

Ark Vol 22 C 2

Chapter 2

ACT 2 War to Secure the Sacred Blood

“There is no doubt that we managed to capture Pabiun Fortress thanks to you and the special forces.”

Pabiun Fortress had finally been captured and arrangements after the battle were being cleared up. Haverstein embraced Ark and said those words. Then a message window floated in front of Ark.

-The sub quest has been completed.

The Schudenberg expedition has been stuck at Pabiun Fortress for a long time and had been unable to enter the Sinius Principality. You and the special forces have risked your lives to accomplish this mission and managed to capture Pabiun Fortress as well as passage into the Sinius Principality.

+ Commander Additional Compensation: Achievement +1000

“Ohhh 3000 achievement points!”

The eyes of the special forces members sparkled as the quest was completed. In the battlefield it was common to gain only 5~15 achievements yet they had earned a few hundred times that from one quest. But this was the laws of the world. The infantry killing dozens of enemies couldn't change the landscape of the war. However, the special forces penetrated the enemy's camp and changed the landscape of the war with one explosion. It was natural for the special forces who risked their lives to gain more achievements. Once again, if they hadn't blown up the Black Obelisk Forest and obtained the Ark of Creation then Pabiun Fortress wouldn't have been able to be captured.

Of course, finding the Ark of Creation would've impossible if he hadn't begun the operation. Even the users who fought and died received between 2,500~3,000 achievement points. So the special forces had collected achievements a lot more quickly. As the commander of the special forces, Ark gained an

additional 1,000 achievement. He also played an active role as the supplier so he had scraped together 6,000 achievements.

‘In fact, I had to give up a certain degree.....’

His saliva dried up as he confirmed the achievements. According to how much achievements he accumulated, the compensation for the would change. However, the compensation for this wasn't just in the game. Ha Myung-woo from Global Exos had formally declared on TV that there was a huge reward for this war against the demons. The total prize pool was worth 10 billion won!

If they received first place in either the Schudenberg or Bristania expedition then the reward received was 300 million won. But there were at least 30,000 users participating in each expedition. In other words, the competitive rate was 30,000 to 1. It was like winning the lottery so Ark hadn't expected to get it from the beginning. But that changed once the war actually began.

‘Hopefully.....’

He had started to think like that. Besides, this event also had a higher cash prize than receiving the no.1 rank in achievements. It was finding something hidden in New World. Surprisingly the reward prize was 1 billion won. And that was Ark's target.

‘Ordinary users will have no idea what ‘that’ thing was. I am the same but I have a lot more information than they do. That is enough for me to aim for it.’

That's right. It was the hidden secret behind the event! Ark had already heard about it from Global Exos. It was the ‘black code’ items that Ho Myung-hwan talked about. After his encounter with An del and Alan, Ark had more information about other the black code items than other users. So Ark had decided to give up on earning achievements when the event started.

‘But the situation has changed. The prizes for the 1st ranked achievement and finding the black code item is separate. Doesn't it mean that I could possibly receive both prizes? That is 300 million won for the achievements and 1 billion won for finding the target item. In other words, it is possible to gain 1.3 billion won from this event!’

1.3 billion won! It was money that a mere citizen like Ark had difficulty imagining. It was money that was difficult to imagine in reality. The thought made his heart jump like crazy. But Ark shook off the thought with a shake of his head. In the present situation, it was possible for Ark to aim for both prizes. But it was just an aim. The possibility of it being achieved was very low.

.....The Demonic War was just beginning. No one knew what would happen in the future. There was no guarantee about what could happen so wasn't it better for him to focus on things that would actually earn money?

'It doesn't change the fact that it is still like winning the lottery.'

Ark escaped from the delusion of 1.3 billion won and started putting things in order. He had settled the , the and the quests. He had gained 4,000 achievements, the legendary sword Shining Darkness and the final piece of his set equipment, the White Tiger's Cloak. It was severing three things with one stroke! But the biggest harvest was.....

"You said you would explain later. Who are those people in hoods and the beasts? No. What is the box that they brought which gave Lariette miraculous powers?"

