

Ark Vol 16 C 1

Chapter 1

ACT 1 Slums

“Huk huk huk, I’ve finished.”

“Already?”

The old man looked at Ark with amazed eyes.

“It should take at least 4 hours to get to the pier and back. Yet you returned from that place overrun with dangerous monsters after just 1 hour and with my luggage?”

“It sounded urgent so I hurried as much as possible.”

“I’ll say this clearly. But I honestly didn’t expect that much from you. In regards to transportation work, there are always small and large problems. In particular, it’s not a surprise to be attacked by thieves or monsters. Of course, I can ask the garrison to look for it but it would take many days for them to accept my commission. Since it is on a very tight schedule and is an urgent delivery, I had no choice but to rely on a foreigner.”

The old man seemed to be complaining as he shook his head.

“But you’re different from the lazy foreigners in this area. Even if they accept my request, they would take many hours to do it. Since they always receive a lot of commissions so they would complete the most urgent one first.”

“I place customer satisfaction as my top priority.”

Although he was breathing hard, Ark tried to make the best impression as possible. The old man nodded and said.

“I know, I know. Even though I doubted you, I never thought that you could find the luggage so quickly. It is the first time I’ve met a sincere foreigner like you. Now, this is the reward I’ve promised.”

“Thank you very much.”

Clink, clink.

Ark spoke thankful words but he had tears in his eyes as he saw the coins. He had ran around for 1 and a half hours and all he received was 50 silver. He could earn more than that hunting one or two monsters and selling japtem. Anyway, an information window appeared after he received the compensation.

-You have completed the quest.

Compensation: 50 silver, +1000 experience, +7 fame

‘I ran a marathon for one hour only to receive that compensation.....’

The old man had a lot of complaints about other users but Ark could understand their feelings. If done at a normal pace, the quest would normally take 2 hours. No matter how low levelled the area, level 150 users wouldn’t really care about that sort of compensation. They would only accept it when there were other quests in that area. Since there were a few quests, the users unconsciously felt like there was no need to rush. Sometimes the NPC might even become such a nuisance that they would cancel the quest. Since the level 366 Ark had completed such a boring quest, it was natural for the NPC to look favourably upon him. And the favourably impression from the NPC gave a more realistic profit.

“I’m genuinely grateful that you sincerely accepted my quest. I’ve decided to write a letter of recommendation so that anyone in my business who you encounter will know about the sincere and polite foreigner. I have a fairly wide network of acquaintances. If you show this recommendation to my partners then you will receive a more generous reward.”

The old man wrote a recommendation letter and gave it to him.

-You have received additional compensation since the satisfaction of the client has exceeded 100%.

The old man who commissioned the quest is an NPC who engages in transporting baggage from Ciel. If the lost luggage was unable to be delivered on time then the transporter's reputation would receive a big hit. Thanks to your sincere work, the old man is able to keep his reputation intact. As a sign of gratitude, this client has provided a bonus compensation. You've also received a letter of recommendation from a satisfied transporter. If you show the letter of recommendation to other transporters then it is possible to receive additional rewards and fame.

Additional compensation: 10 silver, +3 fame

* Special item 'Transporter's letter of recommendation' acquired.

Transporter's letter of recommendation: If you show it to another transporter then it is possible to receive a higher rank quest. In addition, the probability of receiving additional compensation and fame will increase.

'Phew, it is a success!'

Ark sighed with relief as he took the Letter of Recommendation. This was the reason why Ark completed the quest quickly. It was unnecessary to say again, but NPCs gave various types of quests. If NPCs spoke about time running out then it was often a quest with a time limit. Naturally, if the quest was completed quickly then the NPC's satisfaction would rise. If the degree of satisfaction exceeded 100% then he would receive additional compensation. Of course, the bonus compensation wasn't that great. In addition, completion of the quest within 1 hour was needed for satisfaction to go above 100% then considerable effort was needed. Therefore a lot of users gave up on satisfaction early. If they acted greedily while thinking about consumer satisfaction, they might inadvertently make a mistake that would lead to death.

'But this is easy to do in a low level area.'

That wasn't a problem for Ark at all.

“Chik chik, he smells dangerous for some reason!”

There was a more than 150 level difference between Ark and the monsters surrounding Ciel. If he didn't approach the monsters intentionally then they would avoid him due to fear. Even though chaotic users also regularly appeared, he was able to settle it easily with a few swings of his sword. If he rode Radunma to save some time then it was possible to achieve customer satisfaction.

