

Ark Vol 15 C 3

Chapter 3

ACT 3 Hell Training

-Suspicious Cave

A dark and suspicious cave in the swamps. The moss and mildew coats its outside, causing a bad smell and eerie noises also can be heard from the cave.

Countless voices of the dead can be heard in the swamp. There is the root of the corruption and evil souls. If possible, it is recommended that you pretend not to see the cave and pass on by.

“There is a dungeon here.”

Ark gazed at the cave opening with a bemused look. Underneath the rotten wood and moss, there was a dark opening. The cave had surprisingly appeared when he followed the flow of the swamp.

‘Anyway, it is certain that the Monkfish mushrooms came from here.’

A viscous liquid flowed from the cave. The Monkfish mushrooms probably grew in the cave because of the viscous liquid. In other words, the Monkfish mushrooms were growing in large quantities somewhere in the cave.

“It’s been a while since I’ve entered a dungeon.”

Ark looked at the cave and laughed. Then the eyeball sat inside Ark’s collar and muttered.

“Ark-nim, isn’t the atmosphere unusual?”

“You idiot, that makes it better.”

There was no user who would pay attention to the various warnings present in the information window. A dungeon was the staple of RPG games. Monsters hunted in dungeons gave better experience and items. In addition, the higher reward meant higher compensation. Who would avoid that just because of a creepy atmosphere? Of course, Ark wasn't going to carelessly run in.

‘Now what kind of monsters will I see in this dungeon?’ Ark used Eyes of the Cat at the entrance to look inside the cave.

His pupils turned green and he could see the inside of the cave. Just like the entrance, the interior was filled with rotted wood and moss. And he could occasionally see rotten dead bodies.

“Mould Zombies, level 400 Mould Zombies!”

Ark shouted with joy after confirming the monsters that lived in the dungeon. He had just been having trouble with the level of the Mould Zombies within the swamp. But now he found zombies that were 100 levels higher! All of a sudden he had encountered monsters 100 levels higher so he didn't have a problem anymore. After calculating the dark attribute bonus, Ark was level 523. So he was in fact 123 levels higher. But his actual level was 349 and he was fighting a level 400 monster, so he would receive 100% experience and a bonus 10% for every 5 levels that the monster was higher than him.

‘Even if I level up, I won't have to worry about items and materials not dropping.

Ark was fortunate about that.

‘There are 20 Mould Zombies at the entrance. They won't be a problem even if they're level 400.’

Ark had a lot of experience fighting Mould Zombies and he was already tired of it. So there was no need to think of a plan using ‘Stealth.’ The zombies were empty headed so it was impossible for them to lay traps and they would just run forward haphazardly.

“I don't need to see anything else. There aren't that many so I'll finish it quickly!”

“Hehehe, come on Mould Zombies.”

Clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Ark, Razak and Racard held their weapons and entered the cave. But a message window he never imagined appeared as soon as he entered.

-You have entered an area with a special property!

‘What, what the? My mana is drained?’

Ark’s mouth dropped at the information window. 50 mana every second! Then he would lose 3000 mana in 1 minute? Currently Ark had 6,495 mana. Even if he did nothing, his mana would be depleted in 2 minutes.

‘Damn, what will I do without my mana?’

Special effects when entering a cave wasn’t uncommon. However, this effect was considered one of the worst. If his mana was drained so quickly then didn’t it mean he wouldn’t be able to use skills?

“Master, what do we do?”

Racard hesitated while flying towards the zombies and asked.

“Don’t worry about it. I just won’t use skills.”

Certainly not being able to use mana was a considerable penalty. However Ark didn't take it too seriously. If he was a magician then being unable to use mana was definitely deadly. However, Dark Soul was closer to a warrior than a magician. He also had his passive skills which didn't require mana so he wasn't too worried.

"Bah, if it's going to be drained anyway then I might as well use it all. Flash!"

Ark ran at full speed and used Flash. His sword sliced through the 20 Mould Zombies and decreased their health. Next Razak and Racard also attacked, decreasing the health until two or three zombies collapsed.

