufficient distance and supported them with cannon fire. Leviathan couldn’t endure against the combined forces. Blood streamed from its countless wounds as the Leviathan only had 4% health left. If the battle progressed like this then it would continue for only a few more minutes.

“But Ark-nim.....?”

The Mermaid Queen murmured with a worried expression. Ark hadn’t returned from inside the Leviathan yet. If Leviathan died like this then Ark was bound to be in danger. Ark was certain to be somewhere in the oesophagus, stomach or other internal organs. If Leviathan died then they would shrivel up. Ark would be pushed by the internal organs shrinking and die. But they also couldn’t slow down their attacks until Ark returned. If Leviathan managed to run away then the situation would become more complicated. The Mermaid Queen was thinking that when something interrupted.

-Kuaaaah! Kua.....Kuaaak!

The Leviathan suddenly flinched. Then it suddenly gave a weird shriek. After a short time, it coughed and suddenly opened its mouth. And.....

Chwaaaaaah, kwarururuk!

A huge amount of discharge flowed out of the Leviathan’s mouth. Leviathan’s vomit covered several kilometres of the sea.

“T-this damn evil bastard.....”

The Mermaid Queen glared at the Leviathan after seeing the vomit covered waters. Then Leviathan vomited a few more times. The gastric juices flowed out like a waterfall and really made everyone feel like throwing up. Suddenly huge objects fell into the waters along with the gastric juices.

“W-what is going on?”

“A merchant ship!”

The armed crew watching from a far distance murmured with surprise. It wasn't just one or two ships, but six. Then loud laughter was heard from one of the merchant ships.

“Hahaha, we're out! It's a success!”

“T-That person.....!”

“It is Ark-nim, the captain of the no. 8 battleship!”

A sailor confirmed after looking through a telescope. That's right. The person who laughed from the merchant ships vomited out was Ark.

“Huhuhu, the effect is really no joke.”

Ark laughed as he looked at the nauseous Leviathan. Leviathan was still vomiting! In fact, this was the plan Ark used developed to rescue Gold Dream. Once again, Gold Dream would be buried at sea if Leviathan died. If he was still in the stomach then he would also die from the shrinking of the stomach and intestines.

‘I have to take it out while the monster is still alive.....it is impossible to make that guy spit it out. Then the only way is to make it vomit!’

He naturally thought of one type of food.

-Nausea Syrup

A syrup made from the matured flesh of one of the worst smelling fruits on

the continent. A person can't help vomiting whenever they eat this syrup.

<Causes somebody to vomit. Thanks to the 'vomit' state, all food and potion effects will disappear>

Ark made the food using Creative Cooking. While sailing, Ark who was inspired continually used Creative Cooking to make the Nausea Syrup. He had cooked 200 of the dishes. Ark had carried these foods while entering Leviathan. He threw all of it into the stomach. Yet there was an unexpected issue raised with this part.

'Leviathan is far more enormous than I imagined. Furthermore, it has an extreme swallowing ability since it managed to swallow all those ships at once!'

Gold Dream and the transportation fleet also survived in the stomach for several days. Leviathan had indigestion after eating too ignorantly. Fortunately Gold Dream and the merchant ships were still safe but the indigestion was a problem. The Nausea Syrup won't be able to show its true power.

'Is there a way to make its stomach more active?'

Then Ark thought of his experiences in Gallic. When fighting with the boss Adelaine, he had used the strategy of luring her into the stomach and melting her with gastric fluid! The impact on the stomach had made the gastric juices overflow. Of course, if he used a similar method to irritate the stomach then Gold Dream and the transportation fleet would suffer a fatal blow. But wasn't it better than being stuck in the stomach of the dying Leviathan?

"Yes, it's a cannon! I can shake its stomach using the cannon!"

Ark went around with his summons and loaded all the cannons on Gold Dream. When he launched it, there was a loud roar and the stomach started becoming unstable. When the shells hit the stomach wall, an explosion occurred and a huge amount of gastric juices flowed out like a waterfall.

When the concentration of gastric juices in the stomach increased, the floating kegs and planks started to melt. Gold Dream was also the same. Gold Dream had already been tattered after being left for three days so the high concentration of gastric juices started to melt the outer walls.

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Sid looked uneasily at the exterior walls. But Ark wasn't done yet.

‘I just have to hope the Nausea syrup shows an effect before Gold Dream melts.....’

Kullong, kullong, kullong.

It was at that moment. The stomach started to twist and the gastric juices formed waves. It was the stomach just before vomiting would occur!

“That's it! Sid, Razak, Racard, hold on tight!”

The gastric juices started to flow along the oesophagus at a tremendous pace. The effect of Nausea Syrup was activated and Leviathan began to vomit. The gastric juices flowed along the oesophagus like the rapids of a river. If he made a mistake and the already tattered Gold Dream ran into a wall then it would break.

“Okay, Demonic Manifestations!”

Ark used Physical Shield to regulate and protect the boat while Gold Dream flowed back up the oesophagus.

“It is visible! Everybody prepare for the impact!”

After a while, the black sea could be seen between the open mouth. And.....

Weeeeeek! Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Gold Dream managed to escape from Leviathan after 3 days. The five merchant ships also followed.

“Ek! That is.....!”

“The transportation fleet that disappeared!”

“All five ships have appeared!”

The NPCs associated with the merchant’s guild cheered as they saw the ships. But confusion spread on their faces in the next moment. The merchant ships fell to one side and started to sink.

“N-no!”

“The trade goods on the transportation ship.....”

The NPCs rolled around the deck with despair. But what could they do about the sinking ships? Besides, the sinking ships weren’t valuable now.

“Ah, that monster is attacking Captain Ark!”

Leviathan shrieked and ran up to Gold Dream. It understood that he was the reason for it vomiting. Meanwhile, Gold Dream that had just exited was right in front of Leviathan. The masts were also broken so it couldn’t sail. But Leviathan couldn’t imagine it.

“Are you trying to eat my ship twice?”

Ark murmured with an expression full of confidence. He raised his finger before lowering it.

“This is the end. You stupid fish!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the same time, an amazing scene developed. Leviathan had been moving towards him. Yet Leviathan’s body suddenly exploded in various places. Gills, fins, tail, stomach.....a blast occurred in all those areas and Leviathan instantly turned bloody.

-Grr.....grr.....grrrrr!

Leviathan let out a pained moan and wobbled. It had nearly reached Gold Dream. Suddenly an absurd ringing sound occurred in the vicinity of

Leviathan's head. Leviathan's eyes trembled like it was having a spasm and it slowly sank under the water.

“The effect is amazing!”

Ark laughed and muttered. This was obviously Ark's work. Ark had finally exited Leviathan but he hadn't done it politely. Just before throwing the Nausea Syrup, Ark had considered a way to inflict damage. Then he recalled the scene where the Parasites moved along the blood vessels. Ark remembered that scene and piled up the bombs from the merchant ships into the blood vessels. He had adjusted the length of the fuse so that it would explode after Gold Dream escaped. The bombs had followed the blood vessels to areas such as the brain, lungs heart etc.....so the explosions occurred all over the body. No matter how powerful the monster was, it wouldn't be able to withstand that type of attack. What could survive gunpowder exploding at the heart or the brain? Therefore the Leviathan received tremendous damage and instantaneously died.

