

Ark Vol 20 C 5

Chapter 5

ACT 5 Emergency Situation

“Hah, that was a really eventful adventure.”

Hyun-woo muttered as he stretched out on a bus seat. Capturing the secret dungeon was really no joke. After a fortnight of repeated fierce battles, he had defeated Magura and finally cleared the secret dungeon. Then he had to climb back all the way from the 60th floor to the ground floor. Fortunately there weren't that many monsters in the Abyss after the destruction of the temple so it was easier to climb back up. Luckily there weren't any serious situation in the upper levels of the secret dungeon. Four days after clearing the dungeon, he finally managed to return to the castle. And all the people who participated in the dungeon capture instantly disconnected. They had no intention of connecting to New World for the next two days.....

It was reasonable. They had played the game around the clock with barely any sleep and only eating rice. Hyun-woo had mastered these abilities since the start of playing New World. Nevertheless, he also felt extremely tired after returning to the castle from the secret dungeon. The original goal had been training and raised his troops' levels, but then it became a fierce battle for survival. He also felt like disconnecting like the coalition members.

“But.....”

He had to endure it for a bit. This time the dungeon was even difficult for Ark. But he had obtained so much benefits that the suffering was worth it. As the leader of hundreds of troops, he had received 20~30% more experience than the coalition members. He had gained an average of 2 levels a day. When he arrived at the 60th floor, he had gained 34 levels. After defeating Magura, that increased by a further 7 levels. That meant he raised his level by 41 in a fortnight. In addition, he had gained two more levels while returning to the castle. When he finally arrived at the castle, he was level 426! But was that all? He also obtained a Legendary Hearthstone and unique shoulder blades. That was worth not sleeping for 18 days. And there was an additional unexpected benefit from clearing the dungeon.

There had been one doubtful part while Hyun-woo had been managing Silvana. Silvana was an ideal territory with a lake, river and fertile lands. It was the most suitable place to develop commerce and industry. If he just invested a little bit then it would develop faster than other territories. But compared to that, agriculture development wasn't as good. The crops harvested from Silvana were only 60% of

what other territories produced. After clearing the secret dungeon, he confirmed that the harvest rate had quickly increased.

“In fact, Silvana’s soil quality isn’t that good. In the words of an expert, the microorganisms in the earth affect the soil and Silvana has quite a few mutated microorganisms. But a few days ago, the microorganisms in the farmland changed by 180 degrees. If this continues then we can expect a lot of profit from the next harvest.”

Berami explained after Hyun-woo asked him. After hearing Berami’s words, Hyun-woo understood the situation. The farmland wasn’t that fertile because of the secret dungeon underneath Silvana.....no, to be accurate it was because of Magura. Magura was a strong devil who completely changed the Abyss thanks to his influence. The farmlands were also affected by that influence so the crops couldn’t grow properly.

‘But after I defeated Magura, the Hell door was sealed and his influence disappeared. Thanks to that, Silvana’s impoverished farmlands had their power restored!’

If the present state was maintained then Silvana’s agriculture income would improve by 30%. That meant that Silvana’s finances would improve. But the land change didn’t just affect the income.

‘New World is a game set in medieval times so the NPCs require lots of things to survive. If the land becomes more fertile.....’

It would also have a huge impact on the value and fame of the estate.

‘If the value keeps on steadily increasing like this then the territory will be promoted to B rank in no time! When the present state is maintained, it is possible to reduce the time for promotion by half!’

Moreover, the secret dungeon was now just a secret dungeon. The elite monsters would gradually resurrect over time. In other words, he could have Dark Eden continuously invade the dungeon in order to train and obtain steady loot.

'Now I don't have to hunt in the dungeon so seriously. They can hunt comfortably in the underground labyrinth to raise their levels. If I send 100~200 users together than the NPCs can also safely raise their level.