Haverstein asked at that moment with curious eyes. It was the miraculous power which overturned the situation where the expedition was threatened! As the commander of the military expedition, Haverstein was naturally curious. Ark had expected this question and explained straightforwardly.

"It is called the Ark of Creation and it has the power of the Creator sealed inside it. The chest belonged to the 7 heroes during the Dark Century and the entrusted it to the prophet clan to protect. The demons actually flocked here in order to steal the power within the Ark of Creation."

"In order to steal the power within the Ark of Creation?"

"That is the reason but....."

Ark hesitated and recalled the description that a prophet gave him in Shangri-La. The power of 'Sanctuary' activated by the Ark of Creation clearly proved deadly to the demonic monsters. However, they didn't want to steal the ark just because of the threat.

“The Creator made darkness as well as light. It is both good and evil. Then if a Saint Knight used the ark then it would spread a blessing but if a Ruin Knight used it then it would spread a curse. If a Saint Knight obtains the ark then it would display great power against the darkness. But if a Ruin Knight obtains it then conversely it will show great strength against the light.”

The power of the Ark of Creation had already been verified.

“If the demons get their hands on the Ark of Creation.....”

Haverstein murmured in a trembling voice at the fearful thought. Then he asked again after a short time.

“Then the only one who can use the Ark of Creation is Lariette?”

“Yes, on our side only Lariette can use it.”

Ark looked at Lariette and answered. In fact, Lariette had changed a lot from when she was in Shangri-La. Her body still had a light glow around it. The reason was associated with Lariette’s profession. When Ark arrived at Shangri-La, he discovered that Lariette had received the quest to look for the Ark of Creation from a bishop. It was a profession change quest for the Innocence Knight. And Lariette changed to a Saint Knight after obtaining the Ark of Creation. The glow emitted from Lariette’s body was the passive skill ‘Permanent Brilliance’ which increased defense and damage against demonic monsters by 40%. The descendants of the 7 heroes gained abilities specialized for dealing with demonic monsters. It was revealed at Shangri-La that the 7 heroes expected the Dark Lord to be resurrected and arranged to convey those powers to foreigners.

‘It really is dazzling in many ways.’

A sigh naturally flowed out when he saw the shining Lariette. Anyway, the only ones who could use the Ark of Creation’s power was a Saint Knight or a Ruin Knight. Although Ark still didn’t know that Alan was a Ruin Knight. And despite the Ark of Creation being brought into the expedition’s hand, it was like Lariette was the owner.

.....This was the part Ark felt strongly about. In fact, Ark had been full of dreams when he heard about the Ark of Creation. Once again, the reason Ark executed this mission was to ensure that the Schudenberg expedition reached Silrinad before the Bristania expedition. If the Bristania expedition arrived first then Haverstein would be replaced and Ark would lose all his profits. But that worry was gone thanks to the Ark of Creation. The Bristania expedition was expected to arrive in Silrinad in 3~4 days but the Schudenberg expedition could get there in 2~3 days after capturing the fortress. Of course, the Sinus Principality had black obelisks stuck everywhere and demonic monsters were swarming. There was no guarantee about what they would encounter after passing through Pabiun Fortress.

But it was the same for the Bristania expedition so there was no reason for the Schudenberg expedition to arrive later. Although the Bristania expedition had 80,000 troops, the Schudenberg expedition had something to fill up the gap left by insufficient numbers. It was the Ark of Creation! No, in fact it didn't matter who arrived in Silrinad first now. The final goal of the expeditions was to purge the demonic monsters from the continent. In order to do that, the influence of the black obelisks had to be perfectly cleansed. If they didn't completely destroy the black obelisks then wouldn't it just be resurrected later? Despite all the magicians and priests in each kingdom working on a way to purify the Demonic Sphere of Influence, the perfect way to do that had fallen into the hands of the Schudenberg expedition.

That's right. The Ark of Creation was the key to resolving the Demonic War. A sigh naturally flowed from Ark's mouth at the thought.

'If I could handle it.....'

