

Ark Vol 19 C 7

Chapter 7

ACT 7 Lord

“Eh?”

The doctor exclaimed as he looked at the chart. He confirmed the name on the chart again and muttered.

“This is amazing.”

“Is there a problem?”

“No, it’s just.....”

Hyun-woo became tense and braced himself for bad news from the doctor. Hyun-woo was currently at the hospital to check the results from his mother’s latest general check-up. It had been two months since his mother’s last check-up and nothing had happened on that occasion. But this time the situation was different. It was the first medical examination since his mother started New World. He had asked for the advice of the doctor and scoured the internet before buying the game unit but he was still worried. On the other hand, he also had some sense of expectations.

‘My mother visited Lancel using her own strength.’

In fact, Hyun-woo had planned to visit the beginner village after settling the problems in Lancel. However his mother ended up finding him in Lancel by herself. She walked on her own feet. Hyun-woo hadn’t expressed it in front of his mother but he had been deeply impressed and surprised. Of course, it was a game so even people who didn’t have legs in reality could run around. Even so, seeing his mother who had been lying in bed for 6 years walking really felt special. Anyway, his mother was living like a normal person inside the game. Hyun-woo hoped that some of that would transfer to reality. Then the doctor pushed up his glasses and laughed.

“The test results are good. Far beyond the expected range. In particular, the results of the neural response tests were wonderful. There is a 30% improvement compared to two months ago. The 30% number is similar to how much she had improved in two years.”

“Then it’s good?”

The doctor looked puzzled by his question. Hyun-woo blushed and scratched his head before asking.

“But my mother said that she didn’t feel much different.....”

“Somebody who only knows their body when it is sick won’t be able to tell when it improves.”

While a person could check their status through their health in New World, it was difficult in reality. Wasn’t that why people paid a lot of money for a comprehensive check-up? A patient couldn’t confirm the status of their own body so they had to see a doctor.

“Just by looking at the results of this examination, it appears that playing the virtual reality game has a positive effect on Park So-mi. In Park So-mi’s case, the thought of ‘being able to move freely’ is important in her improvement. That positive thinking which stimulates the nerves is the best type of medicine for patients like Park So-mi.”

Hyun-woo had also seen similar information when searching the internet. He had prayed for such a miracle to happen to his mother but now he didn’t pray for that anymore. In fact, it wasn’t just her improvement in health that was good about his mother starting New World. It was the atmosphere around her that really made him happy.

While his mother had lived in the hospital for the last 6 years, she had always shown Hyun-woo a smiling face. Of course, it wasn’t a real smile. Hyun-woo could always feel a shadow behind her smile. But that shadow had gone away after his mother started New World. Now his mother glowed whenever she laughed. As her character, she was able to go around and meet lots of new people which caused her stress to disappear. Hyun-woo felt like the miracle had already occurred.

“In this state, you don’t have to worry that much. The patient also looks quite good after I had an interview with her. However, she shouldn’t play the game too excessively. The virtual reality game is

good but it only has an influence on the nervous system. Even if her nervous system recovers 100%, it will be a problem if she has weakened muscles. She must practice walking in reality.

“Of course, I understand.”

Hyun-woo nodded and exited the examination room.

“Ah, Hyun-woo. What did the doctor say?”

When he approached the hospital entrance, Gwon Hwa-rang approached while pushing a wheelchair. He was pushing Hyun-woo’s mother who had finished her physical therapy and rehabilitation exercises.

“It was good.”

Hyun-woo smiled and explained what the doctor said. Gwon Hwa-rang laughed warmly and nodded.

“I’m glad it is more good news.”

“More good news?”

“Yesterday Hyun-woo became the Lord of Silvana.”

“Huh? But Hyun-woo is already the Lord of Lancel.”

“He’ll hold both posts concurrently.”

His mother looked at Hyun-woo with concerned eyes after hearing Gwon Hwa-rang’s words.

“I asked Galen about what is involved in being a Lord, so wouldn’t becoming the Lord of another territory be a lot more work? I think it’s better not to be too greedy.....”

"It's okay. At first I might be a bit busy but after a while I can leave it to the secretary."

Hyun-woo smiled wryly and replied. He had gone to all that trouble to become the Lord and now his mother was acting like he should leave it to someone else. It was reasonable. Although his mother had adapted to the game, she was still a beginner so she had no idea about the benefits of having a Lordship.