After the weary coalition members returned, Hyun-woo intended to send them in with the NPCs to use the dungeon as a training centre. The only reason he had the NPCs retreat was thanks to the distortion of the Abyss thanks to the Asmodian influence. There was no worry about that anymore. But Hyun-woo had other things to do.

'Now, my remaining work.....I've completed the quest so now I need to finish the quest. There's 12 days left until the next siege. That's plenty of time to go to the Sinus Principality.'

was a compensation quest. There was no reason for him to wait to complete it. He was also really interested in what the compensation would be. Hyun-woo would fly towards the Sinus Principality as soon as he connected to the game today. But he had a phone call moments before he was about to enter the unit.

"There is an important matter so please visit the headquarters."

He heard Ho Myung-hwan's desperate voice as soon as he picked up the receiver.

"Why is Global Exos calling me in the morning?"

He had just been about to start the game so it didn't feel good to be interrupted. But it couldn't be helped since Hyun-woo received a salary from Global Exos every month. If his employer told him to go to headquarters then what could he do? While thinking this, Hyun-woo's bus arrived at his destination. It had been 2 years since he first visited Global Exos for the interview. Back then he put on clothes which didn't match and looked around like a village chicken but it was different now. He had bet the candidates with a good academic background and became a rank 'O' candidate, one of the 'Special Management Target.' However, Hyun-woo hesitated at the entrance.

'If I see her face then what should I say?'

Hyun-woo was hesitant because of Lariette, or Kang Mi-su. Kang Mi-su worked at the reception desk in Global Exos. If he entered the building then he would inevitably have to encounter her. The problem was the recent relationship between Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su.

'It's been a fortnight since we've had any contact.'

In fact, Hyun-woo tried to keep in contact with Kang Mi-su once or twice a week. But during the past fortnight, he hadn't made any contact or received any phone calls. Not just because he had been too busy capturing the secret dungeon but also because Lariette and Roco had a conversation during the siege that he didn't know the contents of.

'I don't know what they talked about but Kang Mi-su's expression was strange. So it is a little difficult trying to contact her.....'

Hyun-woo had recently been thinking that he needed to make clear his relationship with Kang Mi-su. He also had to think about Jung Hye-sun. Hyun-woo had known Jung Hye-sun's heart for a long time. But he didn't have a clear answer so he had been cowardly avoiding answering her feelings. And he couldn't give Jung Hye-sun a definite answer before he talked with Kang Mi-su. Thus it was necessary to talk to both of them.

'But to see her face so suddenly.....'

Hyun-woo sighed and just stood there. On the other hand, he thought that he was being slightly dramatic.

'Yes, what's the problem? I'm friends with Mi-su ssi now. I can just say hi if I see her so there's no need to think about it seriously.'

Hyun-woo let out a large breath and opened the door. Then he swallowed as the reception desk caught his eye. However, he was worried for nothing because Kang Mi-su wasn't at the desk. Then Hyun-woo remembered that Kang Mi-su only worked afternoons.

"What? Didn't I just worry for nothing?"

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. The staff at the reception desk sent him a strange look because of his strange behaviour as Hyun-woo approached the desk.

“How can I help you?”

“Huh? Oh, someone called Ho Myung-hwan asked me to come.”

“Can I have your name?”

“I am Kim Hyun-woo.”

The staff member contacted the Planning Department before smiling and said.

“Take the elevator to the 5th floor and sit in the resting room.”

“Thank you.”

Hyun-woo bowed and headed to the 5th floor. The atmosphere on the 5th floor when he arrived was somewhat strange. There were continuous ringing from the phones and the staff were running around with papers.

‘Is the office of a big business always so crazy?’

Well, Hyun-woo hadn’t worked in any big business so he didn’t know if it was normal or not. While the staff were busy running around, he sat down by himself in a large waiting room and started to feel uncomfortable.

‘What the? If they’re so busy then why did that person call me here?’

Hyun-woo looked around uncomfortably.

“Ark-nim, have you been waiting long?”