Bugul bugul, bugul bugul.

Leviathan's mouth gaped open and it sank back into the black sea.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has
risen.....

The welcome message windows appeared in rapid succession.

“Hehehe, this is really great.”

Ark giggled as he shook a thick purse. Shortly after Leviathan died, Ark had

returned to Reuben harbour with the armed fleet. He earned a total of 85 gold for the successful commission. It was considerable income for 5~6 hours of mercenary work. But Ark's current purse held more than 300 gold. That money had come from the pockets of Admiral Wagner.

“Can we talk for a moment?”

Wagner had approached the instant he returned to the battleship after Leviathan died.

“Hmm hmm, the fact that you knocked down Leviathan.....wasn't it possible because of my instructions? You won't be sorry if you do this favour for me.”

He coughed and it was obvious what he was proposing. Wagner's reaction wasn't that surprising. Wagner had been placed in charge of the new battleships that were collaboration between the Schudenberg kingdom and the merchant's guild. But out of the eight battleships, six had been destroyed. Of course, it was just lucky that they managed to defeat Leviathan in the first place. Although the transportation fleet was discovered, none of the trade goods were reclaimed. After the merchant fleet sank, 20~50% of the goods were floating around in the sea. Fortunately, 40% of it was recovered. It wasn't a bad outcome of the battle against Leviathan.

But the problem was Wagner's disgraceful behaviour during the battle. Wagner didn't know what to do about the disgraceful behaviour he showed during the battle. If it was reported to a higher ranking person then it was clear what would happen. So Wagner devised a plan to get some 'achievements.' In fact, the method used to knock down Leviathan wasn't normal. It was thanks to Ark that they were successful. The merpeople helped because of Ark and he also discovered the transportation fleet. Yet now Wagner was saying that Ark's behaviour was a result of his instructions? Wagner was trying to evade criticism and raise his fame?

‘This guy, is that how he raised his achievements so far?’

Ark looked at Wagner with a blank expression. But when he thought about it, it wasn't a bad suggestion. Anyway, this was just a simple mercenary request. He wouldn't receive that much additional compensation no matter his achievements. And he had no thoughts about becoming famous. Then it was better to get something out of it.

“I accept.”

After thinking for a bit, Ark readily accepted the suggestion. So Ark's achievement was sold for 300 gold. That was a total of 385 gold obtained. And he gained 6 levels from killing Leviathan. The original number of people in the armed fleet was 1,500 people yet only 400 remained after the battle with Leviathan.

“Earning 6 levels and 385 gold isn't a small amount for 6 hours of work.”

However, this was nothing compared to the real income that Ark obtained. After receiving the compensation from the merchant's guild and withdrawing as a mercenary, Ark headed straight for the port. He walked along and explored the ships docked until he came across a familiar one. It was Gold Dream, the ship owned by Ark.

“You've arrived?”

Sid welcomed him after Ark boarded the deck. Ark looked around restlessly and whispered in a secretive voice.

“Well, did you check the price?”

“Yes, I've grasped the current market price.”

“How much?”

“42,800 gold.”

Ark smiled gleefully at Sid's reply. Ark's real income was the 42,800 gold that Sid mentioned. Where on earth did Ark obtain that type of income? The answer was simple. It was from the goods of the merchant ships that had

sunk underwater. The transportation fleet had sunk as soon as it exited Leviathan. Thanks to that, the armed fleet was only able to recover 40% but the merchant's guild thought that was lucky considering the situation.

.....However, there was a secret hidden here.

‘Huhuhu, the operation was a success!’

In fact, the merchant ships were in better condition than Gold Dream when Ark arrived at Leviathan's stomach. The performance of the ships was similar but the transportation fleet had been swallowed later. Even so, the transportation fleet sank....no, to be exact the merchant ships were forcibly sunk. It was Ark's ploy. He had sent bombs into Leviathan. Before Ark took the transportation ship outside, he also left some bombs at the bottom of the merchant ships. The reason he did this was to snatch the trade goods.

‘If the transportation fleet remains intact then I won't even receive 10 won.’

That would be Ark's greatest regret. Although his main purpose was Gold Dream, he accepted the commission to save the transportation fleet and he wouldn't even receive 10 won for it? However, the situation would be different if the transportation fleet sunk. If the ships sank then the merchant's guild had no way to reclaim all the goods. Even in reality submarines couldn't find everything floating within several hundred metres of the seabed. New World was still in the medieval ages so how could they possible recover all the goods? Yet Ark had a simple way to fix that problem.

‘The merpeople!’

That's right. The merpeople would have no problem recovering the goods. After he rallied the merpeople, he managed to recover 60% of the trade goods. He also used Sid's name to sell it to the merchant's guild so he was technically faultless.

‘If the merpeople hadn't appeared at that moment then I would've lost Gold Dream and the profit.’

There was a reason the merpeople had appeared. Before returning to Reuben, Ark had used the Mermaid Queen for the reason. Then the Mermaid Queen explained the reason why they appeared.

“The devil Leviathan was a sea monster that roamed around during the Dark Century and corrupted the waters. At that time, the merpeople sacrificed a lot of people in order to defeat the devil. Recently we’ve heard news that the devil was resurrected. So we instantly stopped our travels and returned. Then we heard Ark using the Flute of the Merpeople. We instinctively sensed that Ark had something to do with the Leviathan and hurriedly rushed towards your location.”

It was the good thing about having high intimacy with NPCs. Who would’ve imagined that it would’ve helped in the middle of the sea? Well, it all worked out with a bit of luck. The Mermaid Queen also readily agreed when Ark asked her to recover the goods from the ships.

‘Of course I also have to give a fee to the merpeople.....’

The problem was settled surprisingly easily.

“Several thousand years ago, Leviathan devoured numerous guardians of the sea in order to raise its abilities. The sea snake attached to it was actually one of the guardians of the west sea.”

The Mermaid Queen proposed. The Leviathan was a devil that had the ability to absorb the powers of other beings. Depending on the type of power it absorbed, it also appeared in the form of a huge turtle, shark or even sea dragon.

“So the flesh of the Leviathan will contain the absorbed powers. It doesn’t matter to other races but the merpeople can process Leviathan’s body to make wonderful equipment. If Ark-nim allows us possession of the body then we will happily help recover the goods.”

“I understand.”

Ark replied without even thinking about it. Honestly, the flesh of the Leviathan was a great ingredient but Ark couldn't claim ownership of its body which stretched over several kilometres. In addition, Leviathan's body had sunk to the bottom of the sea so only the merpeople could harvest it. He thought it was worth trading the Leviathan's body for the trade goods. So Ark was able to request the merpeoples' help in exchange for Leviathan. But he didn't get all the money. He spent 16,000 gold to repair Gold Dream.