In fact, Hyun-woo still hadn't explained to his mother the details of the siege. The siege wasn't a simple thing. 30,000 gold had gone into it. That was around 300 million in cash. He had used such a huge sum of money to capture Silvana because it would give him even more money. When it was this much, the game was more like a business. There were no parents who wouldn't worry if their son poured his entire fortune into a business. His mother was still getting her health back so he didn't want to worry her unnecessarily.

"Anyway, now the siege is over....."

Gwon Hwa-rang said with a sparkle in his eyes.

"What's wrong? Why are your eyes looking at me like that?"

"I heard from Hye-sun. She told me about So-mi ssi's character."

"My character? What about my character....."

Then his mother's face abruptly turned red. Gwon Hwa-rang grinned and muttered.

"Huhuhu, So-mi ssi's character is from an old scanned photo? Now I can see how So-mi ssi looks like in high school. No, not just seeing....."

Gwon Hwa-rang had been quite excited when he heard from Jung Hye-sun about So-mi's character. His mother had never shown Gwon Hwa-rang any old photos of her because she had been embarrassed.

But now he could see it in 3D view and even go on a date with her! Gwon Hwa-rang snorted and looked at Hyun-woo's mother with creepy eyes at the thought.

"Bah, why should she deal with a smelly old man like you?"

His mother blushed and turned her head.

"Please pretend not to know me in New World. You also shouldn't visit Lancel."

"Eek? W-why?" Do you know how long I have waited for the day I could meet So-mi ssi in New World?"

"It's not exactly my high school days. Anyway, all men only like young women....."

"T-that's not true. You're mistaken. I want to see what So-mi looks like in her childhood, not the form of a young woman."

"Then why did ajusshi's eyes look so expectant just then?"

"It's a trap. Hyun-woo, you're talking too much nonsense. Am I a shameless guy?"

"Absolutely."

"Is that so? I should've known."

".....I knew it as soon as I saw that creepy look in your eyes."

"H-Hyun-woo.....!"

Gwon Hwa-rang became frustrated at Hyun-woo's words.

Hyun-woo and his mother looked at each other and laughed.

“Are you going to give him a chance?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’ll have to see from now on. By the way, I’m feeling thirsty after sweating so much.”

Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang at his mother’s words. But Gwon Hwa-rang was just looking away absent-mindedly.

‘He didn’t notice.....’

There was a reason his mother was complaining about Gwon Hwa-rang. It was to give the man a chance! When a woman grumbled, it was a chance for the man to heap affection on her and her confidence would soar. But Gwon Hwa-rang’s senses were dull and he didn’t notice. Hyun-woo clicked his tongue and looked at him with pitying eyes. Gwon Hwa-rang finally noticed the situation and spoke quickly.

“I-I will go. Bottled water? Juice?”

“Well, I just want a drink but if you’re offering then buy me bottled water.”

His mother answered with a mock pout. Hmm, as expected of a mother. She managed to make him buy bottled water from a vending machine without any grumbling. Wasn’t Gwon Hwa-rang being educated without even knowing? The only thing a child could do was help his mother!

“Ajusshi, a caramel macchiato as well please.”

“Eh? Ca..... What? Is it a food?”

“Caramel macchiato. The coffee shop on the opposite side of the street should sell it. Isn’t that quite close?”

Hyun-woo laughed while Gwon Hwa-rang's face distorted.

"Eh? Why are you frowning? You don't want to?"

"W-who is frowning? I'm going!"

Gwon Hwa-rang stared at Hyun-woo before turning around. Then his mother muttered softly.

"I like a man who does things like this for me."

Gwon Hwa-rang flinched before sprinting off at full speed. Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang's retreating back and said.

"His leg seems perfectly fine now."

"Yes, isn't it good?"

"Mother will also be like that soon. Then I can see Mother walking into your wedding ceremony on your own foot. Well, ajusshi might need a little more mental education before then."

"What is this child suddenly saying....."

His mother blushed and gave him a sharp sidelong glance.

"Just things you need to hear."

"T-that.... Wait? You're acting just like your dad. You're really serious just like him. Staying in the same corner of the room every day will just age you quickly. How is it? Do you often meet these days?"