Ho Myung-hwan called out as he walked down the hallway. Hyun-woo felt uncomfortable so he spoke in a curt voice.

“Yes, I’ve waited for a long time.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.....I’m sorry. We’ve been a little busy.”

“Shouldn’t you have considered that before making me take two buses?”

“Hahaha, that is.....”

Ho Myung-hwan laughed awkwardly.

“Forget it. Why did you call me here?”

“Yes, I’ll tell you the details in the meeting room.”

Ho Myung-hwan guided Hyun-woo to a meeting room. Hyun-woo looked around the Planning Department as he was ushered insider the meeting room.

“Everyone seems very busy. Is it always like this?”

“That.....”

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his head and sighed. Ho Myung-hwan also had dark circles under his eyes like someone who hadn’t had enough sleep in days. Ho Myung-hwan loosened his tie and said.

“Over the past few days, the Planning Department.....no, Global Exos has been in an emergency situation.”

“Emergency? Why?”

Ho Myung-hwan looked astonished at Hyun-woo’s question.

“Why? Ark-nim doesn’t use the internet?”

“Internet? What does that have to do with it?”

“Ha, where have you been for the past few days?”

It had been more than a fortnight since he entered seclusion. He had been killing monsters inside the secluded area. It had been 18 days since he entered the secret dungeon and he had only crept out of seclusion at dawn today. The whole time he had been capturing the dungeon, he had barely eaten or slept and just stayed inside the dark cave. So he hadn’t even checked the internet or even the TV. Ho Myung-hwan sent him a pale look at that explanation.

“But didn’t you see the whole system message which appeared in New World a few days ago?”

“Whole system message? Was it about the episode update?”

Hyun-woo remembered something from a few days ago. He didn’t have any concept of time before there was no sunlight in the secret dungeon, but it had occurred when Ark was capturing the 57th floor. He had been in the midst of fighting the monsters when a message window stating

“Now you know. That is the reason why the Planning Department and PR Department has been so busy. There have been questions and protests on the home page, various forums and even over the phone.”

“Then it wasn’t a system problem?”

“It would’ve been great if that was the case.”

Ho Myung-hwan sighed and shook his head.

“That problem is why we called Ark-nim here.”

“Huh? I don’t understand at all. What does this have to do with me?”

Why would they consult with Hyun-woo about a system problem? Did they think he was a genius programmer or something? Hyun-woo made a confused expression and Ho Myung-hwan took out a cigarette and said.

“I’ll tell you this first. Everything that we discuss from now on has to be a secret. You can’t talk about it anywhere else. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes, that is.....”

“Based on our conclusions, I believe the message isn’t a system error.”

“It’s not an error? But.....”

“Wait a moment. I know what you’re going to say. Of course it isn’t normal for two episodes to update at the same time and to skip an episode. Yes, that’s right. The current system of New World isn’t normal.”

“It’s not an error but the system isn’t normal?”

What did they call him so early in the morning for? He wanted to have an angry tantrum but it seemed like they weren’t joking with him based on Ho Myung-hwan’s expression.

“I know it is difficult to understand. But my words are correct. This isn’t a normal error. If it a little difficult but I’ll try to explain. Two continents actually appeared at the same time the episodes were activated. It had been a while since a new episode occurred.”

“Huh? Then the episodes randomly occurred? No that’s not right. The episodes occur when certain conditions are met. It is common for these conditions to be difficult, for example no one can enter the area, so there is a problem with the restrictions?”

“That’s right. It’s why I said it’s not an error but it also isn’t normal.”

Ho Myung-hwan replied.

“But that’s just the start of the emergency situation.”

“The start?”

“I can’t explain in detail but things have started running out of control ever since the new episodes started. If things progress like this then there is no guarantee a new episode won’t be triggered again. And all the data related to the episodes is focused on the Sinius Principality in the northeast of the continent.”

Ho Myung-hwan entered recall mode as he said this.