"Okay, let's do it like that. Flash!"

Ark steadily used Flash with excitement until the fourth time he tried to use it.

-You are unable to use the skill because you don't have enough mana.

"Sheesh, my mana is already depleted? It can't be helped." Flash consumed 500 mana with every use and he also lost 50 mana every second, so his 6,000 mana had already reached the bottom.

Although his mana had run out completely, he wasn't willing to stop. So far, he had killed thousands of zombies in the swamp. Even without his skills, there was no reason to worry about 20 zombies. No, if he could hit it then he would easily defeat them. But Ark miscalculated. Kuaaah! Because he randomly fired Flash, Ark had stopped right in the middle of a horde of zombies. Ark had defeated two or three zombies but there were 20 of them. In other words, he had to block approximately 40 attacks. No matter how quickly Ark swung his sword, he couldn't block that many arms. Tutututung, he felt a serious pain in his shoulder and lost some health.

"Damn, it is hard to avoid these guys in the cave. Racard, attract as many of them as possible!"

"I understand. Hey, you messy corpses. Your opponent is me!"

Racard yelled and quickly flew the opposite way. However, only one Mould Zombie chased after Racard.

‘Whoops!’

Ark started to realize the situation was more serious than he thought. Yes, until now Racard had been able to lure 10~20 zombies thanks to the Taunt skill. Although Taunt only consumed 30 mana, it was still a skill. When his pet used an active skill, it drained Ark’s mana. Thanks to Ark lacking mana, Racard’s Taunt skill was also disabled.

‘Oh my god, then I need to deal with those guys one by one?’

All the strategies he thought of were blocked so he instantly became gloomy. This was a narrow cave so he had no room to avoid the attacks of 20 Mould Zombies. It was fortunate that Razak’s Shield Stroke was a passive skill but he still wouldn’t be able to handle 20 zombies. If he blocked the front then he would be attacked from behind, if he blocked the right then he would be attacked from the left. Since he was under consecutive attacks, it was different to catch the timing to counterattack. It was one of the difficult parts when fighting 1 against 20. The laws of physics still applied to New World. That also applied to this battle. When Ark was hit by the opponent’s attack, his body turned rigid for a bit. It only lasted for 1 second but Ark was unable to swing his sword during that time. In addition, his posture was also unsteady so he was unable to draw out 100% of his power. So he was unable to counterattack properly while surrounded. Unlike reality, New World had a variety of skills for this situation. Magicians had the ‘Warp’ skill while thieves had ‘Crossing’ skill. Ark’s main evasion skill was Dark Dance. But he didn’t have any mana.....

Pepeng, pepeng, pepeng, pepeng!

A red light flashed in front of Ark. It was the first time he was being hit so one-sidedly.

“D-Dark Dance! Flash!”

In a situation where Ark couldn’t hit back, his health quickly decreased. He even forgot the fact that his skills were sealed. He became even more irritated at the severe beating he received from the Mould Zombies. After being hit, a yellow message window floated in front of him.

-You have received a serious blow and have become ‘Dizzy.’

He became 'Dizzy' after being hit a certain number of times in a row! It was the first time he had been in that state since he started. When things were going well, one thing became twisted then it stayed twisted. After becoming 'Dizzy,' Ark's vision blurred in front of him. With his blurred eyesight, he was unable to distinguish between the Mould Zombies' attacks. Ark couldn't even grasp the directions and just wandered around while receiving critical hits.

"M-Master, to the right!"

Ttadak, ttadadadak!

Racard and Razak ran towards him as Ark's health nosedived. But that was just their feeling. His summons were only able to fight against high level monsters because of Ark. Now Ark was being beaten and his summons were no match against the level 400 Mould Zombies.

"Hik, it can't be!"

Racard screamed as he was hit by a Mould Zombie. Razak was also surrounded by the zombies while he used his shield to block all attacks.

"Ah, no. I can't handle this situation! I have to somehow escape!"

"Riposte, Riposte, Riposte!"

