

Chapter 1

Ark Vol 1 Prologue

Chapter Prologue

‘Is this where the reception room is?’

Kim Hyun Woo raised his old glasses.

The building was only a 5 minute walk from the South Seoul station.

The front of the building, the sunlight reflected the words “Global Exos Korea” on a black marble.

Knowing the sign represented a once in a lifetime opportunity; it intimidated him.

He did not have the courage to go in, but he lacked nearly as much courage to turn back.

He took a deep breath and walked into the building.

“I’m here for an interview.”

“Go on up to the third floor.”

The Model-like receptionist motioned him towards the elevator.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

While nodding, he stepped back, bowed and walked away. As he heard a stifled laughter from behind him, he began to blush.

He roughly understood why she was laughing.

After abruptly receiving news of the interview he was forced to come for an interview in an oversized borrowed suit.

He became flustered realizing how foolish and ugly he looked wearing the oversized suit.

Of course there were plenty of different contacts but it wouldn’t come close in comparison...

He had arrived on the third floor, and the lounge was filled to capacity.

People in fancy suits were out and about.

Surprisingly some of the people were wearing blue jeans and t-shirts, their faces were filled with confidence showing their work experience.

His eyes became clouded as he thought about going for the interview with these people.

No, he was not sure he could really go to the interview in his current state. 'Should I not have come? At this rate will I be able to get an opportunity better than this?'

Hyun Woo let out a sigh with an uneasy look on his face.

Hyun Woo was an ordinary youth. At least until 5 years ago.

He was an average high school student who liked brand-name items, bought the newest cell phone whilst his parents nagged at him, and played games the entire day on the weekends. Up until then, he would often watch the stories of the boys on the T.V., and empathized with them on one hand, while thinking he could never live like the boy in the T.V. That is, until it became reality.

He received an urgent call at school.

He was told his parents had been in a car accident.

With one simple call, Hyun Woo's life was changed.

His father had died, while his mother surviving after numerous operations, but complications still remained.

The cause of the accident was his father's drowsiness while driving. The victims still had to be compensated. Nevertheless their insurance had expired without renewal so the insurance company claimed it wasn't their responsibility.

The police and victims attorney had dropped by a few times.

While Hyun Woo had been trying to understand the situation and complicated conversations that had taken place, their house was sold, and they terminated various savings and insurance plans.

To fix that problem, they rented a small apartment. However, his mother still needed to be treated urgently.

Their private medical insurance was bought 10 years ago.

Nevertheless, every time his mother went to the hospital because of a cold, stomach ache, or miscellaneous, she required more treatment than an average person. Together with intensive care she needed, the insurance company's attitude began to change. They gave him pamphlets written in English and Chinese, while prattling on about changing compensation limit. Be

cause of this, they had to pay 3 to 4 million won in dues every month.

- It may be tough, but hang in there for your mother. Use this to pay for the hospital fees.

Five uncles from both of the mother's and father's side stuck an envelope inside an absent-minded Hyun Woo's pocket. But they did not show themselves again.

He felt horrible. The money in his pockets only amounted to 3,000,000 won. It was not enough to even cover a month's hospital bill.

In order to cover living expenses and hospital bills, the debt steadily increased. Hyun Woo realized it for the first time. The little boy who earned a living was shown on T.V, was not mature. He was facing a situation where he had no choice other than to grow up and be mature. The situation makes a person.

He knew very well the meaning of those words. Hyun Woo's life had changed. Waking up at dawn to do newspaper and milk deliveries then working at a part-time job from evening to dawn in order to gain money. In the past it was inconceivable to wash one's body while working part-time at a construction site.

His body ached all over but he continued working rather than relaxing.

It was not because he was exceptionally earnest. He had no other choice but to do it. However, his earnings could barely cover the cost of living and hospital expenses.

'With relatives coming for a visit, I won't be able to relax because of the noise!'

Every time they arrived, all he could do was clench his fist.

He heard his father had a good personality. There was not a single friend's family gathering he missed, and he would withdraw from his savings without

hesitation whenever a relative got in some big trouble. However, the reward he received from the heavens was almost as if it came out of a novel.

After his father died, and as his mother accrued hospital bills, no one leaped in to help them. Worse, they did not even loan them some money. It was because they did not think they would be able to get the money back. Their relationship was weak because they were made when his family's situation was still good.