'If I take 16,000 gold from 43,800 then my final profit will be 26,800 gold.'

He had managed to embezzle 26,800 gold after just a few hours work. In addition, a lot of armed fleet members died so he managed to obtain most of the loot from Leviathan.

-Leviathan's Shield (Unique)

Item type: Leather Shield

Defense: 400

Durability: 256/400

Weight: 45

User Restriction: Level 500 and more

Leviathan is a legendary sea monster. While sailors frequently associate Leviathan with a sea snake, but it is just the tentacles attached to Leviathan. The attached tentacles will often all off. Because of that, the shield is able to show the ability of the tentacles.

<Option: Strength +50, Stamina +30, Underwater penalty decreased by 50%>

<Special Option (Water Pressure Gun): A small hole in the shield will launch a high pressure stream which deals 1~500 damage. It can also penetrate through 10 people standing in a line and deal 1~200 damage. However, some charging time in water is required to use the Water Pressure Gun. 1 hours of

charging will allow the Water Pressure Gun to fire 15 shots>

It was a unique shield resembling Leviathan! The leather 500 shield only had 400 defense but its options were no joke. Strength +50, Stamina +30 and a 50% reduction in underwater penalty! But the real value of this shield was the special option. It was able to use Leviathan's special skill the Water Pressure Gun. Of course, it wasn't on the same level as the Water Pressure Gun Leviathan used. If Leviathan's was like a laser, the Water Pressure Guns stored in the shield was more like arrows. Furthermore, it dealt 1~500 damage.

It also possessed a little of the 'Cutting' attribute that Leviathan's Water Pressure Gun had. When 10 people were standing in a line, it was able to deal 1~200 damage. Furthermore, the Water Pressure Gun from Leviathan's Shield didn't have a cool down time and it didn't consume any mana. This type of long range attack was very useful in battle so any warrior would desire this shield. Leviathan also dropped an additional two magic items. But the standard meant he would only receive 50 gold for it.

'The problem is....'

Ark looked at a few fist sized black beads.

-Parasite's Egg Sacs

The egg sacs of the Parasites living inside Leviathan. It will hatch once placed underwater.

'What is this?'

Ark scratched his head as he looked at the black beads. The Parasite's Eggs Sacs were discovered while Ark was searching in the vicinity of Leviathan's body. There were thousands of small eggs inside one egg sac. Thousands of Parasites would probably hatch from one egg sac. Although he collected it, he didn't know what it could be used for. What could hatching Parasites be

used for?

‘But it might be useful in the future. Even dog poo can be used as a medicine.’

So Ark collected the Egg Sacs and placed it inside his bag.

‘Where should I go now?’

There were no sailors on Gold Dream so Sid had to stay in Reuben Harbour for a while. There was no reason for Ark to stay inside the harbour so he left. But he struggled with deciding where to go.

“Excuse me.”

Suddenly some men in formal clothes approached. Ark turned to them and they asked.

“Are you Baron Ark-nim?”

“Who are you?”

“We are messengers dispatched by the kingdom. We went to Silvana first but quickly rushed here after we discovered your location. Please receive this.”

A messenger extended a sealed letter.

-Convening of all Schudenberg aristocrats

All aristocrats are summoned in order to deal with the recent crisis facing the kingdom. All members of the nobility who receive this order must attend.

“All the nobility in Schudenberg Kingdom is being summoned? What on earth?”

Ark scanned the letter with a perplexed expression.

Lobbyist

“It is confirmed that there have been 273 obelisks in Schudenberg Kingdom. We haven’t discovered the identity of the obelisks but it is certain that the mystery monsters are caused by it. They’re far stronger and aggressive than normal monsters so the surrounding villages have received considerable damage.”

“How do we deal with it?”

“The main instruction provided to the Lords of each territory is to protect the citizens and destroy the obelisks. Therefore each territory has received insignificant additional damage and the number of obelisks has decrease by 1/3rd. Yet the overall situation with the obelisks hasn’t had any large results.....”

They were in Selebrid’s royal castle. Various affairs dealing with the kingdom were reported in a serious manner. One of the contents on the list was regarding the black obelisks. The black obelisks had simultaneously appeared in various kingdoms on the same day. The problem wasn’t the black obelisks but the unidentified monsters. The even more disturbing thing was that the monsters from the obelisks resembled monsters from that region’s folklores that had been passed down.

Leviathan was also the same. The monster Leviathan was known among sailors as the ‘monster that tells the end of the world.’ Ark hadn’t understood it when he disposed of Leviathan but when recovering the goods, a black obelisk had been found underwater. The Mermaid Queen said that Leviathan had disappeared a long time ago so the obelisk was probably the reason why it resurrected. The Mermaid Queen also mentioned that the events on the continent were also occurring underwater. Anyway, these events had turned the Schudenberg Kingdom upside down.

Of course, the kingdom always had numerous monsters. But the monsters from the obelisks were different. Furthermore, the monsters over level 100 had high aggressiveness and tended to flock together to attack territories. The balance of the game had completely collapsed. Meanwhile the troops dispatched to each territory and village in the territory had destroyed the obelisk and additional damage was stopped. But not long afterwards, there was a new obelisk so it just led to a vicious cycle. Therefore public sentiment had reached a state of confusion. So an urgent meeting was called to develop a way to calm the turmoil.

“It is unnecessary to say but the people are shaking in fear. It is essential to show a firm attitude to offset that fear. His Majesty the King has declared martial law and regular troops will be sent to take control of all roads and towns.”

“Emergency martial law.....”

The King stroked his beard and sighed. If he declared martial law then the entire kingdom would be prepared to fight. In other words, the areas unrelated to battle would come to a standstill. Declaring martial law would decrease the damage of the obelisks but the backlash couldn't be ignored.

“Does this situation really require martial law?”

A nobleman asked. The person in charge of state affairs stated in a resolute voice.

“Many people don't know this yet but the damage to the western region of Schudenberg is beyond imagination. Especially thanks to the monster called Doppelganger that can eat their victims and then change into their shape. The only way to minimize the damage is to declare martial law and use the checkpoints between each village.”

“But the damage of martial law to the economy.....”

“We have to concentrate on reducing today's damage before worrying about

tomorrow's damage.”

“I understand. I will entrust the authority to you.”

The King nodded towards the government official in charge of state affairs. Ark's face hardened at the same time.

‘I'm screwed!’

After receiving the summoning order, he had quickly moved to Selebrid using the Letter Movement. Of course, it wasn't because of loyalty to the King that he flew so quickly. The central subject of this meeting was the martial law. No, to be exact it was the problem of provisions when martial law was declared.

Martial Law Section 5: The borders will be blocked under martial law. With the checkpoints closed, movement between territories (see exceptions) is strictly prohibited.

The border and territory checkpoints will be closed and movement between territories prohibited! In other words, all types of trade within the kingdom would be forbidden. It was a natural measure when considering the unnatural monsters.....

‘I've just recovered Gold Dream and now what is this?’