“Meet? With who?”

“Hye-sun.”

“That.....”

Hyun-woo scratched his head and hesitated. Then his mother looked at Hyun-woo with a serious expression and said.

“.....You don’t like Hye-sun?”

“That’s not it, but.....”

“You don’t have to say anything else.”

His mother interrupted Hyun-woo’s words and said.

“Don’t you know Hye-sun’s heart? It isn’t easy for a woman to express her feelings. Of course, you shouldn’t reply if you’re uncertain. But you also shouldn’t let a woman wait too long. Do you understand?”

Hyun-woo nodded without saying anything. His mother say that he had been avoiding the situation. But Hyun-woo already knew what his mother was saying. Hyun-woo also thought the situation was difficult. He didn’t dislike Jung Hye-sun. No, in the beginning he only though of her as a sister but he recognized that his feelings had changed. The reason Hyun-woo couldn’t say a word to Hye-sun was because of Kang Mi-su, or Lariette. He often talked with Kang Mi-su on the phone. Every time he talked to her, Hyun-woo felt a mysterious emotion. Until he could confirm the true identity of that feeling, he couldn’t say a word to Jung Hye-sun about their relationship. It might just be an excuse but he thought it was cowardly to enter into a relationship with someone when he might have feelings for someone else. That was the reason he couldn’t hand over the Poco Poco doll to Jung Hye-sun. He had decided to leave the situation until after the siege ended.

‘But.....’

Things became even more complicated when the siege was over. So he once again pushed the problem of Jung Hye-sun and Kang Mi-su back.

“What did you want to discuss?”

A while later, they had returned to Hyun-woo’s house and Gwon Hwa-rang sat opposite him.

“It’s about Silvana.”

“What’s the problem?”

“It’s not a problem right now but a potential one.”

“I’m not smart. Just tell me simply.”

“Defending Silvana castle.”

That’s right. This was the problem Hyun-woo was worried about. Unlike Lancel, Silvana was a territory that could be taken away by another alliance.

‘I can be relieved for one month.....’

After Hyun-woo’s experience, the siege rules in Nagaran had been changed. In the past, the siege only had approximately 1,000 people and now approximately 4,000~5,000 people took part. The biggest problem was the war funds needed to pay the personnel who took part in the siege. Since the number of troops had increased, he needed a huge amount of war funds for the siege. But that wasn’t the biggest problem. There was a lot of time to prepare after someone applied for a siege. But defending was the problem. An alliance could challenge a siege every fortnight. If an alliance had a steady income from the castle then they would someone be able to hold it. The problem was when someone like Hyun-woo became the Lord. He had spent a huge amount of money in order to win this siege. Thanks to the new siege rules, a new Lord had the right to refuse any siege challenge for one month after he was instated.

‘But the problem isn’t just the military funds.’

It was that he had no troops to protect Silvana. The only way to keep the territory was to continue winning sieges. But presently Hyun-woo had no troops to maintain the estate. The Dark Eden troops this time had only been convened for this siege. They then disbanded after the siege ended.

‘Until now I didn’t need any troops, but if I’m going to possess the territory then I need the minimum number of people to defend it.’

It was natural but Hyun-woo had no intention of permanently residing at the estate.

‘This is the last time. If Silvana is taken away then I won’t get another chance. I have to gain enough power in one month to protect Silvana.’

This wasn’t a choice, it was something essential. Yet another problem arose because of this. Even if there wasn’t a siege, he needed money to gather the troops. The reason was simple. When an estate belonged to a guild, the members wouldn’t receive any payment for participating in the siege. Instead the Lord would divide the profit of the estate among the guild. It was common sense. If there was no benefit to maintaining the estate then what reason did a guild have to occupy it? So the issue of troops wasn’t a problem for all Lords. If there was a lot of troops then they could keep the estate. On the other hand, a lot more money was needed to maintain them. So the castle always had the minimum number of troops needed to defend it.

Raiden might seem like he had a lot of money after maintaining a C rated estate for 1 year. But thanks to the income for 5,000 people, he actually only received an income of several hundred gold. Hyun-woo had already thought of some plans to solve that problem.

‘For the moment 4,000 people should be suitable to defend Silvana.’