Hyun Woo also became keenly aware of the cold endless reality before he graduated from high school.

No matter how special a person is, in the end they are just like any other person.

'I exist only to take care of my mother and myself!'

His mind was set on dropping out of high school, but his mother, on her sickbed, would not hear anything about the matter. He had no choice but to deal with it for one more year.

However, after he graduated from high school, it did not improve the situation they were in.

After he graduated High School Hyun Woo set out to look for a job. Although his work had hours increased, other things remained the same. As usual, he worked all day, and his days became filled with anxiety trying to meet the hospital bills and the ever growing debts payments at the end of every month.

He gradually began to envy his peer who carried the latest mobile or wore the latest fashions.

He had also envied those who could have money to spare. It was one thing Hyun Woo could not stop himself from envying. Hyun Woo since an early age had dreamt of being an employee at a video game production company. Before accident occurred, he had often stayed up all night playing games. If not, perhaps another career related to computers.

Although he abandoned the idea of going to a university he did not abandon his dream.

It was the reason why every month he would pay 300,000 won to attend a private institution.

One day an instructor came up to Hyun Woo and asked.

“Hyun Woo, have you thought of seeking employment at a gaming company?”

“A gaming company?”

“Hmm, a sunbae told me he knows a video game company who are currently recruiting new employees. I was asked to recommend some excellent students, and I was thinking about recommending you. How about it? Would you like to be employed by a gaming company?”

“Would a non-university graduate be acceptable?”

“20 years of age or older is preferable. There’s no gender and educational requirement.”

“Where is it?”

“Have you heard of Global Exos?”

“Yes?”

Hyun Woo froze in place.

It’s expected for education to not be regarded for a small gaming company.

However, not from a company as big as Global Exos! The company was the zenith of all companies in the gaming industry.

They were the first to implement the concept of virtual reality into game, and they’ve also released 2 epic games in which accumulated annual sales of 1 Trillion won.

"What would Global Exos be lacking in order for them to employ people such as myself?"

“I don’t know the details either. According to my sunbae, employee recruitment process is done in various ways, it is very unique. Screening of documents for educational background or work experience is not a priority. And the things were being tested is entirely different and so the way they pay their employees. However with many applicants, it will not be easy... Since I don’t know what interpersonal work is, I’ll try to put the files in.”

A world where one’s educational background was not prioritized. These were the words once said a long time ago.

However Hyun Woo was not naive enough to instantly believe those words.

Without educational background, it limits the employee a chances for a position in such a large business, and is normally limited to things such as an external position. Even more so with Global Exos, and if he wasn't accepted he would feel really bad about it.

"Applying with my high school diploma won't get me accepted accepted. So I'd rather..."

Name: Kim Hyun Woo Gender: Male Age:22 Educations: S Electronic Engineering 2nd Year, Dropout. Top seat of the class, without having missed any class. Although unknown to the Media Network, hacked through their firewall during their conference for testing a mock game system, and became a large issue, which eventually led to voluntary withdrawal.

Global Exos was such a large company. Surely they would not examine the authenticity of each application. When he thought about it, it was impossible for them to do so.

Perhaps, but trying wouldn't hurt, besides, he's got nothing to lose..

All this time he had forgotten about the application when unexpected news came.

"The other day when I told you about Global Exos? Your application has passed the screening, and they've contacted us."

Hyun Woo's instructor was just as surprised as he was.

While he was daydreaming, the interviewer had already arrived here. In any case, he was given a chance to meet the interviewer.

Perhaps this could be a golden opportunity. Which why he thought he had to make most of it, even if he had to resort to clinging to the interviewer's pant legs.

'Have I gone crazy? Whose idea was it to come to this place? Having applied with a fabricated diploma was the least of my problems... At this rate who knows what kind of random things will appear on the news? No, surely Global Exos being a large enterprise, will be liable for having caused an incident of forged documents, with one of their applicants, will cause quite a stir and won't be profitable to them... Oh, but wouldn't turning back right now be equally insane crazy?'

He casually imagined the scene of himself being handcuffed and bombarded with questions from reporters.

“Oh, will you be staying here?”

Suddenly, he heard a woman’s voice beside him.

Since he was already surprised, he lifted his head and saw the receptionist whom he met in the hallway standing there in a formal suit.

“This seat is empty. Would you like to sit here?”