Ark wasn't happy. He was the Chairman of a business with hundreds of staff (Sailors on Gold Dream, employees of the trading post, etc.) It wasn't easy to lead a business. If there was a standstill then the business would undoubtedly suffer and receive tremendous losses. He still had to pay the monthly salary to the staff as well as rent for the warehouses. Was that all? If he missed the timing of the sale then he would lose tens of thousands of gold. The business would undoubtedly suffer a deficit. Now all trade was blocked in Schudenberg Kingdom. Ark was like a horse that had just started learning to walk only to die.

‘I haven't even made 1 gold profit from Gold Dream yet. First it had been

swallowed by a monster and I had to pay the costs of repairs and now trade if banned?’

It was to the extent that Ark thought he was cursed.

‘I didn’t realize the situation was so serious when hearing about it from Global Exos the other day.....’

It wasn’t just talk any more. No, now Ark’s life was at stake. If this continued then there was no guarantee when the martial law would end. It couldn’t be simply resolved by finding the obelisks and destroying them. The reason was that.....

“What is the true identity of the obelisks?”

Somebody asked and a court magician replied.

“We still can’t determine anything about the obelisk’s identity. Our guess is that it is some kind of curse.”

“A curse?”

“That’s right. The cursed obelisk pollutes the surrounding environment and causes ‘illusions’ and ‘memories’ of the evil in this world to be amplified.”

“Illusions or memories? What do you mean?”

“The monsters don’t exist. They are a virtual image created through the excessive fear of the population. This is the part where the curse becomes tricky. In this case, the fear that the people feel are so amplified that the monsters actually become real. And this curse isn’t simply settled by destroying the object.”

“But didn’t the monsters stop appearing when the obelisk was broken?”

“It is a temporary phenomenon. The obelisk is just the vehicle for the curse. Unless the source is destroyed, the obelisks will just be reformed in the future. Well, using a strong artifact with the power of a god will completely destroy the obelisk but that isn’t a viable solution.”

“What should we do then?”

An aristocrat asked with a pain expression. Then the court magician pointed to a northern area of the continent on a map.

“From our advance reports, the source of this originated in the Sinius Principality. Schudenberg has 273 black obelisks. Bristania has a similar number but surprisingly the Sinius Principality has 700 of them. There are so many obelisks in the whole kingdom that it won't be able to easily be resolved. And.....”

The court magician laid a memory crystal onto the table. A light was emitted from the crystal and a hologram appeared. A heavy moan emerged from the mouth of the aristocrats and the King. The image which appeared was a city immersed in darkness. It wasn't night time. But the entire city was covered in something like a black fog. The city covered by darkness was being attacked by a huge number of monsters. The guards swung their weapons to block but the attacks were relentless. In the end, the monsters invaded the city causing flames to rise and a slaughter to occur everywhere in the city. It was a hell like scene.

“This is the current situation of the Sinius Principality. It's only been a few days and the deformed monsters had already taken over 60% of the Sinius Principality. The areas taken by the monsters are covered in a black fog and the environment is rotting. Our studies showed us that the black fog is the root of the curse produced by the black obelisk. The problem is that the black fog is expanding and pushing close to the borders of the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms.”

“What the hell is going on? I've lived for 60 years and I've never seen or heard of such a thing!”

A nobleman exclaimed with a confused expression. The court magician looked at the King and seemed to ask something with his eyes. The King nodded and the court magician took a deep breath before opening his mouth.

“No, this is not the first time this happened. It occurred a long time ago but there remains a record of this phenomenon. Hundreds of years ago.....when the Dark Lord descended to earth.”

“W-what?”

The nobles burst out with surprise. Their faces were enveloped with shock. After a moment, a nobleman asked carefully.

“.....D-did you say the Dark Lord?”

“That’s right.”

The court magician replied calmly.

“Are you saying that the Dark Lord has been resurrected?”

“That’s not it. If the Dark Lord was resurrected then the situation wouldn’t end here. The darkness would’ve already spread across the whole continent. Just like in the past when the continent was seized by darkness. We’ve checked and that isn’t happening. Judging from the current situation, this is just the precursor to the Dark Lord’s resurrection. In other words, someone is trying to revive the Dark Lord.”

Fear appeared in the eyes of the nobility. None of the nobility here had experienced the Dark Century. Yet the people of the continent grew up hearing about the Dark Century. The Dark Lord was like an existence of fear to them. After he finished all that he had to say, the court magician stepped back. Then the King opened his mouth again.

“Now you’ve realized the seriousness of the problem. If this situation isn’t settled then it would become even worse. If the Dark Lord is resurrected.....”

The King let out a heavy sigh.

“.....The current domestic situation is serious enough to declare an emergency martial law. If the Dark Lord is resurrected then this situation will

worsen. This is a life and death situation for the whole continent so I quickly made contact with the King of Bristania and reached a swift agreement. We will send an expedition to the Sinius Principality.”

“Expedition? From both the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms?”

“Yes. The primary objective is to stop the darkness pressing against both kingdoms. And the second objective is to solve the problem attacking the Sinius Principality. I think there is no one who will oppose this decision.”

All the nobles nodded along with the King. It concerned the fate of the continent so how could they object?

‘That’s right. Isn’t this the corresponding scenario that Ho Myung-hwan talked about?’

When Ark first heard about the situation at Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan told him that New World would respond to the situation with more scenarios. NPCs dispatching an expeditionary army were also part of that scenario.

‘But what if the expedition fails?’

In fact, Ark had thought Ho Myung-hwan’s ‘in the worst case scenario there is a possibility of service being suspended’ was just an exaggeration. Why would they stop a game that millions of users played because of a few bugs? However, he now knew it wasn’t an exaggeration after participating in the meeting. If the expedition failed then the continent would be covered in darkness like the Sinius Principality. Many cities and villages would be captured by monsters. If that happened then users won’t be able to play the game normally anymore. They wouldn’t be able to receive quest or even rest at a village. Furthermore, level 200~300 monsters appeared in a level 100 area so they couldn’t even hunt properly. Wasn’t it natural that New World’s service would have to be suspended?

‘Then what about all the money I invested in Ark’s Corporation?’

The NPC villages would disappear and he wouldn’t be able to trade. If the

Dark Lord was resurrected than Ark's investment of 150,000 gold would fly away.

'I don't know whether the Dark Lord is a devil or not but I can't leave it alone!'

If his business which he suffered so much to build was destroyed then wasn't the devil his adversary? It was absolutely unacceptable. Saving the continent? He would've left it to the ones who wanted to become heroes. But if it was to keep his own property? He had to absolutely obstruct the Dark Lord's resurrection in order to defend his business. Ark's head instantly recognized the Dark Lord as his biggest and worst enemy. Then the King opened his mouth again.

"I have two reasons for holding this meeting. The first reason was to gain your consent for the martial law and the other reason is to appoint a commander to lead the expedition."