Global Exos had been flipped upside down four days ago. The computers in headquarters being hacked was just a precursor to

It wasn’t possible for an episode update to run out of control like that. But since the worst situation the programmer Kim Gwon-tae had talked about, data flowing back into the gamers’ brains, the Planning Department could breathe a sigh of relief. However, confusion spread over Kim Gwon-tae’s face again within minutes.

“W-wait a minute. There’s something wrong. The hacking of the computers in headquarters has stopped but the system calculations are still running. The calculations are still in progress even when an A ranked seal has been loosened.”

“What are you saying? There are more operations continuing?”

“I don’t know. Just.....”

“Just?”

“The data is concentrated on the Sinius Principality.”

Kim Gwon-tae had been working on the computer for 10 minutes and that was the only information he found out. But Kim Gwon-tae’s efforts were in vain as the Planning Department was able to identify that in real time. Shortly after the episodes were triggered, the monitors of the Planning Department showed a huge dark energy centred on the Sinius Principality and identified monsters raiding NPC villages. While it wasn’t as serious as the Sinius Principality, there were also some reports of unidentified monsters in the Schudenberg Kingdom. It was these monsters and not the episodes update that caused users to complain and make inquiries on the website and through the telephone.

“What on earth? What is happening?”

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed loudly. But nobody in the Planning Department could answer Ha Myung-woo’s question. They also couldn’t understand or guess what was happening.

“Presently everything is unclear. Just.....”

Kim Gwon-tae thought for a bit before replying.

“This situation must be related to the thing we’re looking for.”

“What we’re looking for? Perhaps.....?”

“Yes, the master code.”

Ha Myung-woo flinched at Kim Gwon-tae's words.

"Did someone get their hands on the master code? Did someone get their hands on the master code and is discriminately destroying the system?"

"No, that isn't the case."

Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

"If someone got their hands on the master code then they would've contacted out company first. Anyone with even a little bit of brains would realize the value of the master code."

"But what if the master code is in the hands of a child who doesn't know anything?"

"It isn't that easy to find the master code easy and it also isn't easy knowing how to manipulate it. The series of events might seem completely random but it has its own rules. Look at the hidden continents that just appeared."

"What is it then?"

"Park Woo-seong hid the master code so it must be protected by several layers of protections. This is just an idea.....but my guess is that someone is trying to destroy the shields around the master code. It is possible that these series of events will spread as more shields are unlocked. This is what I've grasped from the data. If the master code which controls all the systems is triggered then it wouldn't be like this."

"Someone is trying to forcibly access the master code?"

Ha Myung-woo's expression became even more serious at Kim Gwon-tae's explanation.

"Until now we haven't even defined what the master code is. But if someone is trying to approach the master code then they must know something about the master code."

“.....It is like that.”

“They will forcibly penetrate the shields until they get their hands on the master code. That person must have considerable knowledge and the power to act on it.”

“That’s right. The episodes running out of control isn’t something to do with the operating data. Yet the master code didn’t interfere. So someone must’ve met the criteria to trigger the episode. Furthermore, two was triggered at once so there must be two users involved. And they have the same purpose.”

“I have to ask. Is there any chance that it is just a coincidence?”

“The chances are 1/10 million.”

“.....Then there is only one answer.”

Ha Myung-woo bit his lip and muttered. If there was that kind of knowledge and organizational skills then a group had to be involved. The conclusion he came to was that a rival company had obtained information about the master code and was trying to obtain it.

‘If they get their hands on the master code.....’

Global Exos would be destroyed in a day. Anyone who got their hands on the master code was the god of New World. What would they do if they could access all the systems? If they wanted, they could delete all the users’ information or reset the system to the beginning. Only the company who made the game would have the master code. If their competitors found the master code then they could claim legal rights. But what if the competitor made the data flow backwards into the users’ brains to cause brain death? The problem wouldn’t be solved by discontinuing New World. The thought made cold sweat drip down Ha Myung-woo’s back.

