

Ark Vol 20 C 9

Chapter 9

ACT 9 Lobbyist

“It is confirmed that there have been 273 obelisks in Schudenberg Kingdom. We haven’t discovered the identity of the obelisks but it is certain that the mystery monsters are caused by it. They’re far stronger and aggressive than normal monsters so the surrounding villages have received considerable damage.”

“How do we deal with it?”

“The main instruction provided to the Lords of each territory is to protect the citizens and destroy the obelisks. Therefore each territory has received insignificant additional damage and the number of obelisks has decrease by 1/3rd. Yet the overall situation with the obelisks hasn’t had any large results.....”

They were in Selebrid’s royal castle. Various affairs dealing with the kingdom were reported in a serious manner. One of the contents on the list was regarding the black obelisks. The black obelisks had simultaneously appeared in various kingdoms on the same day. The problem wasn’t the black obelisks but the unidentified monsters. The even more disturbing thing was that the monsters from the obelisks resembled monsters from that region’s folklores that had been passed down.

Leviathan was also the same. The monster Leviathan was known among sailors as the ‘monster that tells the end of the world.’ Ark hadn’t understood it when he disposed of Leviathan but when recovering the goods, a black obelisk had been found underwater. The Mermaid Queen said that Leviathan had disappeared a long time ago so the obelisk was probably the reason why it resurrected. The Mermaid Queen also mentioned that the events on the continent were also occurring underwater. Anyway, these events had turned the Schudenberg Kingdom upside down.

Of course, the kingdom always had numerous monsters. But the monsters from the obelisks were different. Furthermore, the monsters over level 100 had high aggressiveness and tended to flock together to attack territories. The balance of the game had completely collapsed. Meanwhile the troops dispatched to each territory and village in the territory had destroyed the obelisk and additional damage was stopped. But not long afterwards, there was a new obelisk so it just led to a vicious cycle. Therefore public sentiment had reached a state of confusion. So an urgent meeting was called to develop a way to calm the turmoil.

“It is unnecessary to say but the people are shaking in fear. It is essential to show a firm attitude to offset that fear. His Majesty the King has declared martial law and regular troops will be sent to take control of all roads and towns.”

“Emergency martial law.....”

The King stroked his beard and sighed. If he declared martial law then the entire kingdom would be prepared to fight. In other words, the areas unrelated to battle would come to a standstill. Declaring martial law would decrease the damage of the obelisks but the backlash couldn't be ignored.

“Does this situation really require martial law?”

A nobleman asked. The person in charge of state affairs stated in a resolute voice.

“Many people don't know this yet but the damage to the western region of Schudenberg is beyond imagination. Especially thanks to the monster called Doppelganger that can eat their victims and then change into their shape. The only way to minimize the damage is to declare martial law and use the checkpoints between each village.”

“But the damage of martial law to the economy.....”

“We have to concentrate on reducing today's damage before worrying about tomorrow's damage.”

“I understand. I will entrust the authority to you.”

The King nodded towards the government official in charge of state affairs. Ark's face hardened at the same time.

‘I'm screwed!’

After receiving the summoning order, he had quickly moved to Selebrid using the Letter Movement. Of course, it wasn't because of loyalty to the King that he flew so quickly. The central subject of this

meeting was the martial law. No, to be exact it was the problem of provisions when martial law was declared.

Martial Law Section 5: The borders will be blocked under martial law. With the checkpoints closed, movement between territories (see exceptions) is strictly prohibited.

The border and territory checkpoints will be closed and movement between territories prohibited! In other words, all types of trade within the kingdom would be forbidden. It was a natural measure when considering the unnatural monsters.....

'I've just recovered Gold Dream and now what is this?'

Ark wasn't happy. He was the Chairman of a business with hundreds of staff (Sailors on Gold Dream, employees of the trading post, etc.) It wasn't easy to lead a business. If there was a standstill then the business would undoubtedly suffer and receive tremendous losses. He still had to pay the monthly salary to the staff as well as rent for the warehouses. Was that all? If he missed the timing of the sale then he would lose tens of thousands of gold. The business would undoubtedly suffer a deficit. Now all trade was blocked in Schudenberg Kingdom. Ark was like a horse that had just started learning to walk only to die.

'I haven't even made 1 gold profit from Gold Dream yet. First it had been swallowed by a monster and I had to pay the costs of repairs and now trade is banned?'

It was to the extent that Ark thought he was cursed.

'I didn't realize the situation was so serious when hearing about it from Global Exos the other day.....'

It wasn't just talk any more. No, now Ark's life was at stake. If this continued then there was no guarantee when the martial law would end. It couldn't be simply resolved by finding the obelisks and destroying them. The reason was that.....

"What is the true identity of the obelisks?"

Somebody asked and a court magician replied.

“We still can’t determine anything about the obelisk’s identity. Our guess is that it is some kind of curse.”

“A curse?”