The aristocrats started buzzing after hearing the King's words. After a long period of discussion, the candidates were narrowed down to 3 nobles. The 1st was an old general known for his military exploits in Nagaran, Kuran. The other person was Earl Ballen in charge of the royal guard. And to Ark's surprise, the last candidate was Viscount Haverstein, the Lord of Jackson.

"The previous Lord of Jackson was a war hero with various achievements in the Continent War. Viscount Haverstein who succeeded him has managed to sweep up a large number of monsters in his territory as well as subjugating the band of thieves that had been causing a headache for ages, and various other military achievements. This situation is also unprecedented for our generation. I think it would be better to have an unconventional young Commander than a stereotype."

Marquise Halben spoke skillfully and eloquently.

'Lord Jackson is even recognized by other nobles.'

Ark looked at Haverstein after hearing Marquis Halben speak. But Haverstein was just making a bitter expression.

“Hmm Lord Kuran, Ballen and Haverstein.....all of them are great knights. But it isn't possible to have 3 wonderful knights as commanders. Fortunately, there is still time before the expedition sets off so we can discuss the matter two days later. The nobles can discuss it during the intervening days and make a decision before the meeting.”

The King finished before getting up and leaving. The aristocrats immediately separated and began to discuss the contents of the meeting. As expected, Lord Haverstein was surrounded by 10 nobles the moment the meeting ended.

“Lord-nim.”

“Oh, Ark. You came as well. You left for an adventure so I thought you wouldn't come.....”

“I received a notification and hurried here. An important affair is happening in the kingdom so I can't pretend ignorance.”

To be exact, he wanted to prevent the martial law which would involve trade being banned. But the martial law wasn't something Ark could stop. He was discouraged thinking about the huge loss that would occur in the future but now he had to think about the expedition. Ark dimly thought that the expedition was a way to solve his problem. When Ark approached, Lord Haverstein excused himself from the other nobles and exited the group.

“Did Jackson receive any damage?”

“Fortunately the damage isn't as serious as other territories.”

A fast response. As expected, he truly had the qualifications necessary to be the commander of the expedition forces.

“By the way, I truly hadn't expected that you would be nominated as a candidate.”

“Is that so?”

Lord Haverstein replied lightly. Ark had a reason for thinking that.

‘He still seems young to me.’

Haverstein had only been 15 years old when Ark first encountered him. It had been 2 years since then. Time sped 3 times faster for NPCs than users so 6 years had passed. Haverstein was already a youth in his twenties. His physique was sturdy and his body had become bigger than Ark’s. But Ark still had the memory of his childlike appearance and kept on thinking of Haverstein as a child.

“Congratulations. To be nominated as a candidate for the commander position at such a young age, doesn’t that mean that the kingdom is recognizing your abilities?”

“That’s not necessarily the answer.”

Just like when he was first nominated, Haverstein gave a bitter smile as he replied.

“I’ve been nominated as a candidate because there are a lot of civil servants in Marquis Halben’s faction. Although they are dissatisfied because I don’t have as much battlefield experience, they have no other choice.”

“Huh? Marquis Halben’s faction?”

“Hmm, of course you wouldn’t know about it.”

Haverstein thought for a bit before saying.

“It is better that you know this. The Schudenberg aristocrats are actually split into 3 factions. The head of one faction, Duke Sarkin was the one who recommended Kuran while the one who recommended Ballen was Marquis Daltin and I was recommended by Marquis Halben.”

In modern times, a faction was like a political party. Unlike modern congressmen who could withdraw from their political party, it was almost

permanent once a Lord entered a faction. No, it was ordinary for the next generation to be raised in the same faction. Because the most important virtues of an aristocrat were honour and trust. An aristocrat in Schudenberg kingdom who didn't belong to a faction would find it difficult to exert any power.

“The three factions are always politically opposed but if a danger appears that risks the Royal Palace then they will unit. That is the reason why the factions didn't oppose the martial law or the expedition force. But the problem of the commander candidate is different.”

The fate of the Schudenberg kingdom depended on the expedition force. If the expedition failed then everything was over. But if the expedition achieved their goal and saved the kingdom and continent then the commander would undeniably a hero. That was the reason why each faction nominated a different candidate. If that hero belonged to their faction then they would have a political advantage.

‘Whether a game or reality, all politicians are the same.’

Ark looked around at the aristocrats. The factions were fighting while there was a chance the continent could perish? Wasn't it similar to the politicians who kept on arguing during the IMF crisis that Korea suffered? Well, Ark had more reason to be worried about the crisis than the nobles.....

“I'm just a mere decoration for them to arrange.”

It was the reason why Haverstein smiled bitterly when he was nominated. However, Ark shook his head and spoke firmly.

“That's not right. I've known Lord-nim since you were young so I know better than anyone. I don't know what kind of person Kuran and Ballen are, but I think Lord-nim is the right person for this position. I will definitely be supporting Lord-nim.”

“I'm thankful for your words.”

Haverstein then looked at Ark with serious eyes.

“Despite my sense of humiliation, I also desire the spot of commander. This is a chance to make my family shine. It will certainly not be easy. But if you are near me to help then I have confidence that I can accomplish it. Just like you know me, I also know what a great warrior you are.”

“If you are the commander then of course I will risk my life to help.”

Ark answered. There was nothing Ark wanted more. This expedition was a collective effort of the Schudenberg troops. The King ordered this mission directly so there would be various quests and rewards associated with it. Then wasn't it best to have a high intimacy with the NPC Commander of the expedition? Wouldn't Ark be given more opportunities than other people?

‘But that isn't the important thing!’

There was a chance that Ark's Corporation would become bankrupt.

However, if Haverstein became the commander of the military expedition then there was a way to solve that problem. Ark got the idea after hearing about the expedition force.

‘For the sake of Ark's Corporation, I have to ask Haverstein to become the commander no matter what! I have to become his cheering squad.....’

Ark was thinking that when he was interrupted.

“I'm thankful but it is highly unlikely that I will become the commander.”

“Huh? Why is that?”

“Haven't you noticed? You're strangely innocent in some matters. In fact, today's meeting was a type of play. 3 candidates were nominated but everybody already knows who will be the commander will be Lord Kuran. The reason is simple. It is because the forces that support Duke Sarkin are the largest. Lord Kuran also has no blemishes so there is no reason for him not to win.”

Ark finally understood the general situation after hearing Haverstein's words. Despite the factions nominating 3 factions, the winner had already been decided. So the King ended the meeting and allowed more time to give the appearance that Marquise Daltin and Halben's opinions were being considered.

'Damn! What the? It's like that?'

Ark bit his lips. If that happened then wasn't it the end for Ark's plan? While Ark was busy thinking, Haverstein pointed towards Kuran.

"But I am a little anxious. Duke Sarkin....um, I shouldn't say this but....he already controls most of the power in the kingdom so if his candidate becomes the commander and succeeds....."

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben having a conversation with other nobles and sighed.

"The only way is to have Marquis Daltin withdraw his candidate Lord Ballen and push the one Marquis Halben recommended. But it won't be easy."

Ark's eyes lit up at that moment. In fact, this was the first time he had encountered the factions. But now he could imagine the ratio of the factions.

