

Ark Vol 17 C 9

Chapter 9

ACT 9 Crisis of Lancel Village

“Is it here?”

Shambala looked at the village nestled at the foot of the mountain.

“Yes, this is it.”

No. 358 who was riding near a horse-drawn carriage nodded. Shambala had finally arrived at Lancel village after crossing the sea. The reason Shambala arrived at Lancel village was to bring the stolen goods they recovered from the pirates. Since Ark’s tip from an anonymous source was the reason they swept up the lawless port, it was agreed that 20% of the goods would be sent to Ark’s store in Lancel village. The Easter Nation swept up 50,000 gold from the pirates so 20% of it was 10,000 gold. It was so much that the carriage could barely carry it. If any thieves attacked and stole it then it would be a terrible loss. So Shambala protected the carriage while it was brought to Lancel village. But that wasn’t the only reason why Shambala came to Lancel village.

“This place is Lancel village?”

“Is this the first time you’ve seen it?”

“No, I briefly saw it a while ago. But.....”

This wasn’t the first time Shambala had seen Lancel village. When Seutandal rose a while ago, he had used the dimensional gate to transfer the Sacred Soil. There was no time to sightsee then but he had still entered the village. But now the village felt completely different from then.

“Isn’t it quite a peculiar village?”

No. 358 laughed and replied.

“Peculiar? No, it’s rather.....”

It was the epitome of an odd village. Either way, Lancel village was completely different from what Shambala remembered. It was a completely different scale from before. When Shambala first visited, it was a village surrounded by a wooden fence with barely 100 houses inside. But now the wooden fence had turned into a stone wall. The stone wall was properly built and arranged to a height of 1 metre. Along with the stone wall, the size of the village was 50% larger than before. Now it contained 200 houses. Not only was it a larger scale, it had also become stranger. Among the 200 buildings, none of them had an identical form. The shape and colour were all so different that it looked like a flower garden when seen from a faraway place. The buildings were linked like spider webs by overpasses and there was also a huge, hollow hole in the village. It was something that Shambala couldn’t understand.

“What’s with those overpasses and hole? Why are they in the village?”

“Oh, the overpass and hole?”

No. 358 looked at the places Shambala referred to and replied.

“The overpasses are made for the Meow. Do you see the Meow climbing up there to take a nap? The Meow really like high places.”

“Then the hole?”

“The raccoon clan dug that. Since they find moving in buildings troublesome, they made an underground village. The raccoons feel more comfortable in the ground.”

Lancel village also contained an embassy from Seutandal. Because of that, the political and commercial ties between Seutandal and Schudenberg ran through Lancel village. Since no. 358 had been helpful to Ark and Shambala, he had been appointed the interim manager of the embassy for the Eastern Nation. Thanks to that, he knew quite a bit about Lancel village.

“Then is that pillar somewhat significant?”

Shambala pointed towards a pillar in the centre of the village. Not only was the pillar strange, there were tents erected around it. When asked about the pillar, no. 358 just laughed.

“Ah, that pillar is to indicate the territories.”

“What? Territory indication?”

“Yes, several beast clans have moved to Lancel village recently. So when the Wolrang arrived then they decided to use the pillar to indicate the different territories. At first, they tried to use the trees around the village but that didn’t work so the mayor built a pillar.”

Shambala muttered with an absurd expression at no. 358’s explanation.

“.....This truly is a village suited to that Ark guy.”

“The good part? Or bad?”

“Of course, the bad part. Where good part does Ark have?”

No. 358 winced and raised his finger to his lips.

“I’ll tell you in advance but please don’t slander Ark in front of the residents.”

“Huh? Why do I have to watch what I say?”

“All the residents here have received help from Ark-nim. If you speak badly about Ark then you’ll be in a bit of trouble, and do you know the branch manager of Ark’s store? You must absolutely say nothing in front of her!”

“Then this is that guy Ark’s home town? That explains the atmosphere in the past.”

Shambala remembered the Seutandal war. When Haman Fortress was on the brink of destruction from the Red Man’s strike, the Lancel residents had come through the dimensional gate to help. If they hadn’t helped then the Seutandal mission might’ve been a failure. Then the Eastern Nation wouldn’t have occupied a spot in Seutandal and they would still be drifting around. So Isabel and the Eastern Nation held a soft spot for Lancel. It was also the reason why the embassy was built in Lancel.

“Well, the development speed really is awesome compared to when I first saw the village. When I was first dispatched here, it looked like a normal village but now there are several different features which bring in significant revenue. Lancel’s specialities are also a good source of revenue for Seutandal.”