“Is there any other problem?”

“You've completed all the urgent problems.”

“.....Really?”

Ark sighed with regret, causing the old man to smile.

“But you don't have to worry about work because transporters gather here so there is always a number of jobs. Ah that reminds me, I ran into my friend Kurad drinking alcohol at the tavern the other day and he said a big headache had occurred. If you head to the Twilight bar next to the west gateway and show him the Letter of Recommendation then he might give you a job.”

“Thank you for the information. I'll go immediately.”

Ark said farewell and stepped towards the west gateway. If he worked diligently then he might be able to receive additional compensation from this quest. Although he received information about the next quest, Ark's face wasn't that bright.

“How much have I gained so far? Character information window!”

Character Name Ark Race Human Alignment Good +500 Fame 6025 (+500) Level 366 Profession Dark Soul Title Cat Knight, Oberium's Caretaker, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero Health 6855 (+225) Mana 6745(+25) Spiritual Power 400 Strength 745 (+38) Agility 925 (+110) Stamina 1,155 (+35) Wisdom 161 (+10) Intelligence 1,173 (+5) Luck 155 (+60) Flexibility 158

Art of Communication 66 Affection 89 (+10) Resilience 436 Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics 153

“Huh.....”

He sighed after checking the information window. The main character information window displayed many information aside from stats. But now Ark was only concerned with his fame. Since Ark was level 366 completing level 150 quests, he only received 60 silver and fame as additional compensation. No, he needed 7000 fame in order to learn the secret technique. In order to obtain the Entrusted Volumes, Ark had forsaken food and drinks for a day in order to grind his fame.

“If this is another luggage search then I will feel sick.”

Ark shook his head with a disgusted expression. The contents of the repetitive quests in Ciel were all similar. He only found this out later but Ciel a commerce city similar to Giran in Schudenberg. So most of the NPCs did transportation work. There was even a separate transporters union in the city. Most of the simple quests around the village were commissions from transporters. They were all ambushed by monsters and wanted to get their lost luggage back.

“Well, I was transporting some luggage here last time.....”

“The items lost in a monster attack? If you tell me the place then I will look for it!”

He had heard those words coming from NPCs so many times that he could no reply in his sleep. As soon as the quest was received, he accepted it and rode towards the location on Radunma. When he arrived at the quest area, he would rush the monsters like crazy. Once the monsters were taken care of, he would look for the items.

“Chik chik, and you? Did you exterminate our kind from the beginning?”

The dying monsters looked at him with accusing eyes.

‘I don’t want to be here either!’

He really wanted to say that. If he completed the quest then he would only receive 30~60 silver as compensation.....Since he was level 366, killing level 200 kobolds didn't give any experience. He also received no loot. The only thing he could get was quest items. This system was to prevent high level users from coming to lower levelled areas. Therefore Ark repeated one day of hunting without receiving any profit.

"Dammit, I have to hold on to gain more fame."

His circumstances surrounding the quests was really a pity. If Ark had been initially interested in fame then he would've collected 5000 more by now. In some cases, there were options to choose either money or fame as a reward for several quests. And of course Ark chose money! If he knew it was possible to learn secret techniques then he would've chosen 100 fame over 1 silver.

"I don't need fame while running around!"

In the past, he never imagined he would need it.

"It's really crazy. Anyway, I have to give up japtem and experience for fame....."

It was a low level village so he had to give up experience and items. The problem was although NPCs gave different amounts of fame, it was obvious how much fame he would receive when the quest was repeated. In a low level area, he could only repeat the quest and receive compensation and fame a maximum of 10 times. But the problem was time. It took at least an hour and a half to receive the quest and wander to the area before coming back.

"I've spent 30 hours so far and completed 20 quests which gave me 150 fame. Thanks to word of mouth, the transporter quests gave an extra 50 fame which gave him 200. My current fame is 6025."

In order to earn the required 7000 fame to learn the secret technique, he needed 975 more fame. If he continued gaining 200 fame in one day then it was 5 more days of grinding quests.

"This Jackson's Hero title is also irritating."

Thanks to the Jackson's Hero title, his intimacy with NPCs increased by 30% instead of fame. So when completing quests, he would receive 30% less fame.

"Well, thanks to the high intimacy with the transporters, I eventually made up that lack of fame because of the word of mouth. Now the quests from the old man has ended but he gave me a Letter of Recommendation so I should continue getting more fame."