'If Marquis Daltin pushes Marquis Halben's candidate then they can prevent Duke Sarking from winning. Based on what I heard, I can conclude that Marquis Halben's faction consisted of 30%, Marquis Daltin 30% and Duke Sarkin 40%. Either Lord Halben could give up and push Daltin's candidate or vice versa. So there is a chance Haverstein can become the commander!'

Of course, like Haverstein said it wasn't easy. The relations between the political factions were deeper and more complicated than it seemed. It would be difficult for the factions to give up their own candidates in order to unite. Ark who had just become an aristocrat couldn't understand the secret strife between factions which continued for hundreds of years but he could profit off it.

‘I don’t understand but there is still something I can try!’

The fate of who would become the expedition commander depended on this. Ark started to desperately think of a plan.

“Are you Baron Ark?”

Daltin looked at Ark with an arrogant expression. Ark paid a visit to Marquis Daltin’s mansion the evening before the aristocrat meeting would occur again.

“I’ve heard about some of your actions. But why did you happen to visit?”

“I know that I am a novice aristocrat who has just been knighted. There haven’t been any chances in the meantime but now that I’m in Selebrid, I can finally visit the high ranking nobility and greet them. If you’re not busy then can we talk for a bit?”

“Hrmm.....greetings?”

Daltin carefully looked at Ark. His eyes suddenly moved to a female nearby and he asked.

“We can talk. But who is this lady next to you?”

“My mother.”

“Mother?”

“You might be tricked by her overly young appearance but she is actually an ahjumma (female version of ajusshi i.e. aunt).....ouch!”

So-mi pinched Ark’s side because of his playful introduction. After her appearance changed to that of a teenage, her behaviour had seemed to become increasingly more childish. Anyway, Daltin seemed to lose his wariness after seeing that actions between mother and child.

“I’ve heard that foreigners don’t age but I am once again amazed after seeing your mother. The grown up son looked older than the mother. If some secret to becoming younger exists then I will offer my entire fortune to learn it.”

“Becoming younger?”

“Not for me but for my wife.”

“You must love your wife very much.”

“I’m not ashamed to openly admit it.”

Daltin replied without hesitation. So-mi’s eyes sparkled with admiration and she said.

“So Marquis-nim is a romantic. How wonderful. The one who receives the Marquis’ love never needs to worry. Is there a chance I can meet her?”

“I’ve been waiting for that. In fact, one of my pleasures is to boast about my wife to guests.”

Marquis Daltin smiled softly and ordered a servant to bring his wife. After a while.....

‘T-this is the same as a thief!’

Those words rose in his throat. Judging from his appearance, Daltin was approximately 50~60 years old. But the Marchioness who appeared with the servant was only 17~18 years old. If he guessed correctly, there was at least a 30~40 year age gap.

‘No wonder why he wants to become younger.’

“Please tell me. I want to meet a husband who loves me as much as yours does.”

“You have to find a good man.”

Daltin winked lightly towards So-mi. Daltin was an old man with the personality of a Casanova. Despite that minor issue, his overall impression

was quite good. He seemed to have a great sense of humour after seeing his reactions to So-mi. But that was just his superficial appearance. Daltin was the leader of one of the factions in Schudenberg Kingdom. He wasn't an insignificant rival.

“Since you came all the way here, did you have some business?”

As expected, Daltin's atmosphere completely changed when the two of them moved to the adjoining room. He changed from a neighbour's grandfather to a politician.

“I previously mentioned that I already heard your name. Well, it is the first time a foreigner has been appointed as an aristocrat in Schudenberg so many people are curious. And they also know the decisive person who allowed you to become an aristocrat. Vicsount Haverstein.”

Daltin mentioned in a quiet tone.

“If you know Viscount Haverstein then why would you come to the head of a different faction?”

“I'm still not a part of a faction.”

Ark answered lightly and Daltin's eyes turned cold as ice.

“I hate ungrateful humans the most.”

If Haverstein was the one who made him a noble then of course he should join the same faction. Despite being the head of another faction, he was still dissatisfied with that behaviour. Ark answered with a laugh.

“That makes sense. And I'm not that type of person either. If I receive a benefit then I should repay that person. That is why I decided to visit the Marquis.”

“I understand the general principles.”

Daltin laughed. He finally understood why Ark visited based on his answer.

“Your answer is honestly not satisfying. But if you came to my faction then it would be a few times more unpleasant. Yes. It’s not bad. I’ll listen to your talk.”

Daltin nodded and lifted his cup of tea. He closed his eyes to relish the fragrance of the tea before asking.

“Yes, what can you give to me?”

If he wanted Daltin to push Haverstein as a candidate then a price needed to be paid. Ark was aware of that but the timing made him nervous. Daltin’s voice was really casual. What did he expect? Well, it turned out like this so there was no reason for Ark to hesitate.

“What do you want?”

“100,000 gold right now.”

Ark’s face hardened at Daltin’s words. Once again, the problem of whether Haverstein became the commander or not had his corporation at stake. No, it might be possible to get more benefits than expected as well as save his business from the crisis.

‘There is 20,000 gold left in the investment fund and I’ve obtained 25,000 gold the other day. I have to accomplish it even if I have to use all the 45,000 gold!’

Ark had been prepared for that much before visiting Daltin. Yet Daltin had requested more than twice that money. After starting his business, there was no way Ark had that type of money. When Ark couldn’t answer, Daltin laughed and added.

“Before you visited, a messenger for Duke Sarkin arrived and gave me a letter. It said that he would give me 100,000 gold if I supported him. If it continues like this than Kuran will become the expedition commander. Duke Sarkin only negotiated with me to gain the majority and show off his power. So your opponent is someone who offered 100,000 gold.”

“.....Did you accept?”

“I refused.”

Ark was relieved at his words. If Daltin joined Sarkin then there was nothing he could do anymore. On the other hand, he wondered why Daltin refused.

“Why?”

“The government affairs aren’t that simple right now. Right now it isn’t important to get things immediately. If I move too lightly then the chance would be lost and misfortune might even occur. You’re a person who obtained a territory with your own hands so you should understand my words.”

Ark couldn’t understand all of Daltin’s words. But one thing was evident.

“.....So you can’t accept my request.”

“It is like that.”

Daltin nodded.

“But I don’t dislike you. Although Lord Haverstein belongs to the faction of Marquis Halben, he is the paragon of a noble youth. He isn’t the type to compel someone to pay back a favour. So he isn’t the one to send you here. Did you decide this by yourself without telling your friend?”

“That is correct.”

“You must think highly of him to come all the way here. Aside from you, a lot of people also really covet Haverstein. I don’t think it is bad that you have a close friendship with him. If the situation wasn’t like this then I would help you.”

“Don’t say that now.”

Ark laughed bitterly and muttered. Despite his praise of Ark and Haverstein, Daltin had no intention of pushing another candidate. Ark was sighing when

he suddenly remembered something.

“I’ve met Marquis Daltin and learnt a lot. Can I ask one more question?”