“That’s right. The cursed obelisk pollutes the surrounding environment and causes ‘illusions’ and ‘memories’ of the evil in this world to be amplified.”

“Illusions or memories? What do you mean?”

“The monsters don’t exist. They are a virtual image created through the excessive fear of the population. This is the part where the curse becomes tricky. In this case, the fear that the people feel are so amplified that the monsters actually become real. And this curse isn’t simply settled by destroying the object.”

“But didn’t the monsters stop appearing when the obelisk was broken?”

“It is a temporary phenomenon. The obelisk is just the vehicle for the curse. Unless the source is destroyed, the obelisks will just be reformed in the future. Well, using a strong artifact with the power of a god will completely destroy the obelisk but that isn’t a viable solution.”

“What should we do then?”

An aristocrat asked with a pain expression. Then the court magician pointed to a northern area of the continent on a map.

“From our advance reports, the source of this originated in the Sinius Principality. Schudenberg has 273 black obelisks. Bristania has a similar number but surprisingly the Sinius Principality has 700 of them. There are so many obelisks in the whole kingdom that it won’t be able to easily be resolved. And.....”

The court magician laid a memory crystal onto the table. A light was emitted from the crystal and a hologram appeared. A heavy moan emerged from the mouth of the aristocrats and the King. The image which appeared was a city immersed in darkness. It wasn't night time. But the entire city was covered in something like a black fog. The city covered by darkness was being attacked by a huge number of monsters. The guards swung their weapons to block but the attacks were relentless. In the end, the monsters invaded the city causing flames to rise and a slaughter to occur everywhere in the city. It was a hell like scene.

"This is the current situation of the Sinius Principality. It's only been a few days and the deformed monsters had already taken over 60% of the Sinius Principality. The areas taken by the monsters are covered in a black fog and the environment is rotting. Our studies showed us that the black fog is the root of the curse produced by the black obelisk. The problem is that the black fog is expanding and pushing close to the borders of the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms."

"What the hell is going on? I've lived for 60 years and I've never seen or heard of such a thing!"

A nobleman exclaimed with a confused expression. The court magician looked at the King and seemed to ask something with his eyes. The King nodded and the court magician took a deep breath before opening his mouth.

"No, this is not the first time this happened. It occurred a long time ago but there remains a record of this phenomenon. Hundreds of years ago.....when the Dark Lord descended to earth."

"W-what?"

The nobles burst out with surprise. Their faces were enveloped with shock. After a moment, a nobleman asked carefully.

".....D-did you say the Dark Lord?"

"That's right."

The court magician replied calmly.

“Are you saying that the Dark Lord has been resurrected?”

“That’s not it. If the Dark Lord was resurrected then the situation wouldn’t end here. The darkness would’ve already spread across the whole continent. Just like in the past when the continent was seized by darkness. We’ve checked and that isn’t happening. Judging from the current situation, this is just the precursor to the Dark Lord’s resurrection. In other words, someone is trying to revive the Dark Lord.”

Fear appeared in the eyes of the nobility. None of the nobility here had experienced the Dark Century. Yet the people of the continent grew up hearing about the Dark Century. The Dark Lord was like an existence of fear to them. After he finished all that he had to say, the court magician stepped back. Then the King opened his mouth again.

“Now you’ve realized the seriousness of the problem. If this situation isn’t settled then it would become even worse. If the Dark Lord is resurrected.....”

The King let out a heavy sigh.

“.....The current domestic situation is serious enough to declare an emergency martial law. If the Dark Lord is resurrected then this situation will worsen. This is a life and death situation for the whole continent so I quickly made contact with the King of Bristania and reached a swift agreement. We will send an expedition to the Sinus Principality.”

“Expedition? From both the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms?”

“Yes. The primary objective is to stop the darkness pressing against both kingdoms. And the second objective is to solve the problem attacking the Sinus Principality. I think there is no one who will oppose this decision.”

All the nobles nodded along with the King. It concerned the fate of the continent so how could they object?

‘That’s right. Isn’t this the corresponding scenario that Ho Myung-hwan talked about?’

When Ark first heard about the situation at Global Exos, Ho Myung-hwan told him that New World would respond to the situation with more scenarios. NPCs dispatching an expeditionary army were also part of that scenario.

‘But what if the expedition fails?’

In fact, Ark had thought Ho Myung-hwan’s ‘in the worst case scenario there is a possibility of service being suspended’ was just an exaggeration. Why would they stop a game that millions of users played because of a few bugs? However, he now knew it wasn’t an exaggeration after participating in the meeting. If the expedition failed then the continent would be covered in darkness like the Sinus Principality. Many cities and villages would be captured by monsters. If that happened then users won’t be able to play the game normally anymore. They wouldn’t be able to receive quest or even rest at a village. Furthermore, level 200~300 monsters appeared in a level 100 area so they couldn’t even hunt properly. Wasn’t it natural that New World’s service would have to be suspended?