Hyun-woo limited the number of troops to 4,000 people. Currently, most sieges in Nagaran only took place with 4,000~5,000 people. First, some of his forces would be filled with troops from Lancel and the Eastern Nation. In fact, Hyun-woo’s strategy in this siege also focused on minimizing the loss of NPCs.

He entrusted the Wolrang and Meow to Bread and Redian and sent them to the relatively stable Defense Towers. Then he had entrusted the Lancel troops to JusticeMan as rear support. Thanks to Hyun-woo's use of Great Sacrifice, hardly any raccoons died. Therefore of the 1,600 NPCs who participated in the siege, only 100 actually died. Ark was reluctant to let the remaining 1,500 NPCs leave Silvana. He had already talked about the matter with Galen. If he wanted the NPC troops to reside at Lancel then he needed to pay them as well. NPC's also needed money to live. If he wanted to borrow the Eastern Nation and Baran clan in particular then he would have to pay a certain amount every month. And if a warrior was killed in action then he would have to provide compensation to their families. But it would still be cheaper than hiring users.

'However, I have no choice but to fill the remaining 2,500 spots with users.'

In the end, he would have to create a guild.

"I want you to be a guild leader for me."

"Me?"

Gwon Hwa-rang said with surprise.

"Yes. Ajusshi managed to employ thousands of troops from Seutandal. I think ajusshi will be better as a guild leader than someone like me who wanders around alone."

"That might be so but....."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke ambiguous words as he hesitated. There were two reasons Hyun-woo wanted to make Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader. One reason was that it was too complicated.

Hyun-woo had tried making guilds in other online games. But there were lots of difficulties after he became the guild leader. Whenever there was a small problem in the guild it was up to the guild leader to solve it. Some issues were okay but he would get a lot of headaches whenever there was an emotional quarrel between guild members. If the guild had less than 100 members then he would be also be constantly bombarded with whispers while hunting. But it was unnecessary to explain when the

guild had more than 2,000 members. He was already the Lord of Lancel and Silvana so he didn't want to become a guild leader as well.

'But Hwa-rang ajusshi likes things like that.'

He had taken charge of rehabilitating some ex-criminals so Gwon Hwa-rang was an expert at addressing complaints. He liked such things. So Gwon Hwa-rang would be the best choice as guild leader. There were also the 700 users who followed Gwon Hwa-rang from Seutandal to Silvana.

'And if Hwa-rang ajusshi becomes the guild leader then the burden of the maintenance costs would reduce.'

This was the second reason why he wanted Gwon Hwa-rang to be the guild leader. Once again, the money which entered the estate belonged to the estate. While he wasn't the Lord, the guild leader was the same. But it was different if the Lord was a guild leader. The Lord would have to worry about the guild members who helped him obtain the estate. Any Lord of a territory would have to pay a certain amount of money to the troops as maintenance fees. It depended on the size of the guild, but the maintenance cost was around 70% of what territories controlled by a Lord who was a guild leader needed to pay. In other words, Hyun-woo could reduce the maintenance costs of his troops by 30% if he made Gwon Hwa-rang the guild leader instead of Hyun-woo.

"Well, it does sound good. Hyun-woo is the one who invested all the funds in this siege. As colleagues who suffered together to occupy the castle, we can't just give it to other guilds in the area. If we suffered all that only to lose the estate to another guild alliance then there would be a lot of complaints.

Gwon Hwa-rang nodded after listening to the explanation. However, he revealed his worries with his next words.

"But.... I..... That.... So-mi ssi....."

That was the reason why Gwon Hwa-rang couldn't easily accept. Now the siege was over. He had planned to date Hyun-woo's mother who had turned into a school girl. Hyun-woo laughed like it was ridiculous and asked.

“You really think it is possible to date my mother if you don’t accept my request?”

“Eh? Are you really going to act that petty?”

“No, it’s just a joke. Even if you are the guild leader, you don’t have to be stuck at Silvana. The guild will only convene at Silvana when there is a siege. The siege only occurs every fortnight. Plus.....”

Hyun-woo approached and whispered in a sly voice.

“If you become the guild leader then you will have 2,500 subordinates. Won’t that be quite impressive when my mother sees it?”

“Ohhhh, that’s right.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang was completely caught by Hyun-woo’s small talk.