But did he have to grind for another four days just to achieve his target? Thinking of the next four days really made him feel gloomy.

"But there's no other method....."

Ark sighed and shook his head. If he solved quests with high difficulty then he would be given more fame. But he often had to go to other areas for such quests. If he grasped the wrong information when receiving the quests then it might take him many takes to complete. So it was better to repeat quests and receive 200 fame a day.

'Should I catch chaotic users to increase my fame?'

Ark had also thought about that method. But there was a problem with that. Most of the chaotic users in a level 100~180 area were level 200. Since there was such a huge level difference, he would not receive a lot of fame. Staying at a village where he was 150 levels higher wasn't very satisfying. Finally he came to the conclusion that repeating quests was the best way to gain fame. It would take a bit more time to fill his target amount but it was already at the point where he felt sick at the thought.

"Still, secret techniques are hard to find so I can't possibly give it up."

Although Ark was getting tired, he firmly braced himself. He wouldn't stop until he receives the Entrusted Volumes from the legendary hobbit master! Even though it was annoying to gain 7000 fame, it was clearly a rare skill if it needed that much.

"Yes, it is more useful to have a good skill than a considerably rare item. In addition, I've already spent more than a day earning fame so it isn't possible for me to give up. It's just for now. I can recoup the lost money and experience but I can't miss the opportunity to learn the skill."

Ark murmured aloud and stepped into an alley. His movements were irritated at the thought of doing more transporter quests. When moving in the relevant area, his high level meant the surrounding monsters and chaotic users weren't a problem at all. So Ark didn't even need to summon Razak and Racard. It wasn't necessary to summon Razak and Racard and waste food. But no matter how high levelled he was, it would take time to move around. The only summon Ark was currently using was Radun.

Radun had a +500% movement speed so Ark could complete the quests 30% faster by using him. However, Ark still felt like he was moving too slowly. In order to save time, Ark used the [Quick] scroll to increase his movement speed by 20% for 30 minutes. [Quick] was a scroll for relatively low level users so it was relatively cheap. Besides, this place was the magic kingdom so scrolls were cheaper here than they were in Schudenberg. Yet a single scroll still cost 50 silver! It was something that Ark would normally never waste money on! But Ark was now tired of gathering game so spending a little money wasn't a problem anymore.

'Completing the quest will still give me 60 silver. I have to use 2 scrolls for a return trip so that is 1 gold. I lose 40 silver every time a quest is complete but I would rather spend money if it would quicken the process.'

Ark thought like that and quickly used the [Vision] scroll. It was the first time he had used so many consumables since starting the game.

'I bought 8 yesterday but after completing the quest I only have one left? Since I need a minimum of four more days, I should buy at least 30~40 scrolls.'

However, Ark didn't head towards the shopping centre to purchase the scrolls.

'If I have to buy items then it is better to help that person.'

The boy with financial difficulties had appeared in Ark's head. Ark learned that the boy who he first encountered in Ciel was called Ronnie. At the time, Ark hadn't understood the Bristania language and had tried to get Ark to buy the dictionary for 20 gold. He had misunderstood Ronnie as a con artist and almost cursed him. But after finding out information from the Magic Institute, Ark had abandoned the discount in order to buy the dictionary from Ronnie. Thanks to that Ark had bonded with Ronnie. And after getting some money from the repetitive quests, he would purchase items from Ronnie.

'I think it is quite rare.'

Ark smiled strangely and scratched his head. In fact, he had seen many pitiful NPCs while playing the game. No matter how pitiful they looked in the game, wasn't it impossible to help everyone? In addition, Ark was the type of person who would say 'Yes, I will help!' Yet Ronnie weighed on his mind for some reason. Although he felt sorry because of the misunderstanding, he identified with the boy as he also lived a hard life.

"Ah, Ark hyung!"

Ronnie ran and greeted him as he entered the alley. Even though he was wearing scruffy attire, his features were quite good. In contrast to when he first arrived in Bristania, Ark's greeting was clear and his understanding was now at 75%.

"Have you been well?"

"I've been alright like always. But why are you here?"

"This guy, is that a question someone running a business should else? Of course it is to buy things."

"Things?"

"Yes. Do you have more [Quick] scrolls?"

"Huh? You already bought eight [Quick] scrolls yesterday. Have you already used all of them?"

"This hyung-nim is working really hard. This time I need 30, no please give me 50."