Ark was almost in a critical condition so he swung his sword wildly. Although Riposte was a chain skill, he could still manually counterattack. Even when he concentrated, the skills sometimes failed. While in his 'Dizzy' state, it was impossible to succeed in his skills.

'Something....there must be another way.....'

Ark's lips became dry as his health continued decreasing. Then something popped into Ark's head.

“That’s right, I have that. Ghost Knight Corps!”

Yes, the desperate plan he came up with was summoning the ghost knights of Oberium! It was an active skill but it consumed Spiritual Power instead of mana. The space abruptly started shaking after Ark used the skill. He looked at the gaping space and saw heavily armed ghosts from Oberium.

-The Oberium Knights have come when you called!

The knights looked around and shouted as they saw the Mould Zombies.

-Over there, defeat the threatening enemies!

-For the glory of Oberium!

Ohhhhhh!

The 30 ghost soldiers rushed like a storm at the Mould Zombies. Just like a huge wave had swept over a sand castle on the beach, the ghosts wielding shields, swords and maces poured over the zombies. Unfortunately, it was still a beginner skill despite the visual effects so the zombies weren’t hurt that much. The ghost soldiers were also impervious to any attacks. The Mould Zombies were pushed by the pressure of the ghost soldiers and collapsed like dominos. The ghost soldiers gained even more momentum as they rushed the Mould Zombies. However.....

-Wahhhhh, those evil zombies! Eh?

Bbyorong, bbyorong.

The chief knight shouted with anger after hearing an alarm ring.

-Drat, our bodies are tied to Oberium so we can’t help anymore.

Then the bodies of the ghost soldiers disappeared like they were a lie. The 5 second duration time of Ghost Knight Corps had ended. Although it had consumed 300 of his Spiritual Power, Ark managed to escape the siege of the Mould Zombies thanks to the ghost soldiers. It was his last chance to escape from the cave!

'Let's escape the cave for the moment!'

Ark did his best to turn around and threw his body. However, he felt a devastating impact to his face and saw stars.

"Ouch, my head!"

Ark was still 'Dizzy' so his pupils were unclear. He couldn't see where he was going and ran into a wall. It was one of his most embarrassing moments ever, escaping the Mould Zombies only to run into a wall.

"Racard, what are you doing? Didn't I tell you to take care of the directions?"

"Sheesh, why are you so nervous? You didn't give me any time to talk."

"Shut up, quickly inform me of the directions!"

"Okay, follow me!"

Racard complained after pulling Ark's hair. It was like Ark was blind so he had to follow Racard's directions. Racard pulled Ark's hair and dragged him while Razak blocked the zombies with his shield and followed.

"Are we there yet?"

"Not yet."

Ark panted while he listened to Racard's answer.

'I've walked approximately 100 metres but when did I enter that deeply?'

Ark thought it was slightly strange but he had no way to check. After a while, his eyesight gradually brightened. Ark's face hardened at the same time. When he surveyed the area, he had already left the cave. The cave was near Saint Betelgeuse and the Mould Zombies had retreated back to the cave after he exited. Yet Racard was still pulling his hair and was turning round and round on the same spot.

".....Are we there yet?"

"There is still a long way to go. Heok, it's dangerous. Quickly!"

When Ark asked in a low voice, Racard just pulled his hair harder.

"The only dangerous thing is your head!"

Ark grabbed Racard and shouted. Then Racard panicked and stuttered.

"Eh? M-Master can see now?"

"Do you want to die?"

"Please don't look at it like that. I was just kidding."

"A joke? Then you want to play?"

Ark replied with a wicked grin. He wanted to relieve a little stress.

“See, I told you there was something unusual.”

The eyeball murmured as he studied Ark’s face. Then Ark stealthily turned his head and pointed to one side.

“Your idea of a joke is hitting me?”

“..... You’ve returned safely.”

The eyeball carefully looked at it and answered. Ark indicated to the corner where Racard was sitting with swollen eyes. Since the situation had deteriorated so suddenly, his pets had considered mutiny. Anyway, Ark managed to relieve his stress with Racard but he was still miserable.

‘Even if my skills can’t be used.....’