‘Then what about all the money I invested in Ark’s Corporation?’

The NPC villages would disappear and he wouldn’t be able to trade. If the Dark Lord was resurrected than Ark’s investment of 150,000 gold would fly away.

‘I don’t know whether the Dark Lord is a devil or not but I can’t leave it alone!’

If his business which he suffered so much to build was destroyed then wasn’t the devil his adversary? It was absolutely unacceptable. Saving the continent? He would’ve left it to the ones who wanted to become heroes. But if it was to keep his own property? He had to absolutely obstruct the Dark Lord’s resurrection in order to defend his business. Ark’s head instantly recognized the Dark Lord as his biggest and worst enemy. Then the King opened his mouth again.

“I have two reasons for holding this meeting. The first reason was to gain your consent for the martial law and the other reason is to appoint a commander to lead the expedition.”

The aristocrats started buzzing after hearing the King’s words. After a long period of discussion, the candidates were narrowed down to 3 nobles. The 1st was an old general known for his military exploits in Nagaran, Kuran. The other person was Earl Ballen in charge of the royal guard. And to Ark’s surprise, the last candidate was Viscount Haverstein, the Lord of Jackson.

“The previous Lord of Jackson was a war hero with various achievements in the Continent War. Viscount Haverstein who succeeded him has managed to sweep up a large number of monsters in his territory as well as subjugating the band of thieves that had been causing a headache for ages, and various other military achievements. This situation is also unprecedented for our generation. I think it would be better to have an unconventional young Commander than a stereotype.”

Marquise Halben spoke skillfully and eloquently.

‘Lord Jackson is even recognized by other nobles.’

Ark looked at Haverstein after hearing Marquis Halben speak. But Haverstein was just making a bitter expression.

“Hmm Lord Kuran, Ballen and Haverstein.....all of them are great knights. But it isn’t possible to have 3 wonderful knights as commanders. Fortunately, there is still time before the expedition sets off so we can discuss the matter two days later. The nobles can discuss it during the intervening days and make a decision before the meeting.”

The King finished before getting up and leaving. The aristocrats immediately separated and began to discuss the contents of the meeting. As expected, Lord Haverstein was surrounded by 10 nobles the moment the meeting ended.

“Lord-nim.”

“Oh, Ark. You came as well. You left for an adventure so I thought you wouldn’t come.....”

“I received a notification and hurried here. An important affair is happening in the kingdom so I can’t pretend ignorance.”

To be exact, he wanted to prevent the martial law which would involve trade being banned. But the martial law wasn’t something Ark could stop. He was discouraged thinking about the huge loss that would occur in the future but now he had to think about the expedition. Ark dimly thought that the

expedition was a way to solve his problem. When Ark approached, Lord Haverstein excused himself from the other nobles and exited the group.

“Did Jackson receive any damage?”

“Fortunately the damage isn’t as serious as other territories.”

A fast response. As expected, he truly had the qualifications necessary to be the commander of the expedition forces.

“By the way, I truly hadn’t expected that you would be nominated as a candidate.”

“Is that so?”

Lord Haverstein replied lightly. Ark had a reason for thinking that.

‘He still seems young to me.’

Haverstein had only been 15 years old when Ark first encountered him. It had been 2 years since then. Time sped 3 times faster for NPCs than users so 6 years had passed. Haverstein was already a youth in his twenties. His physique was sturdy and his body had become bigger than Ark’s. But Ark still had the memory of his childlike appearance and kept on thinking of Haverstein as a child.

“Congratulations. To be nominated as a candidate for the commander position at such a young age, doesn’t that mean that the kingdom is recognizing your abilities?”

“That’s not necessarily the answer.”

Just like when he was first nominated, Haverstein gave a bitter smile as he replied.

“I’ve been nominated as a candidate because there are a lot of civil servants in Marquis Halben’s faction. Although they are dissatisfied because I don’t have as much battlefield experience, they have no other choice.”

“Huh? Marquis Halben’s faction?”

“Hmm, of course you wouldn’t know about it.”

Haverstein thought for a bit before saying.

“It is better that you know this. The Schudenberg aristocrats are actually split into 3 factions. The head of one faction, Duke Sarkin was the one who recommended Kuran while the one who recommended Ballen was Marquis Daltin and I was recommended by Marquis Halben.”

In modern times, a faction was like a political party. Unlike modern congressmen who could withdraw from their political party, it was almost permanent once a Lord entered a faction. No, it was ordinary for the next generation to be raised in the same faction. Because the most important virtues of an aristocrat were honour and trust. An aristocrat in Schudenberg kingdom who didn’t belong to a faction would find it difficult to exert any power.

“The three factions are always politically opposed but if a danger appears that risks the Royal Palace then they will unit. That is the reason why the factions didn’t oppose the martial law or the expedition force. But the problem of the commander candidate is different.”