"5-50 scrolls?"

50 scrolls would cost 25 scrolls. It was understandable if this was a store but Ronnie was operating a street stall so it was difficult for him to get 50 scrolls. The transaction was bigger than Ronnie expected so he made an embarrassed expression.

“Why? You can’t get it?”

“Ah, no..... That’s not it. Yesterday Ark hyung bought 8 scrolls so there is only 2 left and I haven’t been able to get more.”

Ronnie answered hesitantly. However, Ark had already expected that. Ark had worked at a street stall before and learned the inner workings of it. Since Ronnie only made a certain amount of money a day, it was impossible to have a quantity of 50 scrolls.

“Will you be able to get it? I’ll wait so please bring it to me.”

“But if you want 50.....”

“Are you afraid I will order the scrolls and then run away? As expected, you’re also a merchant. I understand. The [Quick] scrolls are 50 silver for one? 50 pieces is 25 gold. I’ll give you a deposit so bring it to me quickly.”

“Huh? Deposit?”

Ark handed him 25 gold. Once again, Ark was aware of Ronnie’s viewpoint. Ronnie normally sold japtem so 25 gold was a lot of income for him. Once supplied, Ark would buy it immediately. The place Ronnie was getting the items was probably from the shopping area.

If Ronnie didn’t have the 25 gold then then what shop owners would accept a credit for the scrolls?

‘I understand the feeling well.’

Ark smiled and looked at Ronnie. But Ronnie took the deposit with a hesitant face.

“What is it? You can’t buy the items?”

“I..... That.....”

Ronnie wavered and studied Ark’s face before saying.

“Hyung doesn’t seem to know..... If you buy it from the store then you can get it for 5% cheaper. I buy the items and then sell it at a fixed price. That also applies to the [Quick] scrolls you bought yesterday. Buying one or two is okay, but if hyung wants to buy 50 then it might be better from the store.....”

‘Oh my God!’

Ark made a strange face at Ronnie’s words. Didn’t he understand that giving a deposit and buying the scrolls was for Ronnie? Ark wasn’t a different person. Sometimes stores would give discounts when items were bought in bulk. No, anyone could know that information just by reading the flyers in every store. Still, Ark had visited Ronnie and bought items intentionally. Even Ark thought that his actions were really strange. If he could save 5% of 25 gold, which was 1 gold, 25 silver and 1 copper then Ark normally wouldn’t hesitate. He was astonished at how much his pattern of behaviour had changed.

‘I don’t know why but it might be because of my new awareness.’

Ark gave a bittersweet smile as he looked at Ronnie. Although Ark had experienced similar situations before, the crucial part that differed was Ronnie. Despite Ark giving him profit, Ronnie was overly honest. He was a pure boy who felt guilty about possible cheating Ark. Ark had abandoned his honesty early in his difficult life and truly hoped that Ronnie wouldn’t lose that. But Ark couldn’t help for nothing.

‘Well, although it doesn’t look good for me.....’

“Eh? Really? I’ve only bought a few so far so I had no idea.”

Ark put a deliberately surprised expression on his face and said.

“Hey, thanks for letting me know this good information. 5% of 50 scrolls is 1 gold and 25 silver. Then wouldn’t 200 scrolls be 5 gold? Ugh, if everybody buys scroll then wouldn’t I be able to save hundreds of gold? It is unfortunate but luckily I know now. Then.....”

Ark smiled and grabbed Ronnie’s nose.

“This guy, aren’t you being foolish?”

“Ah, ouch! Ark hyung, it hurts.”

“You’ve got to learn the basics.”

“Huh? The basics?”

“For a merchant, they have to endeavour to earn profits even if the sky is collapsing. If you’re unsure about the customer then you should use whatever sales pitch possible. How will you make money if you don’t do that?”

“B-but.....”

“Be quiet, I don’t want to hear anymore then bring me the items quickly.”

“Huh? Then?”

“Although I understand that I can use the store, I’ve already given you the deposit. And I can save money from now on thanks to you so just buy it this time.”

“H-Hyung.....!”

Ronnie looked at Ark with eyes brimming with tears. Then Ark scratched his head and shouted with embarrassment.

“Don’t misunderstand. Don’t keep dawdling back and forth or do you not want me to buy items from you anymore?”

“U-understood. I’ll be going.”

Ronnie rubbed his eyes with his sleeve and turned around. Suddenly someone ran from the other side and shouted.