Who would’ve thought that he would be so one-sidedly beaten up? His confidence which had swelled after changing professions and hunting 160 zombies in a hour suddenly burst. However, being mauled by zombies wasn’t the only reason for Ark’s miserable mood.

‘I didn’t think it was possible. I’ve become dull.’

During the battle, Ark realized he had some serious problems. In fact, this wasn’t the first time Ark had fought many enemies in a narrow space. In the past, he also experienced the same thing when sweeping up the thieves. In addition, the enemies had similar levels after applying the dark attribute bonus unlike now. But it hadn’t been one-sided that time.

‘The reason is clear. I’ve been unconsciously relying on my skills too much.’

Yes, Ark immediately realized the problem. In the beginning, Ark had placed more emphasis on his combat ability than his skills and stats. Just like a fighter observed the enemy’s combat pattern during a tournament, he had meticulously looked for methods to defeat them. He didn’t have any worthy skills so he hadn’t used his skills carelessly. However, Ark currently had various attack, defense, evasion and wide area skills. Thanks to his steady effort, he managed to gain over 6,000 mana. His health was also on

par with his mana so could fire skills blindly. Ark's fighting technique had evolved from a battle of perception to one which used skills blindly. It was because hunting was more fun and quicker when he used skills. He couldn't even remember the last time he had used kicks.

'This is the reason that I've been beaten up!'

Ark had certainly become strong after changing to his 2nd profession and learning various skills. However, because of that his pure combat abilities had regressed. Once his skills were disabled, he was unable to fight properly.

"Oh my god..... I'm no different from the trivial warriors I've beaten.'

In the old days, Ark had thought Andel was pathetic for only relying on his defense and skills. Unlike online games in the 2000's, a character in a virtual reality game was more than their level or skills. Understanding a battle was as important in battles as utilizing skills. He was able to display his might in a 1-on-1 match with Shambala and JusticeMan because of that. Ark knew better than anyone about overlooking something important. It was a failure for which he had no excuse.

'I thought I was training properly but I wasn't.'

The first reason was that Ark had been fighting weaker enemies after receiving the 50% dark attribute bonus. The second reason was that he relied on skills rather than ability in emergency situations. Overconfidence was also the reason why he blindly entered the cave. In the beginning he wouldn't have behaved so ignorantly.

'If I fight against Shambala then isn't there a 100% chance that he would beat me?'

Although it was a dismal thought, Ark tried to maintain a positive mindset.

'Yes, I don't need to think so badly. It is lucky. I've realized my mistake before it is too late to go back. Even though skill application is important, maintaining my combat ability is also essential. I've clearly realized it this time. Okay!'

“Now, we’ve rested enough so let’s get started!”

“What? We’re entering again?”

Ark stood up and Racard frowned at his words.

“Of course. Have I ever abandoned a dungeon just because of tough enemies?”

“No but.....”

“Don’t worry. I have no intention of entering so ignorantly this time.”

After recovering his mana, Ark’s group once again returned to the cave. Ark sent a command to Racard.

“Racard, pull a few of them to the entrance.”

“Aha, you intend to take care of them little by little?”

“Such a thing.....why does your expression seem a little bothered?”

“I’m going.”

Racard quickly flew into the cave after Ark glared at him. He unleashed his bitterness from Ark’s abuse on the Mould Zombies and lured three of them. Monsters gathered in one place were usually had a ‘link’ between them. ‘Link’ was an established system where certain monsters moved together. However, the Mould Zombies were undead and weren’t caught by ‘Link.’ It was something Ark was glad about.

Kuaaaa!

“Master, they’re coming!”

Racard flew out of the cave entrance with three zombies following him.

“Okay, I’ll start now. For the moment, I won’t use my pets or skills!”

“Racard, Razak, you don’t have to move. Don’t help me even if it becomes dangerous!”

“Eh? But why? Well, it’s not that hard.”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Ark received the promise from his pets and ran up to the Mould Zombies. When Ark ran in front of them, the Mould Zombies changed their target. Wind blew as the sharp nails sliced down! Ark crossed his legs and used a taekwondo move to block the sharp nails. Then the other two zombies swung their arms as well. Although one of them was blocked by his sword, the other nail grazed his shoulder.