“Just say it.”

“How do I persuade a stubborn person?”

“Hahaha, you’re asking me? You really aren’t ordinary. Okay, I’ll tell you. How to persuade a person. You have to gather the maximum amount of information about your opponent first. Once you’ve grasped the weak point of the opponent then they can’t refuse. You can then begin ‘negotiations’ after that.”

“The weakness of the opponent.....? Isn’t that slightly cowardly?”

When Ark made a bothered expression, Daltin shook his head and smiled.

“Unlike the battlefield, using those methods in a negotiation isn’t cowardly. You have to use every method possible to persuade the person. This is the definition of negotiation.”

“So if someone discovered your weak point then you wouldn’t condemn them? You won’t get angry and called them cowardly?”

Daltin firmly answered Ark’s question.

“Angry? If a person really drove me into a difficult situation then I would praise them.”

At that moment Ark’s eyes lit up. It was the answer Ark wanted to hear from Daltin.

“Then I’ll have another cup of tea.”

Ark smiled and lifted his cup. Daltin looked puzzled for a moment. But Daltin had fallen into a trap that he couldn’t escape. 10 minutes passed like that. The door suddenly opened and the Marchioness ran in.

“Honey, it is a request!”

When his wife approached, Daltin's firm face instantly changed. Daltin seemed to have forgotten that Ark was looking and nodded absent-mindedly.

“Oh, what is it? I'll do whatever I can to fulfil your request.”

“Please recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander of the military expedition!”

“Hohoho, I got it. I shall do as you want....ack! W-what?”

“Recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander. It shouldn't be too difficult for you.”

“T-that.....”

Daltin stuttered and turned his eyes towards Ark. They seemed to be saying ‘what the hell did you do?’ The Marchioness didn't know anything about politics. Daltin also never talked politics with her. Yet she suddenly wanted Daltin to recommend Haverstein as the commander after Ark's visit. It couldn't just be a coincidence.

‘Huhuhu, you're the one who said you didn't care about an attack.’

Ark ignored Daltin's eyes and looked into the distance. That's right. Ark was the reason why the Marchioness requested such a thing from Daltin. It was his idea in order to achieve a negotiation. Ark had acted like he wanted to convince Daltin. That was in order to earn time for So-mi's operation. How did So-mi convince the Marchioness in such a short time?

‘Marquis Daltin, you've now been trapped.’

He had to either persuade Daltin or Sarkin in order to make Haverstein the commander. And there was a reason why Ark selected Daltin. It wasn't just because Duke Sarkin's candidate was the one most likely to win.

‘Unlike Duke Sarkin, Marquis Daltin has an obvious weakness!’

The Marchioness nagging Daltin right now was his weakness. According to his research, Daltin was a respected noble. The only time he lost his sense of

reason was when it related to his wife. Then wouldn't it be 100 times easier to capture his wife? So Ark had turned his investigation from Daltin to his wife. And this morning he realized that the Marchioness had a princess like personality. Not just her behaviour but thousands of gold were spent on clothes, jewellery and all kind of items to decorate her rooms.

'Clothes and decor.....'

So-mi instantly floated into Ark's head at that time. So-mi had been steadily selling the costumes she made at Ark's Store. The goods she created with 'Embroidery' hadn't been seen before in New World so they flew off the shelves. There was a backlog of orders for a least a few months!

'This is it!'

There was no way he could give her jewels or precious metals that she didn't have before. But So-mi's clothes are things that the Marchioness had never seen. He could attract the Marchioness' attention using this material.

"Omo, this room is very pretty."

"Is that so? It took me 1 year to decorate this room."

The Marchioness immediately puffed up when So-mi complimented the room. Then So-mi pretended to contemplate for a moment before saying.

"But it's too bad."

"Huh? What is?"

"The chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, the tables, furniture and beds are really wonderful and full of dignity."

"Indeed. I spent 100,000 gold decorating this place."

"But.....the curtains and table cloths....."

"Aren't they all top grade items?"

"I'm aware of that. But the Marchioness should know that just because it is

expensive doesn't mean that it is good. The design and colour doesn't emit the full dignity. I'm also interested in this area.....ah, do you want to look at this?"

So-mi took out some fabrics from her bag. She compared the fabrics against the bed and table before speaking again.

"How is it? Doesn't this fabric look a lot better?"

The Marchioness was caught the moment So-mi showed her the fabric samples. It was an inevitable result. So-mi acted like it was a simple fabric but it was actually a special material that Ark spent thousands of gold on. Various rare materials he found in dungeons like the 'Golden Spider Web' and the 'Unicorn's Mane' he requested from Roco were used as embroidery materials. That alone already made it a rare decoration. But was that all? So-mi had looked through various embroidery books and created an amazing design on the material. Currently all the items in the room were decorated with the image of a god. But So-mi's embroidery had a simple yet stunning contemporary design. It was a pretty and rare decoration so of course the Marchioness' heart would be captured.

"T-this is the first time I've seen something like this. Where did you buy something like this?"

"I didn't buy it."

"You didn't buy it?"

"This is something I created."

"Really? Then could you possible make me curtains and other decorations that suit my room? It doesn't matter how much money it costs. This might be rude but please."

"I don't think it's rude. Since it is my hobby then I would also like to decorate your room. I've been allowed to see a room as nice as this so I would like to make you the best products. But....."

So-mi sighed with a pained expression.

“I’m not an expert in decorating rooms. In order to create a design that best suits the room, I will have to stay here and work. Otherwise I won’t be able to create my best products. But I have to leave for a different region soon.”

“T-that.....”

The Marchioness had a disappointed expression on her face. She was so frustrated that she even felt like crying.

“Can’t you somehow stay here and create it for me? You will have a lot of fun with me. You can also teach me some embroidery.”

“I would really like that too. But the reason I came here today is because my son wanted to ask your husband to support Viscount Haverstein in becoming the commander of the expedition. So if he fails then we will move to another place.....”

“Commander of the expedition?”

At that moment, the eyes of the Marchioness gleamed. Then she covered her mouth politely and laughed loudly.

“Hohoho, what is that? Was that the problem? Just leave it to me. I will talk to me Honey. If my Honey agrees then it won’t be a problem! If Viscount Haverstein becomes the expedition commander then will unni accept my request?”

So.....the Marchioness stuck to Daltin.

“I promised already. Does Honey want to make me a liar?”

“N-no, that’s not.....government affairs.....my guest.....”

“I don’t know! If you don’t agree then I’ll die!”

“Don’t even joke about that. I’ll think positively about it.”

“You’re trying to trick me again by using ambiguous words!”

“That’s not it. I’ll think about it but I need to finish talking to my guest first.”

“Are you sure? You promise?”

The Marchioness kissed Daltin and exited the room. Daltin wiped off the kiss mark and stared at Ark.

“You.....what did you do to my wife?”

“Didn’t you say you would never get angry?”

Ark smiled and replied. Daltin finally perceived that he had fallen into a trap. Everything had been planned from the beginning. Drawing Daltin to another room while leaving So-mi along with his wife, everything was Ark’s plan.....