The fate of the Schudenberg kingdom depended on the expedition force. If the expedition failed then everything was over. But if the expedition achieved their goal and saved the kingdom and continent then the commander would undeniably a hero. That was the reason why each faction nominated a different candidate. If that hero belonged to their faction then they would have a political advantage.

‘Whether a game or reality, all politicians are the same.’

Ark looked around at the aristocrats. The factions were fighting while there was a chance the continent could perish? Wasn’t it similar to the politicians who kept on arguing during the IMF crisis that Korea suffered? Well, Ark had more reason to be worried about the crisis than the nobles.....

“I’m just a mere decoration for them to arrange.”

It was the reason why Haverstein smiled bitterly when he was nominated. However, Ark shook his head and spoke firmly.

“That’s not right. I’ve known Lord-nim since you were young so I know better than anyone. I don’t know what kind of person Kuran and Ballen are, but I think Lord-nim is the right person for this position. I will definitely be supporting Lord-nim.”

“I’m thankful for your words.”

Haverstein then looked at Ark with serious eyes.

“Despite my sense of humiliation, I also desire the spot of commander. This is a chance to make my family shine. It will certainly not be easy. But if you are near me to help then I have confidence that I can accomplish it. Just like you know me, I also know what a great warrior you are.”

“If you are the commander then of course I will risk my life to help.”

Ark answered. There was nothing Ark wanted more. This expedition was a collective effort of the Schudenberg troops. The King ordered this mission directly so there would be various quests and rewards associated with it. Then wasn’t it best to have a high intimacy with the NPC Commander of the expedition? Wouldn’t Ark be given more opportunities than other people?

‘But that isn’t the important thing!’

There was a chance that Ark’s Corporation would become bankrupt. However, if Haverstein became the commander of the military expedition then there was a way to solve that problem. Ark got the idea after hearing about the expedition force.

‘For the sake of Ark’s Corporation, I have to ask Haverstein to become the commander no matter what! I have to become his cheering squad.....’

Ark was thinking that when he was interrupted.

“I’m thankful but it is highly unlikely that I will become the commander.”

“Huh? Why is that?”

“Haven’t you noticed? You’re strangely innocent in some matters. In fact, today’s meeting was a type of play. 3 candidates were nominated but everybody already knows who will be the commander will be Lord Kuran. The reason is simple. It is because the forces that support Duke Sarkin are the largest. Lord Kuran also has no blemishes so there is no reason for him not to win.”

Ark finally understood the general situation after hearing Haverstein’s words. Despite the factions nominating 3 factions, the winner had already been decided. So the King ended the meeting and allowed more time to give the appearance that Marquise Daltin and Halben’s opinions were being considered.

‘Damn! What the? It’s like that?’

Ark bit his lips. If that happened then wasn’t it the end for Ark’s plan? While Ark was busy thinking, Haverstein pointed towards Kuran.

“But I am a little anxious. Duke Sarkin....um, I shouldn’t say this but.....he already controls most of the power in the kingdom so if his candidate becomes the commander and succeeds.....”

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben having a conversation with other nobles and sighed.

“The only way is to have Marquis Daltin withdraw his candidate Lord Ballen and push the one Marquis Halben recommended. But it won’t be easy.”

Ark’s eyes lit up at that moment. In fact, this was the first time he had encountered the factions. But now he could imagine the ratio of the factions.

'If Marquis Daltin pushes Marquis Halben's candidate then they can prevent Duke Sarking from winning. Based on what I heard, I can conclude that Marquis Halben's faction consisted of 30%, Marquis Daltin 30% and Duke Sarkin 40%. Either Lord Halben could give up and push Daltin's candidate or vice versa. So there is a chance Haverstein can become the commander!'

Of course, like Haverstein said it wasn't easy. The relations between the political factions were deeper and more complicated than it seemed. It would be difficult for the factions to give up their own candidates in order to unite. Ark who had just become an aristocrat couldn't understand the secret strife between factions which continued for hundreds of years but he could profit off it.

'I don't understand but there is still something I can try!'

The fate of who would become the expedition commander depended on this. Ark started to desperately think of a plan.

"Are you Baron Ark?"

Daltin looked at Ark with an arrogant expression. Ark paid a visit to Marquis Daltin's mansion the evening before the aristocrat meeting would occur again.

"I've heard about some of your actions. But why did you happen to visit?"

"I know that I am a novice aristocrat who has just been knighted. There haven't been any chances in the meantime but now that I'm in Selebrid, I can finally visit the high ranking nobility and greet them. If you're not busy then can we talk for a bit?"

"Hrmm.....greetings?"

Daltin carefully looked at Ark. His eyes suddenly moved to a female nearby and he asked.

“We can talk. But who is this lady next to you?”

“My mother.”

“Mother?”

“You might be tricked by her overly young appearance but she is actually an ahjumma (female version of ajusshi i.e. aunt).....ouch!”