‘Ugh, my reaction time has become slow as well. In the old days I would’ve had no trouble avoiding that attack. I only used ‘Dark Dance’ for a while and have become sluggish. I have to concentrate or I’ll be hit again.’

At the same time that Ark suffered damage, he turned his body and avoided the next attack. In this situation, it would be easier to connect ‘Parry’ and ‘Counter-attack’ for the chain skill Riposte. Then he would follow it by continuous Dark Blades until the dark aura built up and he used Dark Strike.....A picture was painted in Ark’s head at the moment. He had become accustomed to battling using skills.

‘But if I do that then it won’t be training!’

Ark flinched and repressed the desire to use his skills. If he excluded all his skills and only used ‘Sword-Hand Combat’ then it would be training.

‘Riposte is a skill so I can’t use it no matter how much I want to!’

Ark leaned his upper body forward to avoid the nails. Then he stretched his leg and kicked the Mould Zombie. The Mould Zombie lost its centre of gravity and stumbled. Then Ark threw his body upward and kicked the Mould Zombie's jaw.

Kuaaaaak!

The Mould Zombie rolled over several metres just like a movie.

"How about that? This is Korea's taekwondo!"

Ark muttered with pride. Of course, most people were heavy so they wouldn't fly several metres from a kick. But even if the laws of physics exist, this was still a game. His attacks depended on his stats and he had 725 strength. The stats also applied to the Mould Zombies but it was like they were kicked by a bull. Such calculations were essential for combat in New World. Although Ark didn't go to the gym anymore, he never missed his dawn exercise. If it was simply taekwondo skills then he was confident. But that was in reality. In New World, his battle style was adapted to fit the game i.e. New World taekwondo style!

"I have to concentrate and maintain my posture."

Ark put more focus on his training than on defeating the Mould Zombies. He avoided the zombie's attack and did a spin kick. The spin kick was followed by his sword attacking the stomach! When he was surrounded, he stepped back and started kicking. A variety of taekwondo techniques emerged. At first he was a little worried, but eventually his body warmed up and he could deal with the three Mould Zombies. Even though he didn't use other skills, he did use the basic Sword-Hand combat because it was effective. The Mould Zombies were medium-sized monsters so there was a 5% chance that advanced Sword-Hand Combat would cause an abnormal state! If he continuously used kicks then there was a high chance of causing that state.

"Take this!"

Kukuong, kuaaah!

The last Mould Zombie was caught was a wrestling back drop and the battle ended. Ark hadn't used any skills to handle three Mould Zombies and Buksil muttered after watching spellbound.

“A-awesome. That’s fantastic. You’re not just a dirty person!”

“What? Dirty person?”

“Ah, no, rough.....no, hot.....yes, you have the hottest personality.”

“That’s not true. This little thing is not cool at all.”

Racard rubbed his swollen eyes and complained. Buksil only recently knew Ark so he had never seen Ark use taekwondo or wrestling techniques. However, Racard had seen those techniques since the beginning so he wasn’t impressed. Ark had no intention of finishing it like this.

“Racard, this time lure 5 of them.”

“Eh? “Isn’t that more unreasonable?”

“Shut up, just bring them as soon as possible.”

Ark trained with the Mould Zombies while slowly increasing the numbers. After doing this for a day, Ark was able to deal with ten Mould Zombies without using any skills. Of course, it wasn’t like his combat abilities suddenly grew after one day. He was just reviving his previous battle style using taekwondo. It didn’t take that long since he hadn’t been neglecting his exercise. If Ark hadn’t been using his skills so much and concentrated on his actual fighting ability then he could’ve dealt with 20 Mould Zombies.

‘That feeling seems to have returned.’

Ark gave a satisfied smile as he looked at them.

“Now it’s time for you guys.”

“Eh? What?”