Obviously Daltin was angry. Daltin had been tricked by Ark and was the opponent in his negotiations. He was furious but he couldn’t say anything after the words he previously said. It would hurt his pride to admit it. Daltin muttered in a deep voice.

“The person I thought was innocent is actually a snake.”

“I’ve often heard that.”

“Okay. Then I’ll ask again. What can you give me?”

Daltin asked with a disgusted expression and Ark laughed impudently. It was the same question but it was different from before. He didn’t accept before but this time there was no choice but to accept. So he could negotiate directly.

“My gratitude and respect.”

“What?”

Daltin’s face hardened. But after a short moment, he abruptly laughed and said.

“Hahaha, your gratitude and respect is worth more than 100,000 gold?”

“That’s correct. There’s no doubt.”

“Well.....I really can't hate a guy like you.”

Then a message window appeared in front of Ark.

* Art of Communication has increased by 20.

-Political Power: Political Power has increased by 100.

<Political Power increases when you persuade an aristocrat or settle a political problem. If Political Power increases then you will have a stronger voice among the aristocrats. It will increase your chances of successfully persuading an aristocrat>

The message appearing was a sign that Daltin raised the white flag.

Buzz.

The next day the conference room was in a state of chaos. It was because Daltin had withdrawn his candidate and supported Haverstein.

“All 20 aristocrats who follow me will recommend Viscount Haverstein as the expedition commander!”

Confusion spread on all the faces of the nobles in attendance. Even the King couldn't hide his feelings. If Daltin who had 30% of the support backed Haverstein then the outcome was obvious. 60% of the nobles would be supporting Haverstein as a candidate.

“Your Majesty, do you have anything to say?”

Daltin tilted his head to one side and asked quietly. The King shook his head.

“Ah, no. Good. If the majority of the nobles recommend it then I can entrust the position of expedition commander to Lord Haverstein. Come here and receive your appointment.”

“Huh? Ah, yes!”

While Haverstein was being appointed by the King, the others were chatting amongst themselves. Anyway, Haverstein was now the commander of the expedition force. At the same time, he received the authority to decide everything that related to the expedition. Ark immediately headed towards Haverstein with a large grin after the appointment was finished.

“Congratulations.”

“W-what is happening.....?”

“It’s simple. Marquis Daltin recognized that you are the right person for the position.”

Ark said. At that moment, Marquis Daltin approached while accompanied by Marquis Halben who was in charge of Haverstein’s faction. Haverstein immediately spoke to Daltin.

“Marquis Daltin, your recommendation.....”

“Yes. I’ve already discussed with Marquis Halben about the problem.”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben who immediately answered.

“It’s not important. Lord Daltin was just making a recommendation about the merchant who will be in charge of munitions supply for this expedition. I am thankful for his recommendation and agreed. That’s all.”

Haverstein frowned at Marquis Halben’s answer. Haverstein was upright and honourable so it was difficult for him to accept a backroom deal like this.

“Marquis Halben.”

Haverstein sent Halben a heavy look. Then Halben waved his hand and said.

“Just listen. The person Lord Daltin recommending to be in charge of munitions supply is Lord Ark.”

“Huh? Ark? Lord Ark?”

Haverstein looked at Ark with perplexed eyes. That’s right. This was the reason why he wanted to make Haverstein the expedition commander. Currently Schudenberg Kingdom was under martial law so trade was impossible. If the war went on for a long time and it wasn’t possible to trade then Ark’s business would become bankrupt. But there was one way he could still trade. It was to supply the military goods for the expedition. The expedition from the Schudenberg Kingdom would be on a massive scale. What would happen if he had a monopoly on all the goods the expedition needed? He would obtain a huge income. And the authority to appoint the goods supplier belonged to the expedition commander. So Ark wanted to make Haverstein the commander and obtain the monopoly contract. But while he was persuading Marquis Daltin, Ark realized that he had overlooked one thing. It was Haverstein’s personality.

‘Haverstein is an upright man. If he was working along then of course he would give the exclusive contract to me. But it is different if it related to the Kingdom. Even if I present a lower price than the other candidates, he has a personal relation to me so he can’t easily accept.’

In fact, there was one way Ark could win over the other candidates. Ark had the craftsmen from the raccoon clan. Naturally they didn’t make things for free. However Ark could obtain the items with a 20~30% discount. Since the military supplies would have a huge volume, the large order meant he could get a 30~40% discount. It would be expensive but still cheaper than other suppliers. Yet there was the chance that the strong-minded Haverstein wouldn’t accept because of his close friendship with Ark. Duke Sarkin and his candidate Lord Kuran had already made some arrangements with the merchant’s guild in Selebrid.

‘But it will still be no use if Haverstein becomes the commander.....’

Ark worried for a while before deciding to use Daltin. Thus Daltin

recommended Ark for the position. Then the personal friendship with Haverstein wouldn't matter. Because the recommendation came from Daltin. If that reason disappeared then there was no reason for Haverstein to not nominate Ark as the supplier. Haverstein also sensed a bit of this situation. Haverstein smiled subtly and nodded.

“I understand. Lord Ark, prepare the necessary data and see me at the base tomorrow.”

“Here it is.”

Ark immediately handed him a thick form. There were dozens of raccoon villages in the Underground World. He also had goods from the Baran clan in Seutandal. And he planned to use the triangular trade route of Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel to circulate the goods. There was also a price list of the required goods. Haverstein could only laugh after he was handed the documents.

“There really is no one who is a match for you.”

“I want to help the expedition both physically and mentally.”

“It really feels like you are a thousand man army.”

Shortly afterwards, Haverstein formally gave Ark the official rights as the munitions supplier.

-Schudenberg Royal Contract

<Contractor: The Expedition Commander Viscount Haverstein= Ark, the representative of Ark's Corporation>

The supplying of the necessary war materials for the expedition army that is leaving for the Sinius Principality will be entrusted to Ark.

“That's it, I did it!”

Ark cheered as he grabbed the gold coloured agreement. Now Ark's

Corporation was the official supplier of the expedition army. Like he always said, a crisis was an opportunity. It was only a few days ago that Ark had been on the verge of bankruptcy. But Ark had used various creative tricks to turn the crisis to his benefit. If the expedition force achieved its aim then Ark's Corporation would be a unique existence in the Schudenberg Kingdom.

“I will be rich as long as I stop the Dark Lord!”

And the next day in Schudenberg Kingdom no there was an announcement throughout the Kingdom.

-The Expedition Army's Crusade

Currently the Sinius Principality is being threatened by unidentified monsters. If this evil is allowed to gain more power than the continent will suffer a terrible fact, just like a long time ago. Therefore the Schudenberg King along with the Bristania King will be rallying an expedition to fight against this evil.

.....All brave warriors!

Join this crusade to protect our world and become brave heroes! All warriors who participate in this expedition will be paid special compensation according to their achievement.

‘Recruitment applicants.’

So the crusade was declared with New World's fate at stake.