So-mi pinched Ark’s side because of his playful introduction. After her appearance changed to that of a teenage, her behaviour had seemed to become increasingly more childish. Anyway, Daltin seemed to lose his wariness after seeing that actions between mother and child.

“I’ve heard that foreigners don’t age but I am once again amazed after seeing your mother. The grown up son looked older than the mother. If some secret to becoming younger exists then I will offer my entire fortune to learn it.”

“Becoming younger?”

“Not for me but for my wife.”

“You must love your wife very much.”

“I’m not ashamed to openly admit it.”

Daltin replied without hesitation. So-mi’s eyes sparkled with admiration and she said.

“So Marquis-nim is a romantic. How wonderful. The one who receives the Marquis’ love never needs to worry. Is there a chance I can meet her?”

“I’ve been waiting for that. In fact, one of my pleasures is to boast about my wife to guests.”

Marquis Daltin smiled softly and ordered a servant to bring his wife. After a while.....

‘T-this is the same as a thief!’

Those words rose in his throat. Judging from his appearance, Daltin was approximately 50~60 years old. But the Marchioness who appeared with the servant was only 17~18 years old. If he guessed correctly, there was at least a 30~40 year age gap.

‘No wonder why he wants to become younger.’

“Please tell me. I want to meet a husband who loves me as much as yours does.”

“You have to find a good man.”

Daltin winked lightly towards So-mi. Daltin was an old man with the personality of a Casanova. Despite that minor issue, his overall impression was quite good. He seemed to have a great sense of humour after seeing his reactions to So-mi. But that was just his superficial appearance. Daltin was the leader of one of the factions in Schudenberg Kingdom. He wasn’t an insignificant rival.

“Since you came all the way here, did you have some business?”

As expected, Daltin’s atmosphere completely changed when the two of them moved to the adjoining room. He changed from a neighbour’s grandfather to a politician.

“I previously mentioned that I already heard your name. Well, it is the first time a foreigner has been appointed as an aristocrat in Schudenberg so many people are curious. And they also know the decisive person who allowed you to become an aristocrat. Vicsount Haverstein.”

Daltin mentioned in a quiet tone.

“If you know Viscount Haverstein then why would you come to the head of a different faction?”

“I’m still not a part of a faction.”

Ark answered lightly and Daltin’s eyes turned cold as ice.

“I hate ungrateful humans the most.”

If Haverstein was the one who made him a noble then of course he should join the same faction. Despite being the head of another faction, he was still dissatisfied with that behaviour. Ark answered with a laugh.

“That makes sense. And I’m not that type of person either. If I receive a benefit then I should repay that person. That is why I decided to visit the Marquis.”

“I understand the general principles.”

Daltin laughed. He finally understood why Ark visited based on his answer.

“Your answer is honestly not satisfying. But if you came to my faction then it would be a few times more unpleasant. Yes. It’s not bad. I’ll listen to your talk.”

Daltin nodded and lifted his cup of tea. He closed his eyes to relish the fragrance of the tea before asking.

“Yes, what can you give to me?”

If he wanted Daltin to push Haverstein as a candidate then a price needed to be paid. Ark was aware of that but the timing made him nervous. Daltin’s voice was really casual. What did he expect? Well, it turned out like this so there was no reason for Ark to hesitate.

“What do you want?”

“100,000 gold right now.”

Ark’s face hardened at Daltin’s words. Once again, the problem of whether Haverstein became the commander or not had his corporation at stake. No, it might be possible to get more benefits than expected as well as save his business from the crisis.

‘There is 20,000 gold left in the investment fund and I’ve obtained 25,000 gold the other day. I have to accomplish it even if I have to use all the 45,000 gold!’

Ark had been prepared for that much before visiting Daltin. Yet Daltin had requested more than twice that money. After starting his business, there was no way Ark had that type of money. When Ark couldn’t answer, Daltin laughed and added.

“Before you visited, a messenger for Duke Sarkin arrived and gave me a letter. It said that he would give me 100,000 gold if I supported him. If it continues like this than Kuran will become the expedition commander. Duke Sarkin only negotiated with me to gain the majority and show off his power. So your opponent is someone who offered 100,000 gold.”

“.....Did you accept?”

“I refused.”

Ark was relieved at his words. If Daltin joined Sarkin then there was nothing he could do anymore. On the other hand, he wondered why Daltin refused.

“Why?”

“The government affairs aren’t that simple right now. Right now it isn’t important to get things immediately. If I move too lightly then the chance would be lost and misfortune might even occur. You’re a person who obtained a territory with your own hands so you should understand my words.”

Ark couldn't understand all of Daltin's words. But one thing was evident.

".....So you can't accept my request."

"It is like that."

Daltin nodded.

"But I don't dislike you. Although Lord Haverstein belongs to the faction of Marquis Halben, he is the paragon of a noble youth. He isn't the type to compel someone to pay back a favour. So he isn't the one to send you here. Did you decide this by yourself without telling your friend?"