He could negotiate a significant amount of money from both kingdoms in order to allow the expeditions to use it. But was that all? The Ark of Creation was able to turn the tide of the war so he could gain a lot of achievements. If that happened then he could get his hands on the 1.3 billion won prize money!

'But Lariette-nim is the only one that can use the Ark of Creation.....'

It would become difficult to engage in business involving the Ark of Creation. But who was Ark? He was an unscrupulous merchant who didn't let go of even a single blade of grass! It was a lucrative treasure so Ark wasn't going to give up the chance to earn money. And Ark found a way to make money from it in an unexpected direction. It was the prophet clan who provided Ark with a hint.

'Huhuhu, I can't miss this opportunity.'

Ark was smiling at his thoughts when he heard Haverstein's voice again.

"This is a big deal. With the Ark of Creation, we can fully cleanse the black fog spreading from the black obelisks on the continent.

This is the method to save the continent."

Haverstein continuously praised Ark's achievements in a cheerful voice. But Ark's next words poured cold water on Haverstein's giddy mood.

"I'm sorry but the Ark of Creation can't be used at the moment.

".....Can't be used? What do you mean?"

"Actually, a significant amount of 'Sacred Blood' is required in order to use the Ark of Creation.

"Sacred Blood?"

"This."

Ark took out a few small, red stones from his bag.

-Sacred Blood (Special)

A mysterious stone rarely found in deep dungeons. This stone is called Sacred Blood and has something to do with an ancient myth. According to the ancient myth, the Creator used its own body to make the world.

The pieces of skin became the earth while the bones became various minerals. And the oceans and lakes were made with blood and tears. But when separating the body, some blood mixed with the pieces of skin and became buried underground. These pieces hardened after several thousand years passed. Because it contains the hardened blood of the Creator, the Sacred Blood is said to be the closest thing to the Creator's body which exists in this age.

But this is not confirmed as it reacts like a common stone to magic and solvents.

"These stones are necessary to use the Ark of Creation?"

Haverstein asked after examining the Sacred Blood.

"Yes, there is a legend that the Sacred Blood is a hardened drop of the Creator's Blood."

"I have heard of that legend before."

The person who answered was Nadin, the person in charge of spreading supplies. He dealt with various supplies so was well-versed in different legends.

"But wasn't that a rumour some merchant used to try and sell the Sacred Blood?"

"It's not just a rumour."

"Then the Sacred Blood really contains the blood of the Creator?"

"That is unknown.....but the Ark of Creation contains the Creator's power. And the Sacred Blood is its source of power. Therefore it is highly likely that the legend of the Sacred Blood isn't entirely unfounded."

"The legend of the Sacred Blood isn't the important thing."

Haverstein said after looking at Ark.

“The important thing is to collect the Sacred Blood so we can use the Ark of Creation.”

“Yes, but the problem is that it is fairly difficult to obtain the Sacred Blood.”

Ark mock sighed and replied. The Ark of Creation consumed 100 Sacred Blood with every use! When considering the future, there was no telling how many Sacred Blood was needed. But like Ark said, it wasn't that easy to secure the Sacred Blood. Despite the legend attached to the information window, it still seemed like an ordinary stone. It couldn't be used as a magic equipment or be used in jewellery since it was a plain stone. Therefore the NPC stores weren't willing to buy it. In other words, the only way to purchase the Sacred Blood was through users. That's why it was difficult for Ark to obtain the Sacred Blood.

“We have no choice but to use the Ark of Creation to purify the black fog in the Sinius Principality. So it is most important to obtain a reliable supply of Sacred Blood. But it can only be bought from foreigners so it is difficult to obtain a steady supply.”

“Do you have a solution?”

“There is a way.....”

Ark hesitated before carefully replying.

“The problem is money.”

“Money?”

“Yes, the Sacred Blood is a stone rarely found. The foreigners haven't discovered its uses yet but they have a lot of curiosity so they won't sell it cheaply. And in order to obtain a steady supply, men would have to be sent to various places to buy it. So considerable labour costs are required.”