“I can’t allow the master code to go somewhere else!”

Ha Myung-woo exclaimed and instantly called for a meeting. Fortunately, nobody had obtained the master code yet. In addition, the Planning Department could guess the location of the master code thanks to this incident. It was highly likely that the master code was located in the Sinius Principality. The problem was how to find the master code from there.

'Dammit, in this situation I might need to arrange an army in New World.....'

He hadn't expected this situation. But Ha Myung-woo couldn't just throw up his hands and give up. It was different from an army but he had his own secret organization. It was the 2,000 candidates who were top-class in New World. He could rally the candidates to investigate the Sinius Principality and the shields protecting the master code.

"Call the candidates immediately! Focus their attention on the Sinius Principality!"

.....So Hyun-woo was summoned to Global Exos through such a process. Of course, the company couldn't confess the real situation about the master code to the candidates. They had to hide the information while moving the candidates as they wanted. That was the basic policy of the Planning Department. After recalling all that had happened, Ho Myung-hwan started to talk again.

"So we can't assume that this is an error but it might be because of a bug. It seems like some users are deliberately exploiting this bug to cause problems."

"Then shouldn't you investigate the users' account information and take action?"

Hyun-woo couldn't understand what the problem was. In fact, most online games had security programs to hunt down users abusing bugs and track their accounts. This was also clearly stated in the terms and conditions for New World. Ho Myung-hwan quickly misdirected him.

"T-that is.....I can't go into detail about some of our internal problems. Anyway, I called Ark-nim because I wanted to consult about the problem."

“You wanted to consult with me about the problem?”

“Because it can only be solved by users.”

“Huh?”

“I told you, this is because of a bug in the game. The problem is that it isn’t a common bug. To be exact, I’m referring to ‘Code Black items.’

“Code black items? W-what is that?”

“You might know this already but designing and creating a game isn’t easy work. Thousands of experts and many trial and errors were required over many years before the game was born. And there had been dozens of beta versions. During the process of testing the beta versions, many items had been disposed of because of a balance problem. The code black items are those that have been discarded during the testing process.”

This was the excuse that Ha Myung-woo had come up with. Despite the situation, they couldn’t possible give the candidates’ information about the master code. But they couldn’t just tell the candidates to go somewhere without giving any information. They also had to give a light explanation or else the candidates might not be able to solve it. So they had come up with the code black items.

“Currently the programmers have searched the data and confirmed that the code black items hadn’t been deleted. But thousands of items were discarded in the beta versions so there is no guarantee that we can find all the items in a few months.”

“So there are several thousand code black items in New World.....”

“Yes, but we’ve managed to narrow down the search criteria. In order to quickly solve the problem, the Planning Department has decided to send several candidates to the Sinius Principality to gather information. And the same information is been delivered to all the candidates. But the detailed information is only told to special management targets like Ark-nim.”

“I just need to check the information of the code black items?”

“No, you will have to pick up that item.”

“Why don’t you just dispose of it after receiving confirmation?”

“That’s not possible. In this situation, the user didn’t get the item through normal gameplay but through something like jacking. So it is different from a users’ private property. Even if it is obtained in the normal way, it is still an illegal item. So the company can delete it no matter what. But if the user ends up being deleted.....”

This wasn’t really a problem. But Ho Myung-hwan just coughed and continued talking with a crafty look.

“Well, it’s hard to say anything more because of my position. I think that you already understand the situation. I hope the candidates will realize the urgency of this situation and agree to help solve the situation.”

There was a variety of methods used to get the candidates to agree. Ho Myung-hwan looked at Hyun-woo with an expression that seemed to say ‘Please? Won’t you help?’ But Hyun-woo’s reaction was just ‘Ah, really?’ In fact, he didn’t have any reason to agree. Hyun-woo had started playing New World in order to get a job at Global Exos. But that was back in the days when he was cold and hungry. Of course, he still wasn’t rich but he had invested 150,000 into the triangular trade. As the chairman of that business, he could earn tens of thousands of gold in a month. If the business was successful then his dream of being a game tycoon was a dream anymore. So why did he have to worry about a job with an annual salary smaller annual salary? No, he would rather pay more attention to his business then to do a job like this.