She nodded and sat down next to him.

“I’m sorry for laughing earlier. Did I offend you?”

“It’s alright. It must’ve been hard not to laugh. I look really funny, don’t I?”

“Yes?”

After seeing the strange glance the receptionist gave as a response to his question, he made a puzzled face.

“Ah.....It looks like there’s a misunderstanding. I wasn’t laughing because of your clothes. There really isn’t anybody who bows who would deeply to a receptionist. I was laughing because I thought you were a slightly eccentric person. Also, your clothes suit you quite nicely”

Hyun Woo’s face became red. Could this mean he had an inferiority complex?

“I’m sorry for misunderstanding”

“No I’m sorry for causing the misunderstanding.”

“By the way, why are you here?”

“To be honest, I’ve also submitted an application. My name is Kang Misu”

“Oh, My name is Kim Hyun Woo.”

Kang Misu extended her hand. Meanwhile, Hyun Woo wiped his hands on his pants and was about to shake her hand...

“All the candidates please head over to the auditorium.”

‘Damn. Whatever. I’ll probably die or faint anyway. Wait, I wouldn’t die from this, would I?’

Unable to break away from crowd, Hyun Woo was swept away into the auditorium.

Approximately 2000 people were packed tightly inside the auditorium. Since only about 10 people would be chosen, The ratio of being chosen was 1 to 200. Everyone's attention was on the stage where a man in his late 20's stood.

"Nice to meet you, everyone. I am the Planning Director, Ha Myung Woo. On behalf of Global Exos I would like to thank all of you for gathering here today."

His speech was followed by loud applause.

Ha Myung Woo nodded gently and said.

"Then let's go straight to point of what everybody has been wondering about. Those of you here who are aware of Global Exos' announcement last month regarding a new virtual reality game called New World, could please raise your hand?"

Most of the people raised their hands. However, Hyun Woo didn't raise his.

Virtual reality games were not available for regular computers.

If one wanted to play it, they had to buy a commercial network unit, which cost a considerable amount of money.

Although there was also virtual reality gaming centers.

Because the cost of a unit is expensive, they charged a high service fee.

Ha Myung Woo nodded his head.

"I see most of you have heard of it. However, because limited information was released, we will explain it briefly. Global Exos created the world's first ever Virtual Reality game which changed the gaming industry. Soon after, one after another, gaming companies have started to make virtual reality games, and eventually led to the popularity of Virtual Reality. But the game we announced to be released is original and a whole new innovation."

Some people who had experience with those games nodded their heads.

During the following discussion, Hyun Woo's mouth was wide open in awe.

Up until now, virtual reality games have amounted to a visual image has been implanted directly into the retinas in order to perceive the virtual world.

The game New World was going to be different than any other games. Information received from the retina will be directly delivered to the brain, which allows the game to be perceived as a real-world experience.

Thanks to that, it's no longer just seeing, but experiencing another world with all five senses.

For the last 3 years, Hyun Woo lived without playing games, and the advancement in technology was amazement to him.

"It's true the expense will reach four times as much as an existing unit. However, New World is not a simple game. We are heading towards a new age. I am confident we will be able to create a new culture and will last 10 to 20 years into the future. The recruitment test this time was to pick a capable people who will be managing New World, as well as making history."

"What are the requirements to pass the screening?"

Right then, someone asked.

"Everyone is probable wondering about the passing requirements. Among those of you who are present, you might identify yourself as inexperienced or uneducated, but as of this moment, I want everyone to forget about those labels. We have decided not to take those matters into account. New World is a project that will last for dozens of years, and we are recruiting people based on their talented to be able to manage a long-term project. In simpler terms, we will be judging based on your passion for this game as well as the possibility of future growth."

Physicist, Chemist, Astronomers, medical experts, and even experts in Nanoscience. Dozens of experts will spend years studying the virtual reality game, The New World.

However, Global Exos was not looking for an employee with knowledge in those subjects. But rather, an employee who knew how to start a fire. Global Exos was looking for one who could manipulate the fire, was what Ha Myung Woo explained.

"How will you determine those who are qualified?"

"The method we'll be using is quite simple."

Ha Myung Woo parted his lips slightly and replied.