“I know what you mean.”

Haverstein nodded as if he understood. And he answered in a firm voice.

“But the Ark of Creation is the key to settling the Demonic War. We have to secure the Sacred Blood no matter how much it costs so please put all your efforts into it.”

‘It’s a success!’

Ark nodded with a smile of satisfaction at Haverstein’s words. This was the method Ark used to gain money from the Ark of Creation. In fact, it was quite difficult for Ark to secure the Sacred Blood. But even if it was a rare item, there were millions of users in New World. There would always be some for him to buy. Still the reason Ark exaggerated it was to raise the price of the Sacred Blood. Currently Ark was supplying the expedition with munitions at 70% of the market price. But that was possible because Ark was participating in the production of the supplies. But if he bought it from the foreigners and sold it at 70% then he would suffer a loss.

So Ark had included a provision when making the contract for the exclusive supplies. If the commander and quartermaster acknowledged an exception for an item then he could get 10% of the purchase fee. In other words, if an exception was authorized then Ark would obtain a profit of 10%. Of course, the Sacred Blood was the exception item. No matter how much he bought in the end, Ark could make a profit of 10%. However, the reason Ark raised a fuss was to obtain more profit. In other words, he could state the he required additional labour fees in order to obtain a steady supply of the Sacred Blood. And the Schudenberg expedition had no choice but to buy the Sacred Blood in order to use the Ark of Creation.

‘Hopefully I can gain 20% of the purchase price because of the handling fee and still obtain a lot of Sacred Blood. If the price inflates then I can receive several thousand gold in profit.’

Ark thought like that and made an even bigger fuss.

“Well, money isn’t the only problem to obtaining the Sacred Blood.....

But I know the important of the Ark of Creation so I will mobilize my guild and try my best to secure it. But the amount of Sacred Blood required by the expedition will be huge. Even if I rally my personnel, the 10% handling charge in the contract won't be sufficient. In order to make certain ends meet, I need at least 20% of the fee.....”

Just as Ark was about to bargain in earnest.

“Wait a minute.”

Nadin who was looking at Ark carefully suddenly interrupted.

“Is it really that hard for Lord Ark to obtain the Sacred Blood?”

“What do you mean?”

“I know that the Sacred Blood is a rare stone but I'm not sure that obtaining it will be difficult enough to guarantee raising the fee in the contract. No, in fact I've been doubting your abilities as the exclusive supplier for the expedition army.”

‘This bastard, what is he suddenly making a fuss about?’

Ark felt annoyance rise at Nadin's words. But Nadin just ignored Ark's reaction and continued talking.

“Commander-nim knows fully the important of the Ark of Creation to the expedition. Clearly money isn't an issue if it is to obtain the Sacred Blood. The supply of Sacred Blood is important. I have no objections to this part.”

“Then what's the problem?”

“The problem is the quality of the supplier.”

“The quality of the supplier?”

“Your duty is to supply items for soldiers fighting in the war to support them. Being able to supply the necessary items no matter how hard it is to obtain is a necessary quality of the supplier. But Lord Ark just admitted that it would be difficult for him to obtain a reliable supply of the Sacred Blood. Then isn't he missing the qualities of a supplier?”

“No, that.....”

Ark hurriedly rushed to talk. However Nadine struck first.

“Sacred Blood is the most important item for the expedition so having the supplier be unable to obtain it is a huge problem. If he has no confidence then can we really leave such an important item to Lord Ark?”

“Hrmm.....”

Haverstein sighed with a careful expression. Nadin's words did make sense. Haverstein's expedition going forward would centre around the Ark of Creation. It was the obvious strategy. But he couldn't ignore the risk of what would happen if the important Sacred Blood supply was disrupted.

“But Lord Ark has done wonderfully as the expedition's supplier. Shouldn't you just believe in him?”

“The Sacred Blood isn't some simple supplies. It is a key item which will determine success or failure. I think that leaving to problem to a more accomplished merchant would be better.”

“You think that a merchant will be better?”

“Yes, the merchant's guild in Selebrid.”

‘That bastard.....’