‘I have to remain a candidate to receive the monthly salary. But I can’t pretend to do as he asked because Ho Myung-hwan is watching my videos.’

Anyway, there was no reason for Hyun-woo to accept. But Ho Myung-hwan didn’t even flinch at his expression.

“If the situation becomes even worse because of the black code items then we might even have to suspend service.”

“Hik! W-what?”

“Of course, that’s just the worst case situation. That is why we have to request this from the candidates.”

While Hyun-woo took it seriously, in fact it was just a bluff. Millions of users played the game so how could they suspend it for a few months? If that happened then Global Exos would have to pay damage compensation and would suffer astronomical losses. It wasn’t just that. Their external reliability would fall, causing their stocks to plunge. If that happened to a large company then it would have serious ripple effects on the economy. If the person listening was calm then they would realize it wasn’t such an easy thing. However, Hyun-woo’s heart wasn’t calm so he couldn’t question it closely. He had finally gathered all the funds and started his business. Hyun-woo had poured a lot of money into it. But if the game service stopped for several months then Hyun-woo wouldn’t see a single penny. He also wouldn’t be able to obtain money to pay for the costs of living if he couldn’t play the game. So Hyun-woo started to think that this problem also involved him.

‘Now he understands the situation.’

When Hyun-woo’s face stiffened, Ho Myung-hwan realized that he had accepted the situation and smiled before speaking.

“Global Exos is making a collective effort to make sure that situation doesn’t occur. But the solution absolutely requires the help of Ark-nim and the other candidates. We’ll also help so Ark-nim should try your best.”

Hyun-woo exited the meeting room with complex thoughts. He also had some doubts. He understood Ho Myung-hwan’s words. But he wasn’t completely convinced. Global Exos was a large business known worldwide. Even if they couldn’t control what happened in the game, why did they have to ask for help from the candidates? In addition, was it so bad that they would have to suspend service? When considering that Global Exos would receive tremendous damage if service was suspended, it was

difficult to completely accept the talk. Ho Myung-hwan said it was a normal item so the game publishers couldn't get involved. But wasn't that nonsense in a situation where the company could lose billions of won? Global Exos wouldn't be that law abiding.

'It is clearly a situation that can't be told outside the company.'

.....It was natural to reach this conclusion. But there was a problem more important to Hyun-woo. The most worrisome thing was that New World might be temporarily suspended.

'I can earn hundreds of thousands of gold in a few months.'

In other words, Hyun-woo would lose that much gold during those few months of suspension. Hyun-woo had invested everything into the business. That's because he thought he would get back the profit after the triangular trade route was established. But that money was tied to New World so if service was suspended then he wouldn't even get living expenses. And if such a situation persisted for a few months.....

'It will become quite difficult. But.....'

Hyun-woo had thought it was serious when he was called by Ho Myung-hwan. He had entered the meeting room calmly but it had progressed in a direction he hadn't expected. Global Exos said that if they couldn't solve the problem then they would even discontinue service.

'And they want me to go to the Sinius Principality.'

In fact, Ark already intended to go to the Sinius Principality because of the quest. Now Hyun-woo had another purpose after hearing Ho Myung-hwan's words.

'This situation is because of the black code items. These items have the power to disrupt the balance of New World. I don't know what type of item it is and what power it has, but I need to figure out the information!'

This was another reason to fly to the Sinius Principality. If candidates other than Hyun-woo headed to the Sinius Principality then they might be able to solve the problem. If the black code items could affect the balance of the continent then couldn't he get a lot of money for the information? Then it was better to get his hands on the black code items.