“Tomorrow afternoon, everyone will receive access to their own gaming unit with New World installed on it. With this unit, you are to create a new account for New World. Inside the game, if you accomplish a particular condition, a event will occur and you can think of as a formal certificate of employment. Furthermore, while the test is in progress, Global Exos will be paying you a minimum of 1.5 million Won every month. This is the company’s policy is to ensure everyone will be able to completely concentrate on the game and play with similar conditions.”

It was an unprecedented way obtaining employment caused a disturbance in the auditorium.

As the unrest settled down and questions started to be asked.

“What conditions must be achieved?”

“Are you talking about a quest?”

“Or is it about obtaining some rare items?”

“I’ve predicted you would have a lot of questions. However, I can’t tell you specific information. What I can tell you is there are many ways you can achieve your goal, and also, there is no set path towards the goal.”

“Are you saying the goal of this test is to obtain something inside the game?”

“You are correct. However, we will not give you any clues. Isn’t that the most fun part of a game?”

Ha Myung Woo said in joyful voice. However, there was no one who shared his happiness.

"You have freedom to do what you wish inside the game. Although you are given your freedom, it is your responsibility to follow the rules. It is also up to you to choose your own goals. Depending on your situation, you will be judged as we see fit."

“How long will the testing period be?”

“How many people will you be recruiting?”

“We will be recruiting only 10 people.”

“The testing period will end when we have chosen 10 people.”

Ha Myung Woo added with a smile.

"Perhaps this might be the longest testing period of employee recruitment in history. However, the game New World is worth investing your time and effort in. Without a doubt."

"I hope this would motivate people to combine their strength and work together. Fighting~"

Kang Misu said with a beautiful smile as she came out to talk to the people in the auditorium.

There was definitely nothing he looked forward to more than working with this beauty in an office of the large conglomerate.

Hyun Woo stood idly at the convenience store counter eyeing a Global Exos' brochure.

He knew it was one of the world's largest corporations but he did not expect it to be at this level.

On the pamphlet were the written details of the employees who passed the special test.

It was rumored New World's exclusive Planning Department receives an assigned annual salary of approximately 100 million won.

Considering the starting salary of a large enterprise was 40 million, this was exceptional.

In addition, there was a full page article of the company's guaranteed benefits.

'It seems like only 2000 people were qualified. If they give everyone 1.5 million won, that's 30 billion a month! Even if the test runs for only three to four months, they will be spending over 100 billion! Since they're spending so much money on just the recruitment exam...'

Literally a dream Job!

It was a job that could resolve all of Hyun Woo's problems in one go.

More than anything, Hyun Woo was captivated by the unique recruitment test.

They didn't want a close to perfect score on the TOEIC evaluation, nor did they want someone with an amazing work experience.

If they were looking for those kinds of things, he would not have applied for the job.

However, they proposed a method of achieving something inside the game as a test to get employed. Therefore, the only condition was to be good at games.

‘Did they really not investigate my education?’

If the falsification of his educational background were to come out of the light, it might become a big issue.

No, it might not even get detected. As he thought about it, his hope swelled up.

‘This way, there might be some hope for me.’

Since his younger years, Hyun Woo had always loved to play games.

Although he spent a lot of time playing amazing games, they weren’t memorable.

Furthermore once he had completed the game, all items obtained could be sold for money.

Even so, he didn't think getting employed would be easy.

Ratio of 200 to 1. The other candidates would also rush forward with their lives on the line.

However, since they are all starting with same conditions, he was confident he wouldn’t become left behind.

‘It’s a once in a lifetime chance. I can’t miss this!’

That same day, Hyun Woo quit his part-time job at the convenience store, and stopped his milk and newspaper deliveries.

However, because of the cost of living, and hospital bills, he cannot overindulge himself by quitting two of his other part time jobs.

With the 1.5 million won Global Exos promised as a salary, he still could not even afford the hospital bills.

He did not blindly believe his debt was resolved by itself. He understood tomorrow his debt would still increase.

Therefore, he needed a little more like to save up.

‘Since I have less time than the others, I have to do this as if it was life-and-death situation.’

As soon as he finished work, he immediately headed for home.

‘I should try looking for information about the game...’

However, Hyun Woo started to shake his head.

‘It’s just information. Experiencing it first-hand will allow me to understand the game faster.’

Hyun Woo immediately went to the unit. After he turned on the power, he heard a low whirring sound and suddenly, everything went dark.

Suddenly, a piercing light, along with a new world, unfolded before him.

- New World Begins.