"That is correct."

"You must think highly of him to come all the way here. Aside from you, a lot of people also really covet Haverstein. I don't think it is bad that you have a close friendship with him. If the situation wasn't like this then I would help you."

"Don't say that now."

Ark laughed bitterly and muttered. Despite his praise of Ark and Haverstein, Daltin had no intention of pushing another candidate. Ark was sighing when he suddenly remembered something.

"I've met Marquis Daltin and learnt a lot. Can I ask one more question?"

"Just say it."

"How do I persuade a stubborn person?"

“Hahaha, you’re asking me? You really aren’t ordinary. Okay, I’ll tell you. How to persuade a person. You have to gather the maximum amount of information about your opponent first. Once you’ve grasped the weak point of the opponent then they can’t refuse. You can then begin ‘negotiations’ after that.”

“The weakness of the opponent.....? Isn’t that slightly cowardly?”

When Ark made a bothered expression, Daltin shook his head and smiled.

“Unlike the battlefield, using those methods in a negotiation isn’t cowardly. You have to use every method possible to persuade the person. This is the definition of negotiation.”

“So if someone discovered your weak point then you wouldn’t condemn them? You won’t get angry and called them cowardly?”

Daltin firmly answered Ark’s question.

“Angry? If a person really drove me into a difficult situation then I would praise them.”

At that moment Ark’s eyes lit up. It was the answer Ark wanted to hear from Daltin.

“Then I’ll have another cup of tea.”

Ark smiled and lifted his cup. Daltin looked puzzled for a moment. But Daltin had fallen into a trap that he couldn’t escape. 10 minutes passed like that. The door suddenly opened and the Marchioness ran in.

“Honey, it is a request!”

When his wife approached, Daltin’s firm face instantly changed. Daltin seemed to have forgotten that Ark was looking and nodded absent-mindedly.

“Oh, what is it? I’ll do whatever I can to fulfil your request.”

“Please recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander of the military expedition!”

“Hohoho, I got it. I shall do as you want....ack! W-what?”

“Recommend Viscount Haverstein as the commander. It shouldn’t be too difficult for you.”

“T-that.....”

Daltin stuttered and turned his eyes towards Ark. They seemed to be saying ‘what the hell did you do?’ The Marchioness didn’t know anything about politics. Daltin also never talked politics with her. Yet she suddenly wanted Daltin to recommend Haverstein as the commander after Ark’s visit. It couldn’t just be a coincidence.

‘Huhuhu, you’re the one who said you didn’t care about an attack.’

Ark ignored Daltin’s eyes and looked into the distance. That’s right. Ark was the reason why the Marchioness requested such a thing from Daltin. It was his idea in order to achieve a negotiation. Ark had acted like he wanted to convince Daltin. That was in order to earn time for So-mi’s operation. How did So-mi convince the Marchioness in such a short time?

‘Marquis Daltin, you’ve now been trapped.’

He had to either persuade Daltin or Sarkin in order to make Haverstein the commander. And there was a reason why Ark selected Daltin. It wasn’t just because Duke Sarkin’s candidate was the one most likely to win.

‘Unlike Duke Sarkin, Marquis Daltin has an obvious weakness!’

The Marchioness nagging Daltin right now was his weakness. According to his research, Daltin was a respected noble. The only time he lost his sense of reason was when it related to his wife. Then wouldn’t it be 100 times easier to capture his wife? So Ark had turned his investigation from Daltin to his wife. And this morning he realized that the Marchioness had a princess like personality. Not just her

behaviour but thousands of gold were spent on clothes, jewellery and all kind of items to decorate her rooms.

‘Clothes and decor.....’

So-mi instantly floated into Ark’s head at that time. So-mi had been steadily selling the costumes she made at Ark’s Store. The goods she created with ‘Embroidery’ hadn’t been seen before in New World so they flew off the shelves. There was a backlog of orders for a least a few months!

‘This is it!’

There was no way he could give her jewels or precious metals that she didn’t have before. But So-mi’s clothes are things that the Marchioness had never seen. He could attract the Marchioness’ attention using this material.

“Omo, this room is very pretty.”

“Is that so? It took me 1 year to decorate this room.”

The Marchioness immediately puffed up when So-mi complimented the room. Then So-mi pretended to contemplate for a moment before saying.

“But it’s too bad.”

“Huh? What is?”

“The chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, the tables, furniture and beds are really wonderful and full of dignity.”

“Indeed. I spent 100,000 gold decorating this place.”

“But.....the curtains and table cloths.....”

“Aren’t they all top grade items?”

“I’m aware of that. But the Marchioness should know that just because it is expensive doesn’t mean that it is good. The design and colour doesn’t emit the full dignity. I’m also interested in this area.....ah, do you want to look at this?”