'From their words, the company can't forcibly take away the black code items. That means I can bargain with the company. I don't care about the entrance examination anymore so I can extort money from them for the information.'

The gap between the company and Hyun-woo was growing increasingly larger. Anyway, Hyun-woo headed down to the 1st floor in a daze. When he first arrived at the building, his head had been full of Kang Mi-su. Now all he could think about was the previous discussion. He was only thinking about how to make money from the situation that he forgot about Kang Mi-su. Hyun-woo was just thinking to himself as he crossed the lobby. Then he heard someone yelling as he passed in front of the desk.

"It is a request!"

"No.....I mean.....it is difficult....."

'Huh? This voice is Kang Mi-su's?'

Hyun-woo stopped and turned towards the voices. As expected, the person at the desk was Kang Mi-su. And the one making a loud noise was a man in his twenties. The man was squeezing his head and kept on sighing.

'What's going on?'

Hyun-woo couldn't intrude recklessly so he stopped and observed the situation. Then the man made a pleading expression and tried to ask Kang Mi-su again.

"It's a request. Just tell me the telephone number. That will do."

“I’ve already told you. Do I have to say it again? I don’t know information about specific users and even I did, it isn’t possible for me to tell someone else.”

“I understand. I really do. But it is an emergency. If I don’t have that information then millions, no several hundred million won would fly away.”

“I’m really sorry. I can’t help you.”

Kang Mi-su sighed and shook her head. Hyun-woo was able to guess the general situation from listening.

‘What the? Why is he creating a disturbance to ask for another user’s information?’

It was natural for the game publisher not to hand out information about their users. If someone had a grudge in the game then they were so made that they would do something in reality. That was the sort of problems that would occur if the company freely gave out the users’ information. Hyun-woo had experienced this with Andel.

‘I don’t know what’s happening but clearly it isn’t the usual problem. Well, it is unrelated to me and I shouldn’t try to talk to Kang Mi-su with this atmosphere.’

Hyun-woo once again delayed the chance to talk to her. Suddenly the man started to cry and begged.

“I really might die if I don’t get my hands on that person. Please, just that one person. I went to the broadcasting station for that person’s number and was kicked out. This is the only place left.....eh? W-wait?”

The man rubbed his eyes with his sleeves and opened it widely.

“I thought you looked vaguely familiar.....are you Lariette-nim?”

“Huh? You know me?”

“It really is you? No, there’s no doubt!”

The man grabbed Kang Mi-su’s hands and shouted.

“It’s me. I’m Sid. You saw me not long ago in Silvana.”

“S-Sid? The hobbit merchant Sid?”

“Yes, I am that small, cute hobbit Sid!”

Both Hyun-woo and Kang Mi-su’s opened widely. This man was really Sid?

‘Sid? That man is Sid?’

Hyun-woo stared at Sid’s face. Sid spoke with an urgent voice.

“Ah, I can’t believe I met Lariette-nim in a place like this. Thank god! Lariette-nim is familiar with Ark-nim so you can give me his phone number.”

“Ark-nim?”

“Yes, does Lariette-nim know? Ark started the triangular trade not long ago. However the Gold Dream that I left with has flown away! I need to quickly tell Ark-nim! Please give me Ark-nim’s number! I gave my phone number to Ark-nim but I don’t know his.”

“Gold Dream has flown away? What does that mean.....?”

Lariette asked with confusion.

“Wait, explain what you said just now!”

A loud shout rang out across the lobby. Kang Mi-su and the man turned around with surprise and saw Hyun-woo.

“.....Ark-nim?”

“Huck! He is Ark-nim?”

Sid flinched and braced himself. After nodding towards Kang Mi-su in greeting, Hyun-woo grabbed Sid's shoulder tightly and said.

“Yes, I am Ark-nim. What did you say? What happened to Gold Dream?”

Sid stared blankly at Ark's face. Then tears tripped down his face again and he cried out.

“Ark-nim.....help me!