No. 358 spoke proudly about the village. One speciality he was talking about was the raccoons’ swords and equipment. The raccoons were gifted artisans so the quality of their produced items was already a speciality of Lancel. Lancel village was also at the foot of the Argus Mountains which had abundant magic ingredients and the Wolrang and Meow were also major specialties. And 30% of Lancel’s specialties were consumed by Seutandal. Naturally Ark’s Store in the centre of the village monopolized most of the transactions.

“.....That Ark is only good at things like this.”

Shambala snorted with a sour look.

“Some of the residents here also used to be thieves. Aside from the Meow and raccoons, there are also some orphans from the Baran clan taken in after the Seutandal war. Ah, and there is the popular dance performances by the beautiful Meow shaman Jana that is famous throughout Schudenberg. Although the relationship between the Meow and Wolrang isn’t that great.....”

No. 358 continued talking about Lancel village.

‘Damn, it’s already irritating that I have to separate from Isabel for a few days but now this guy keeps chattering. The Letter Movement tower should be built more quickly.’

Shambala ignored no. 359 and looked at the construction site in the village centre. The building being constructed was the Letter Movement tower manufactured by the Magic Institute. The royal family of Schudenberg thought it was inconvenient that the embassy was at the foot of a mountain so they decided to construct it. However, there was still a lot of time until it was completed. Meanwhile the carriage had arrived at Lancel village. The guards were familiar with no. 358 so they greeted him and allowed him to enter. There were so many people inside the village that it was difficult for the carriage to move around. The embassy was here and this was also the first place in Schudenberg where the specialties of Seutandal could be bought. While the various local specialties and merchandise of Ark's Store, it was now an essential stopping place for a lot of level 100 users. They soon entered a residential area where the sign for Ark's Comprehensive Store appeared.

"Hmm, this is Ark's store?"

"Yes. Isn't it amazing? It has only been created for 1 year but it is already one of the most famous shops around. There are so many items that it requires 2 warehouses to be rented."

"I've already heard that explanation."

No. 358 was also a part of Seutandal's tourism business. So no. 358 hadn't stopped talking until Shambala spoke sharply to him. Suddenly a pig like person ran up to him.

"Welcome. Sir?"

"Where is the store manager?"

Shambala was irritated by the talkative person so he spoke in a sharp voice. Then the pig stuttered and withdrew hesitantly.

"W-why are you looking for the store manager?"

"Why do I have to tell you anything?"

"H-have you come here to return something?"

“What? Return?”

“I-I’m right! Heok. P-please endure it! Have you come because of that sword? I might’ve made a little mistake while taking care of it..... Or is it a herbal medicine set I sold you? There is the risk that it will spoil if left too long....ah, no, that’s not.....anyway please endure it and don’t return the goods!”

“What, what the? This guy? I said let me see the branch manager!”

“Sob sob sob, please bear it for me. I might’ve made a mistake when selling the goods..... If the manager finds out then I’m dead, sob. Please forget it just this once. I am poor and have no money for a refund.”

The pig grabbed his pants and cried. Shambala looked at the scene with astounded eyes.

“Omo, Shambala oppa?”

Suddenly a voice was heard from behind him. He saw that it was Roco when he turned around. Roco had returned after receiving some harp lessons from the ghost. After the pig saw Roco, he wiped off his tears and asked.

“Sniff, store manager. You know this person?”

“Yes. He is Ark oppa’s friend. Please enter.”

“Sheesh, I cried for no reason.”

The pig pouted and went back into the store. Shambala stared blankly at the back of the pig’s head before saying.

“What on earth? He?”

“Oh, is this the first time Oppa saw it? He is a salesperson for our store.”

“Salesperson?”

“Yes, sometimes there are people who buy items and then use an excuse to try and refund them. That person is Ulmeok who has a specialty in crying. Whenever he cries than the customer won’t want to make a return anymore. Hohohoho!”

That’s right. This store had a 0% return or refund policy. It was the secret to Ark’s store which boasted 100% customer satisfaction. Well....Shambala really had nothing to say. That Ark.....Shambala sighed. Roco then saw the carriage and asked.

“Oh, these are the stolen goods recovered from the pirate’s hideout?”

“You heard?”

“I went to Oppa’s house a few days ago and he told me to expect it with Shambala oppa.”

“Well I don’t really mind the scale of the items. If it hadn’t been for Ark then wouldn’t we have lost those guys in the middle of the pursuit? If the pirates aren’t caught than things will become difficult for Isabel.”