So-mi took out some fabrics from her bag. She compared the fabrics against the bed and table before speaking again.

“How is it? Doesn’t this fabric look a lot better?”

The Marchioness was caught the moment So-mi showed her the fabric samples. It was an inevitable result. So-mi acted like it was a simple fabric but it was actually a special material that Ark spent thousands of gold on. Various rare materials he found in dungeons like the ‘Golden Spider Web’ and the ‘Unicorn’s Mane’ he requested from Roco were used as embroidery materials. That alone already made it a rare decoration. But was that all? So-mi had looked through various embroidery books and created an amazing design on the material. Currently all the items in the room were decorated with the image of a god. But So-mi’s embroidery had a simple yet stunning contemporary design. It was a pretty and rare decoration so of course the Marchioness’ heart would be captured.

“T-this is the first time I’ve seen something like this. Where did you buy something like this?”

“I didn’t buy it.”

“You didn’t buy it?”

“This is something I created.”

“Really? Then could you possible make me curtains and other decorations that suit my room? It doesn’t matter how much money it costs. This might be rude but please.”

“I don’t think it’s rude. Since it is my hobby then I would also like to decorate your room. I’ve been allowed to see a room as nice as this so I would like to make you the best products. But.....”

So-mi sighed with a pained expression.

“I’m not an expert in decorating rooms. In order to create a design that best suits the room, I will have to stay here and work. Otherwise I won’t be able to create my best products. But I have to leave for a different region soon.”

“T-that.....”

The Marchioness had a disappointed expression on her face. She was so frustrated that she even felt like crying.

“Can’t you somehow stay here and create it for me? You will have a lot of fun with me. You can also teach me some embroidery.”

“I would really like that too. But the reason I came here today is because my son wanted to ask your husband to support Viscount Haverstein in becoming the commander of the expedition. So if he fails then we will move to another place.....”

“Commander of the expedition?”

At that moment, the eyes of the Marchioness gleamed. Then she covered her mouth politely and laughed loudly.

“Hohoho, what is that? Was that the problem? Just leave it to me. I will talk to me Honey. If my Honey agrees then it won’t be a problem! If Viscount Haverstein becomes the expedition commander then will unni accept my request?”

So.....the Marchioness stuck to Daltin.

“I promised already. Does Honey want to make me a liar?”

“N-no, that’s not.....government affairs.....my guest.....”

“I don’t know! If you don’t agree then I’ll die!”

“Don’t even joke about that. I’ll think positively about it.”

“You’re trying to trick me again by using ambiguous words!”

“That’s not it. I’ll think about it but I need to finish talking to my guest first.”

“Are you sure? You promise?”

The Marchioness kissed Daltin and exited the room. Daltin wiped off the kiss mark and stared at Ark.

“You.....what did you do to my wife?”

“Didn’t you say you would never get angry?”

Ark smiled and replied. Daltin finally perceived that he had fallen into a trap. Everything had been planned from the beginning. Drawing Daltin to another room while leaving So-mi along with his wife, everything was Ark’s plan.....

Obviously Daltin was angry. Daltin had been tricked by Ark and was the opponent in his negotiations. He was furious but he couldn’t say anything after the words he previously said. It would hurt his pride to admit it. Daltin muttered in a deep voice.

“The person I thought was innocent is actually a snake.”

“I’ve often heard that.”

“Okay. Then I’ll ask again. What can you give me?”

Daltin asked with a disgusted expression and Ark laughed impudently. It was the same question but it was different from before. He didn’t accept before but this time there was no choice but to accept. So he could negotiate directly.

“My gratitude and respect.”

“What?”

Daltin’s face hardened. But after a short moment, he abruptly laughed and said.

“Hahaha, your gratitude and respect is worth more than 100,000 gold?”

“That’s correct. There’s no doubt.”

“Well.....I really can’t hate a guy like you.”

Then a message window appeared in front of Ark.

* Art of Communication has increased by 20. -Political Power: Political Power has increased by 100.

The message appearing was a sign that Daltin raised the white flag.

Buzz.

The next day the conference room was in a state of chaos. It was because Daltin had withdrawn his candidate and supported Haverstein.

“All 20 aristocrats who follow me will recommend Viscount Haverstein as the expedition commander!”

Confusion spread on all the faces of the nobles in attendance. Even the King couldn't hide his feelings. If Daltin who had 30% of the support backed Haverstein then the outcome was obvious. 60% of the nobles would be supporting Haverstein as a candidate.

“Your Majesty, do you have anything to say?”

Daltin tilted his head to one side and asked quietly. The King shook his head.

“Ah, no. Good. If the majority of the nobles recommend it then I can entrust the position of expedition commander to Lord Haverstein. Come here and receive your appointment.”

“Huh? Ah, yes!”

While Haverstein was being appointed by the King, the others were chatting amongst themselves. Anyway, Haverstein was now the commander of the expedition force. At the same time, he received the authority to decide everything that related to the expedition. Ark immediately headed towards Haverstein with a large grin after the appointment was finished.