“Well, come to think of it there is no one else who can take the position. I will become the guild leader as you requested and leave Lariette in charge of the Seutandal forces.”

“You’ve thought well.”

“By the way, where will you obtain the 2,500 people from to form the guild? Do you think it will be easy?”

“Where? From the people who will soon resurrect at the estate.”

Hyun-woo smiled and replied. Hyun-woo thought to form the guild from 2,500 Dark Eden users. Once again, Hyun-woo had a month free without any sieges. The Hermes alliance used to be one of the 5 powers within Nagaran, so with the Lord changed the other alliances would be sensing prey. After the month ended, there would definitely be guilds applying for a siege.

‘So I should compose the guild from people who have experience with sieges.’

However, finding users with experience in sieges wasn’t that easy. Most people with experience had already joined a guild. Of course, there were some who participated as hired soldiers but the numbers wouldn’t be enough. However, the troops in Dark Eden had undergone special training and also had experience in a siege. Where else could he secure 2,500 people at once?

“I like that idea too. Because it is better to join a guild which already has a territory.”

It wasn’t easy for general users to join a guild that had already occupied a castle. Furthermore, the current Lord of Silvana was Dark Wolf who had appeared on TV! If he made a guild proposal then they would welcome it with open arms. If they accepted then it would be good for everyone.

“Okay, then I’ll take care of that.”

Gwon Hwa-rang replied.

‘Now I’ve settled the problem with the troops.....’

But the next issue was one which really caused him a headache.

‘As expected, the final problem is money?’

In fact, Hyun-woo was currently being squeezed for a lot of money. One of them was the fee he promised to the users who participated in the siege. 2,700 users participated in the siege. He had promised them around 300~500 gold to each unit if the siege succeeded. There were around 25 units consisting of 100 people so he needed to pay between 7,500~12,500 gold. That was the siege success fee. He honestly thought that amount was unreasonable but he had been willing to do anything to win. So paying the troops was a desperate measure.

“Well, 5,000 gold still remains from my war funds for the siege and if Buksil sells the Immortality Pill in Paradon then that should be several thousand more gold. Although it will take some time to dispose of

the mithril door, that is 20,000 gold so if I'm conservative than 15,000 gold will remain. But in the future I need more money."

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. Once again, there was a reason why Hyun-woo had invested 30,000 gold into recapturing Silvana. It was to complete his triangular trade route between Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel. And recapturing Silvana had been the toughest challenge. Now his wallet was in a bad state from recapturing Silvana.

"The last time I checked, the price of the trading office was 100,000 gold! I need that much money. Carriages and ships are also necessary to establish the triangular trade. A merchant fleet requires 30,000 gold, carriages needed 10,000 gold and the amount needed for daily operations is 10,000~20,000 gold. So in the end I needed around 150,000 gold to truly set it up."

This was currently Hyun-woo's largest worry. Of course, trading was still possible even if he didn't buy a trading office, merchant fleet or carriages. But he wouldn't have spent 30,000 gold to obtain Silvana if he was satisfied with such a triangular route. He had decided to establish a trading firm like the one in Silvana on Seutandal.

"If the triangular trade route truly connected, I could get 100,000 gold in a month. It will be a 100% jackpot!"

He was already earning some money from the small scale triangular route with Ark's store in the centre. In other words, he had a lot of experience. After acquiring the qualification to establish a trading office from Isabel, he could make tremendous profit. It would be a jackpot business with a success rate of 100%! Plus he had accomplished regaining Silvana. But he didn't have the funds needed for the business.

"Damn, it will be a jackpot only if I have that money....."

After regaining Silvana, Hyun-woo could make the rest move forward slowly. But since Silvana was in his hand he was irritated about not being able to immediately start. He had 2 territories but he didn't know how long it would take to save 150,000 gold.

"Is there a way to gain that much money?"

But 100 and 200 gold is different from 150,000 gold. Most users couldn't even imagine gaining that much money.

"Even if it takes several years, is the only way to gradually save money?"

Hyun-woo couldn't stop sighing. Suddenly, he heard the news coming from the TV in the living room. Hyun-woo listened to the announcer's words without really thinking when he had a sudden flash in his head.

"Yes, that's the way!"

Hyun-woo yelled as he figured out a method to obtain the business funds.