Roco laughed at Shambala’s words. Then Shambala frowned and asked.

“.....Why are you looking like that?”

“Hohoho, it is still hot. Isabel, Isabel, does Oppa still have that single-minded devotion?”

Roco nudged his side, causing Shambala to cough and avoid her gaze. However, the pieces of skin revealed through the mask had reddened. Shambala coughed before speaking again.

“Actually, I also have some business with you.”

“Huh? Me? What is it? Love advice?”

“Don’t joke around. I heard you are raising a unicorn?”

“I am raising it.....but why are you asking about the unicorn?”

“There is a new seal on my dagger so I haven’t been able to use it yet. I need some magic ingredients to unseal it and the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’ is one of them. But I haven’t been able to find a unicorn.”

That’s right. It was the reason why he left his beloved Isabel to come to Lancel. A while ago, Shambala had gathered all three treasures to change to his 2nd profession. It was the ‘Dark Veil’, ‘Blood Armour’ and the ‘Thousand Human Blood’ dagger. Among them, the Thousand Human Blood dagger had a strong seal on it. And special magic ingredients were needed for the ceremony to unseal it. One of them was the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’. He had found all the other magic ingredients so he came running when JusticeMan told him Roco was raising a unicorn. He explained to the surprised Roco.

“Unicorn’s Mane? Do you need all of the mane?”

“No, a handful will be enough.”

“Well, if it is that much.....”

Rocco blew a sigh of relief and nodded. In fact, the unicorn was quite sensitive these days. It was expected. Twice the unicorn experienced having its horns severed thanks to Ark. Fortunately it had grown halfway back but the unicorn still had some trauma from the memories. If someone even sent it a little suspicious look than it would instantly run away.

‘I feel a bit sorry for Unicorn but he is Ark oppa’s friend and he only wants a little bit. Hohoho!’

“Just hold on a minute. I’ll call Unicorn and check.”

Roco smiled and answered. Shambala looked at the stolen goods loaded on the carriage and murmured aloud.

“But that guy Ark is really never tired. He provided a tip about how to get the stolen goods and he even managed to get a commission for it. He got a profit without even doing anything. Damn guy, at this rate.....”

That’s right. It was indeed Shambala! But Shambala had forgotten about no. 358’s warning. Never talk badly about Ark in Lancel village. Particularly in front of the manager of Ark’s store! Shambala was muttering to himself until he looked at Roco with a puzzled expression.

“Eh? Why? You’re not calling the unicorn?”

Roco twitched and spoke with a strange expression.

“I was too short-sighted.”

“.....?”

“The unicorn is indeed my pet. Although it will heal, I just can’t strip it of its mane. There should be a price for it.”

“A price?”

“Yes. I mean.....um.....ah. The carriage will block business to the store so Shambala oppa, please help Ulmeok transfer it to the warehouse. And you should also arrange the warehouse while you’re there. I’m so busy these days that I haven’t had time to arrange the warehouse. I will think about giving you the Unicorn’s Mane after that.”

“So you want me to bring these goods to the warehouse and then arrange it?”

“If you don’t want to then that’s too bad.”

Roco exploded and turned around. Shambala couldn’t understand why Roco’s attitude had suddenly turned so cold. However no. 358 who was sitting in the carriage sighed as he noticed the reason.

“Deliverer-nim....he can only get along well with Isabel-nim.....”

Shambala stared at Roco before muttering.

“The way you’re handling that pig and your attitude gradually resembles Ark.”

“Omo, thank you.”

Roco laughed loudly with pleasure. Thus.....Shambala was forced to labour for Roco. Suddenly there was an uproar above him as the Meow jumped through the overpass and shouted.

“Damn, it happened again!”

“Those bastards, where on earth are they hiding?”

“Those mice, when I caught them I’ll tear them to pieces!”

Then Roco ran to the Meow with a surprised expression and asked.

“What’s wrong? Perhaps.....?”

“Eh Roco, ah, yes. 3 of the Meow encountered them this time!”

‘The Meow encountered?’

Shambala sensed that a serious problem was occurring and looked at no. 359 but he just shook his head. Shambala jumped off the carriage and approached Roco.

“What’s going on?”

“That.....”

Roco hesitated for a while before explaining. In fact, an incident had occurred in Lancel village a few days ago. While the ex-thieves were patrolling, the Meow and Wolrang who had been looking for magic ingredients were killed. Initially it was just one or two people, but it had occurred more frequently until three or four people were killed at once in a matter of days. The mayor Galen had covered up the incident for the moment. If the visitors and residents found out then the lively village would become confused and worried. So the guards had been secretly investigating the incident. But they still hadn’t managed to find the killers.