Ark started to realize Nadin's reason for causing an uproar. Nadin was an aristocrat who belonged to Duke Sarkin's faction. Duke Sarkin had been sure his candidate would win and had already organized with the merchant's guild in Selebrid to provide supplies. However, that was all wasted when Haverstein unexpectedly became commander. That's why Nadin had disapproved of Ark from the beginning. And he immediately pounced on this situation with the Sacred Blood to cause problems for Ark. He even tried to transfer the matter of the Sacred Blood over to the merchant's guild in Selebrid.

"It isn't necessary to say but the merchant's guild has networks all over the continent. And the merchant's guild in Selebrid can use its large influence. If they were in charge then they would be a reliable supplier of the Sacred Blood."

Nadin spoke steadily. Then Haverstein made a perplexed expression.

"But Lord Ark is the one who brought us the Ark of Creation."

"Of course. The success of the is a worthy achievement and I praise him for that. But....."

Nadine sighed and gazed at Ark.

"His achievements as a warrior are different from his work as a supplier. The Sacred Blood is urgently needed so shouldn't it be handed over to a more competent supplier?"

"I didn't say that I couldn't supply the Sacred Blood! I said it would be difficult."

Nadin lifted a corner of his mouth and muttered.

"But the merchant's guild in Selebrid wouldn't have those problems.

.....That is all I'm saying."

Haverstein also couldn't respond to Nadin's words. Like Nadin said, the success or failure of the expedition depended on the Sacred Blood. As the Schudenberg commander, he had to put aside

personal emotions and decide without any bias. However, it was difficult to obediently accept Nadin's words.

"It is not yet confirmed whether the merchant's guild in Selebrid can provide a steady supply of Sacred Blood or whether Lord Ark can't supply it. Shouldn't both sides have a chance to try?"

Nadin's eyes then flashed. And he proposed like he had been waiting for this chance.

"Then how about a price competition?"

"Competition? What competition are you talking about?"

"The key is a reliable source of Sacred Blood. That is the easiest way to test their abilities."

Nadine smiled and continued.

"It will take the expedition approximately 3 days to arrive in Silrinad. Ark and the merchant's guild have until then to obtain the Sacred Blood. How about the aim is for both of them to supply 1,000 Sacred Blood by the time we reach Silrinad? That would be a better way to choose the right supplier."

"What.....!"

Ark made a ridiculous expression. Nadin just shrugged cynically.

"What's wrong? Are those conditions disadvantageous to you? You said you have a lot of personnel but you don't have any confidence that you can beat the merchant's guild?"

"Lord Nadin wants a competition between suppliers when we are in the middle of a war?"

"It is because it is a war. Commander-nim."

Nadin answered in a sharp voice.

“The fate of thousands of soldiers and the continent is at stake so important positions need to be entrusted to competent people. To be honest, I’ve already doubted Lord Ark’s qualifications as the supplier and those doubts only worsened after hearing his words about the Sacred Blood. It is only because of Lord Ark’s achievements that I am giving him a chance.”

Nadin had caught Ark and Haverstein’s tails with his clever answer. There was no room to refute those words. In the end, the stubborn Haverstein was forced to wave a white flag.

“.....Like Sir Nadin said, the supply of Sacred Blood is vitally important. So you will compete over who can obtain the required Sacred Blood. But Sir Ark has been the supplier without any problems so far so that shouldn’t be involved in this matter.”

Haverstein was able to give Ark that much. However, Haverstein had firmly made up his mind.

“The issue is not as simple as you think. When compared to all the munitions, the Sacred Blood is very few. If the merchant’s guild is able to supply the Sacred Blood and doesn’t receive any profit then they will suffer a loss. Then why would the merchant’s guild in Selebrid participate in this competition? It is unprecedented for an expedition to trade with two businesses. It is obvious. The business that wins in this competition should become the supply group.....”

“But.....”

“Okay. I accept.”

Haverstein said reluctantly. Ark who had been listening from the side made an angry expression. But it was impossible for him to decline in this atmosphere. It would be better for him to accept the competition and quickly think of ways to win. When Ark accepted the competition, the conversation proceeded rapidly.