“You guys will also be training. Racard, you used to be able to lure monsters without using the Taunt skill. But what happened to that? Razak is no different. Raza didn’t make any big mistakes you didn’t do very well either. This is evidence that you have become undisciplined! Now we’re going to return to my original methods. I’ve going to revive the old training methods for a while.”

“I don’t want to experience the past again. Isn’t our current strategies enough?”

“Do you want you other eye to become swollen as well?”

“Damn, I knew it would be like this. I knew it!”

Racard murmured with a desperate voice. Then Ark looked at Buksil and Baekgu in the corner and said.

“You two as well!”

“Huh? Why do we have to train as well?”

“Until now it didn’t matter, but if you go to higher level regions then Baekgu as he is now won’t be enough as your bodyguard. Baekgu needs some training to level up and become stronger. And Buksil as well. Didn’t you have some trouble with filming the video? You have to learn what to do if your eyeball is attacked. Take it out!”

Eh eh? Eh eh eh? Wait a minute. Hik!”

Ark took out Buksil’s eyeball and turned it round and round. Ark threw it and kicked it.

“What do you feel?”

“W-what are you doing.....ouch!”

Buksil staggered and sat down as he felt nausea. But Ark just declared sharply.

“Bah, how can you take videos in this state? If you’re going to shoot a video while scouting the area and foraging ingredients then you need to handle this much.”

“That, that is.....!”

“I won’t allow anyone to decline!”

Ark raised his fist and threatened them. Ssak ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Radun also looked at Ark with surprise eyes. ‘Dad, what should I do?’ He seemed to ask.

“Not you, you’ve been doing well. Aigoo, you cutie.”

“Ooh, this is discrimination!”

“Shut up, training is starting!”

So Ark and his group began three days of hellish training.....

“Racard C-plan, lure three of the zombies without using Taunt!”

“Yes! Ya, you beep-beep-guys! Bring it on, come on, come on!”

Razak glared at them and unleashed a barrage of curses. Although the zombies didn’t really understand, they instinctively felt anger at the curses and followed him. Ark looked at Razak and Baekgu and nodded.

“Razak, block two of the Mould Zombies with your shield. Baekgu, you will approach and attack the zombies while Razak is stopping them with his shield. Go!”

Clack clack clack!

“Yes, Captain!”

Razak and Baekgu moved to their positions at Ark’s command. Although they had failed several times at the beginning, now the execution of the strategy reached 80% after the training. This was the outcome of the hellish training for three days. Now Ark didn’t have to follow their movements every time anymore. His summons now listened to him again after the discipline. And Baekgu who participated in the hell training had gained 4 levels. He was not the only one who changed. While Razak and Baekgu finished the two blocked Mould Zombies, Ark lured the remaining one towards Buksil’s eyeball.

“Buksil, bring me a memory crystal!”

“Yes!”

Buksil quickly pulled out the memory crystals from the eyeballs. Then he played the dramatic footage from the crystal. Buksil hadn’t been resting in the meantime and had been tirelessly working to make the image of the battle seem filled with urgency. After the training to withstand violence, he had managed to take the scene of Razak’s fight from dozens of angles.

“Okay, it’s a pass.”

“T-thank you!”

Buksil sighed with relief and replied. Ark gathered Buksil and his summon again before speaking.

“Now the training is finished. First, I think it’s admirable that you ‘volunteered’ for the training. What the? What happened to your expressions? Well, are you dissatisfied?”

“Of course not!”

“Anyway, now it’s time to show the results of your training against the zombies in the cave! Razak, Racard, from now on we’ll be capturing the dungeon. And Buksil and Baekgu will collect the food necessary for it. If you pinch me dungeons success going forward will need more military capacity. You’ve succeeded in the training so there is no need to worry while collecting ingredients. While collecting the ingredients, you’ll also take the videos and Baekgu will take care of any zombies that escape. Can you do it?”

“Yes, we can do it!”

All of his bruised companions shouted simultaneously. He didn’t know how long it would last but they were currently showing the results of the discipline. Anyway, Baekgu and Buksil left to gather ingredients while Ark took Razak and Racard to begin the dungeon exploration. Animosity filled his summons eyes as they looked at the cave.