“They don’t seem like simple thieves.....”

Roco murmured with a stiff expression. Several members of the beast clans and the guards had been killed around the village. Normally NPC thieves wouldn’t go so close to a village. But it was also difficult to think that the attackers were users. The reason why users normally PKed was to get money and goods. However, the residents of Lancel village killed were NPCs. NPCs had an incredibly low probability of dropping items. In addition, the guards only wore basic equipment and the Meow didn’t have any. The increase in chaotic value when killing an NPC was also much higher compared to killing a user. In other words, there was no profit in killing NPCs.

“Should I check it out?”

Shambala asked after thinking for a while.

“Huh? Shambala oppa?”

“It is better than me moving the baggage. I am a professional.”

“Ah, that’s right. Shambala oppa is a brutal assassin so you would also understand assassins!”

“Do you have to say it that way? Anyway, will you give it to me if I resolve this?”

“The Unicorn’s Mane? I understand. Since Lancel village isn’t profitable when everybody feels uneasy.”

“Okay, no 358. The warehouse arrangement is up to you!”

“Huh? Huh? Huh?”

Shambala forced the work onto no. 358 and left the village. There were two reasons why Shambala offered to do this task. The first reason was that he preferred fighting unknown enemies to carrying goods. And the second reason was because he guessed where they could be hiding.

‘I have to find them quickly and return to Seutandal.’

Shambala used the skill he learned after changing professions and searched around the village. Shambala didn’t encounter them often but he knew about the beast clans’ abilities. Just like their name, the NPCs had several animal like abilities. While the raccoons could dig tunnels, the Meow and Wolrang had a keen sense of smell. If the members of the beast clans couldn’t find the scent after several days then they must’ve been using skills to hide their trail.

‘But they are hiding near the village. Hiding in a remote place and then coming to the village to kill is a lot more dangerous. If that appears then the residents might notice them. And they could hide and watch for when the guards mobilized.’

If they wanted to monitor the village and hide from the beast clans’ keen sense of smell than there was only one place.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Shambala reached a waterfall that wasn't that far from Lancel village. The reason the beast clans couldn't find them was because they moved through the water. So the only hiding place possible was the waterfall.

'Huhuhu, indeed.....!'

As expected, he found a small cave where he searched around the waterfall.

'If they only killed three or four NPCs at one time then there should just be 10 of them. But I can't be sure so I should take a look at the situation.'

Shambala used Stealth and entered the cave. The entrance was small but inside it was quite deep and wide. After he walked around 10 metres, he suddenly heard people talking.

"Kukuku, the village should be in an uproar by now."

"No, not necessarily."

"The guy who infiltrated the village said that the guards are keeping it quiet. But the atmosphere is gradually becoming worse."

'Users? They're not NPC thieves?'

Shambala hid himself near the entrance and surveyed the interior. In the spacious area, 8 men were sitting around. When he used Penetration on them, he confirmed that their names were deeply red-black. In order to become so chaotic, they must've been the users who killed the inhabitants of Lancel village.

'Why on earth are they killing the residents of Lance village?'

At that moment one chaotic user sighed and murmured.

“Hey, aren’t we somewhat stupid?”

“What?”

“Deliberately raising our chaotic level just to learn the death skill. If we’re caught then we’ll be in prison for at least two months.”

“That is true. But we’re doing it because of the guild.”

‘Death skill? Guild?’

Usually when Penetration was activated, the name of the user and the guild would be shown together. However no guild names appeared on the chaotic users. They must’ve temporarily withdrew from the guild to commit the murders. But the reason they were killing NPCs was to learn the death skill? What did that mean? Then they started to talk again.

“There’s no need to worry. We’re not the only suicide group. If all the people selected to be a part of the suicide group by our guild participates then we’ll stack up the chaotic value. The guild has also promised to support us if this strategy works.”

‘Suicide group? Wait.....then these guys.....!’

Shambala had experienced the strange skill they were talking about before.

‘Self-destruct.’ It was literally a skill which exploded the character to deal enormous damage. But Self-destruct wasn’t a skill that could be learnt using normal methods. The only way to learn Self-destruct was to build up the chaotic value until it reached a certain amount and then visit a NPC in a secret society to learn it.

‘That’s right. This is the reason why they killed the residents. Killing NPCs instead of users will increase the chaotic value faster. But why are they going so far just to learn Self-destruct? And this is the strategy of a guild.....’