“Ronnie, Ronnie! It’s serious!”

“Eh? Tarun ajusshi? Is it serious? What’s wrong?”

“Your mother is having another fit!”

“Uh, my mother?”

Ronnie’s face turned white and terrified.

Was this Ronnie’s house?’ Ark looked around with an uncomfortable expression. After listening to the man called Tarun’s words, Ronnie urgently left for home. At that time, Ark had run after Ronnie to ask for the deposit back. When considering Ronnie’s character, of course he would return with the items but Ark had to continue doing the repeatable quests. Since there was no time, he ended up coming along to Ronnie’s house.

The rich and poor lived in completely different worlds. Once of the richest neighbourhoods in Korea was called Gangnam, where they people living there had allowances of millions of won a day. Meanwhile, the poor had to gather together to rent a 100,000 won room. And that rule also applied to New World.

It was natural for money to be important in the commerce town of Ciel in Bristania. But just on the outskirts of Ciel was the slums where the poor lived, who had to worry about getting a meal every day. Ronnie's house was 10 minutes away from Ciel on the corner of the slums. Ramshackle houses were placed here and there with boarded up planks.

"Mother!"

Ronnie threw his baggage into the house and ran to the bed. The only household goods was an old pot. A middle age woman coughing could be seen lying on a wooden bench in the corner of the shack. With just one glance, it was obvious that the lady was sick. She had black and red spots all over the body, while her face was pale and sweaty.

"Huk huk huk, R-Ronnie..... Ronnie....."

"Mother, I'm here! It's me! It's Ronnie!"

"Ahh, Ronnie..... Ronnie..... My son....."

The middle-aged woman struggled to reach out her hands in order to grab Ronnie. He fidgeted with tearful eyes and shouted.

"Painkillers, the painkillers!"

"She's already taken the painkiller. But....."

"Oh, Mother, Mother!"

Ronnie cried and howled at Tarun's answer. At the same time, the body of the lady bent like a bow and she moaned. Then, Ark had a thought and his heart dropped. A middle-aged lady struggling with pain with a boy held her hand and didn't know what to do! He had seen this scene before. No, he had experienced it. The scene unfolding before his eyes was just like Ark holding onto his mother's hand in the ICU while praying. The rage and despair Ark felt at that time couldn't be described in words. He felt a horrified fear seeing this familiar scene occur in front of him.

'Damn, indeed.....'

Even though he had experienced it a few times, he still couldn't get used to it. The feeling was so unpleasant that Ark felt like closing his eyes and turning away. However, he couldn't pretend not to see the scene.

'This will be dangerous if I leave!'

Ark had taken care of numerous sick people in New World and intuitively sensed the danger. If this was reality then it would end like that, but this wasn't reality. Hyun-woo was only a gamer but Ark was a great warrior, a cook and a caretaker! Ark pushed Ronnie away and gasped the hand of the lady.

"Have courage. I know it is painful. Other people might not understand but I know. I'm not saying I understand your pain. Who in this world would be able to understand the pain of a sick person? But I know. I know the pain of watch someone you love being in pain and being unable to do anything."

"Ahh, Ronnie..... Ronnie....."

"Yes, that's right. Be strong for Ronnie's sake!"

Ark grasped the lady's hand as he prayed and gave her hope. Then a faint light started to appear around their clenched hands. The feeble light gradually expanded like a candle and lit up the room until it entered the lady's body. Then the lady's pain eased and her breathing gradually stabled. After a while, her breathing became peaceful and she fell into a deep sleep. The effects of Advanced Nursing was shown and the crisis was conquered. Tarun and Ronnie looked at Ark with amazed eyes and murmured.

"Oh, such a thing! You didn't even use painkillers!"

"H-Hyung. Thank you!"

"..... It's not a cure."

"I'm aware of that. But..... After having a seizure, she suffers for several days. To see her fall asleep with a relaxed expression..... Thank you. Thank you very much."

Ronnie cried out in a tearful voice and bowed repeatedly. Ark's chest throbbed with every bow. A long time ago, Ark had repeated the same words to a doctor. After he bowed, Ronnie seemed to remember something and took out his purse.

"I'm sorry. Here is the earlier deposit. I'm sorry but today....."

"That's it. I'll take care of the scrolls so you just take good care of your mother."

Ronnie nodded and sat down beside the bed, wiping his mother's face with a wet towel. Ark couldn't watch anymore and exited the house.