“Congratulations.”

“W-what is happening.....?”

“It's simple. Marquis Daltin recognized that you are the right person for the position.”

Ark said. At that moment, Marquis Daltin approached while accompanied by Marquis Halben who was in charge of Haverstein's faction. Haverstein immediately spoke to Daltin.

"Marquis Daltin, your recommendation....."

"Yes. I've already discussed with Marquis Halben about the problem."

"Huh? What does that mean.....?"

Haverstein looked at Marquis Halben who immediately answered.

"It's not important. Lord Daltin was just making a recommendation about the merchant who will be in charge of munitions supply for this expedition. I am thankful for his recommendation and agreed. That's all."

Haverstein frowned at Marquis Halben's answer. Haverstein was upright and honourable so it was difficult for him to accept a backroom deal like this.

"Marquis Halben."

Haverstein sent Halben a heavy look. Then Halben waved his hand and said.

"Just listen. The person Lord Daltin recommending to be in charge of munitions supply is Lord Ark."

"Huh? Ark? Lord Ark?"

Haverstein looked at Ark with perplexed eyes. That's right. This was the reason why he wanted to make Haverstein the expedition commander. Currently Schudenberg Kingdom was under martial law so trade was impossible. If the war went on for a long time and it wasn't possible to trade then Ark's business would become bankrupt. But there was one way he could still trade. It was to supply the military goods for the expedition. The expedition from the Schudenberg Kingdom would be on a massive scale. What

would happen if he had a monopoly on all the goods the expedition needed? He would obtain a huge income. And the authority to appoint the goods supplier belonged to the expedition commander. So Ark wanted to make Haverstein the commander and obtain the monopoly contract. But while he was persuading Marquis Daltin, Ark realized that he had overlooked one thing. It was Haverstein's personality.

'Haverstein is an upright man. If he was working along then of course he would give the exclusive contract to me. But it is different if it related to the Kingdom. Even if I present a lower price than the other candidates, he has a personal relation to me so he can't easily accept.'

In fact, there was one way Ark could win over the other candidates. Ark had the craftsmen from the raccoon clan. Naturally they didn't make things for free. However Ark could obtain the items with a 20~30% discount. Since the military supplies would have a huge volume, the large order meant he could get a 30~40% discount. It would be expensive but still cheaper than other suppliers. Yet there was the chance that the strong-minded Haverstein wouldn't accept because of his close friendship with Ark. Duke Sarkin and his candidate Lord Kuran had already made some arrangements with the merchant's guild in Selebrid.

'But it will still be no use if Haverstein becomes the commander.....'

Ark worried for a while before deciding to use Daltin. Thus Daltin recommended Ark for the position. Then the personal friendship with Haverstein wouldn't matter. Because the recommendation came from Daltin. If that reason disappeared then there was no reason for Haverstein to not nominate Ark as the supplier. Haverstein also sensed a bit of this situation. Haverstein smiled subtly and nodded.

"I understand. Lord Ark, prepare the necessary data and see me at the base tomorrow."

"Here it is."

Ark immediately handed him a thick form. There were dozens of raccoon villages in the Underground World. He also had goods from the Baran clan in Seutandal. And he planned to use the triangular trade route of Seutandal, Silvana and Lancel to circulate the goods. There was also a price list of the required goods. Haverstein could only laugh after he was handed the documents.

"There really is no one who is a match for you."

“I want to help the expedition both physically and mentally.”

“It really feels like you are a thousand man army.”

Shortly afterwards, Haverstein formally gave Ark the official rights as the munitions supplier.

-Schudenberg Royal Contract

The supplying of the necessary war materials for the expedition army that is leaving for the Sinus Principality will be entrusted to Ark.

“That’s it, I did it!”

Ark cheered as he grabbed the gold coloured agreement. Now Ark’s Corporation was the official supplier of the expedition army. Like he always said, a crisis was an opportunity. It was only a few days ago that Ark had been on the verge of bankruptcy. But Ark had used various creative tricks to turn the crisis to his benefit. If the expedition force achieved its aim then Ark’s Corporation would be a unique existence in the Schudenberg Kingdom.

“I will be rich as long as I stop the Dark Lord!”

And the next day in Schudenberg Kingdom no there was an announcement throughout the Kingdom.

-The Expedition Army’s Crusade

Currently the Sinius Principality is being threatened by unidentified monsters. If this evil is allowed to gain more power than the continent will suffer a terrible fact, just like a long time ago. Therefore the Schudenberg King along with the Bristania King will be rallying an expedition to fight against this evil.

.....All brave warriors!

Join this crusade to protect our world and become brave heroes! All warriors who participate in this expedition will be paid special compensation according to their achievement.

'Recruitment applicants.'

So the crusade was declared with New World's fate at stake.