However, the chaotic users had stopped talking.

‘Anyway, I can’t just let them keep killing residents.’

Shambala left the cave and went back to the village. He then informed Mayor Galen about the meeting. The beast clan members instantly ran wild in the street. However Shambala shook his head.

“Those guys will just rise again 24 hours after you kill them and repeat the same actions. The only way to prevent it is to have the guards kill them. Lancel village is a part of Jackson. If the guards kill the chaotic users then they’ll automatically be locked in the jail at Jackson. Since they’ve killed many residents, they’ll be locked in the jail for at least two months. And they’re chaotic values will return to normal so they can’t acquire the Self-destruct skill anymore.”

‘It is better to not strike their hiding place directly.’

After that Shambala used Stealth to watch the cave. When they appeared to hunt the next day, the NPC guards surrounded them in an ambush.

“Now, surround and exterminate them!”

“These bastards, I’ll repay my colleagues’ grudges!”

The guards swung their swords and rushed to attack.

“Heok! How did the guards.....?”

The chaotic users were level 250. However, the 8 of them couldn’t deal with the 30 guards surrounding them. Apart from Shambala, the Meow and Wolrang also attacked to get their revenge. Of course they allowed the guards to deal the final blow in order to lock them in jail.

“You’re dead!”

“Grrrrr, take this!”

“Go, clear my family’s grudge!”

At Shambala’s command, the beast clans beat them up before allowing the guards to kill them. Thus it took only 5 minutes to wipe the chaotic users out. Now they would rot in a prison cell in Jackson. But Shambala still felt uncomfortable.

‘Those guys are dealt with. But I haven’t figured out the reason why the guild wants to learn the Self-destruct skill. It might be needless worry, but if it is somehow related to Lancel village.....’

Lancel village was also important to Seutandal. If a serious problem occurred in Lancel village then the effects would even cross into Seutandal.

‘There are still a few days left before I need to return to Seutandal. Then I can return when the Letter Movement tower is finished. Yes. I’ll stay here and watch the situation a bit more.’

Shambala sensed something sinister so he stayed in Lancel and checked the area. He would sometimes visit the waterfall cave while hunting. Since the chaotic players used the cave as their hideout, Shambala expected their colleagues to visit there. After a couple of days, Shambala’s ominous prediction turned into reality. No, the reality exceeded Shambala’s worries.

“Those morons, they were caught and locked in jail! Luckily the other squads in the area were successful and managed to achieve a sufficient number.”

There were as many as 300 users gathered in the waterfall cave. They all had high chaotic numbers from killing NPCs in villages near Lancel. Judging by the situation, they had already learnt Self-destruct. The fact that they were gathered here meant Lancel village was their goal!

‘And those guys.....!’

Shambala stared at the man standing in front.

Shambala didn't need to use Penetration to know their name and guild.

'Jewel....then the ones behind this.....'

The Hermes alliance!

"As you know already, we lost the lawless port so we are in a crisis. The guild is in such a state thanks to Ark. Lancel village is just like his home base. The Hermes alliance will annihilate Lancel village. Our main goals are Ark's store and the Letter Movement tower."

Jewel eloquently spoke towards the other guild members.

"But our mission doesn't end with Lancel village. Our final goal is to recapture Seutandal. We are the hidden forces of the Hermes alliance selflessly devoting ourselves to recapturing Seutandal. Therefore the Hermes alliance has spent enormous time and money to support us in our efforts to recapture Seutandal!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The alliance members lifted their swords and shouted.

"I've received word from Duke and the troops he is leading. Their estimated time of arrival is 3 days. Once the support troops arrive, we will commence the operation to annihilate Lancel village."

Shambala realized the situation was even worse than he expected.

'That Ark, he allowed the Hermes alliance to find out about Lancel village? Ah, that's right. The dimensional gate..... Anyway, those Hermes guys have made up their minds and aimed at Lancel so it is serious. Furthermore, their end goal is Seutandal! But the troops in Lancel don't have any hope of stopping those guys. I need to contact Ark immediately to prepare countermeasures.'

Shambala realized the urgency of the situation. He instantly used Stealth to leave the cave. The news was then conveyed to Ark through Roco. And after two days.....

“Those Hermes alliance bastards!”

Ark flew from Paradon in Bristania to Giran using Letter Movement and finally arrived in Lancel village. However, Ark wasn't alone. Accompanying Ark was Bread and Redian, Bristania's strongest combination. So Lancel village was surrounded and the 3rd part of the battle against the Hermes alliance begun.