“But what if both parties bring 1,000 Sacred Blood?”

“Then they’ll compete with the price.”

“Price?”

“Yes, the Sacred Blood is important so it isn’t possible to question the money spent on it. But I am in charge of the expedition’s funds. It is natural for the side with a lower purchase price to be the winner. And the expedition will pay the winner of the competition an average of the two Sacred Blood bids.”

“What does that mean?”

Haverstein was at a loss so Nadin explained. “Isn’t it possible to report that the item was bought cheaply in order to win the competition when it was actually bought at an expensive price? So the expedition will pay the winner the average price of the two corporation’s purchase price.”

In other words, let’s say it was 55 gold. Then Ark would receive a loss of 45 gold for every Sacred Blood he supplied. However, it wasn’t possible to buy the Sacred Blood at an excessively high price. If the purchase price was high then it would be easier to buy the Sacred Blood, but if the merchant’s guild also supplied 1,000 and they had a lower price than they would win. This competition was a way to catch 2 rabbits by deciding the supplier and reducing the monetary burden of the Sacred Blood purchases on the expedition!

“Okay, then I will take your advice regarding the competition.”

The talk about the war to secure the Sacred Blood ended with Haverstein’s words. Ark made a complicated expression as he left the tent and Shambala laughed at him.

“You made a mistake.”

“Do you want your house to catch on fire?”

“Isn’t this because you were too greedy? It is your own fault.”

“You really.....!”

Ark was about to retort sharply when he shook his head.

‘Damn, I was too greedy.....’

Like Shambala said, Ark’s greed was coming back to haunt him. Ark could’ve just quietly accepted the 10% fee for the Sacred Blood and there wouldn’t be any problems. In the end, he became too greedy and was stuck in a competition with the merchant’s guild of Selebrid.

‘I have a headache.’

He had three days before the expedition arrived at Silrinad to provide the Sacred Blood but that wasn’t enough time. Even if he managed to buy the right amounts, it still needed to be transported to Silrinad. If he removed the transport time which was approximately 12 hours then he had around one day to buy 1,000 Sacred Blood from users.

‘But I’ve already know where I can buy the required amounts of Sacred Blood.’

Ark had learnt from Shangri-La that Sacred Blood was needed. So Ark had already determined how to make a profit from the Sacred Blood before leaving Shangri-La. That was why Ark accepted the competition.

‘The problem is how to win the competition.’

Ark was irritable because of Nadin’s condition to pay the average purchase price of the two competitors. If Ark bought 1,000 Sacred Blood at a high price then he would lose the competition. But if he lowered the price too much to win then it would be hard to obtain a profit. No, he might actually receive a loss instead. If that happened then he would rather give up the competition. But now he had to win the competition, even if it meant suffering a loss.

“I should’ve just taken the 10% fee.....”

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. Then a question popped into Ark's head.

'Wait? Wasn't I perfectly trapped?'

Now that he thought about it, it was like Nadin knew about the situation in advance. He had grabbed Ark and Haverstein's tails before bringing out the competition. And he also presented the condition of the purchase price. It was too complicated and clever to be devised suddenly.

'But there's even more. Nadin seemed to have already gotten the agreement from the merchant's guild beforehand. How could Nadin just suddenly decide on a competition?'

It was impossible. Despite the merchant's guild having the advantage, it wasn't 100% that they would win. And if it was a low price then they would have to suffer a loss. That wasn't something that Nadin could decide for them. Then Nadine would have to check whether the merchant's guild wanted to compete. But he didn't say a single word about that. So he must've already had the merchant's guild's agreement from the beginning.

'Then Nadin has already contacted the merchant's guild about this. But how? Only Shambala and Lariette knew that the Sacred Blood was needed to power the Ark of Creation.'

There was no way Nadin could know about it beforehand. However, there was one person Ark had not considered. Somebody other than Ark and Lariette knew about the Sacred Blood. It wasn't just Shambala. It was Sid! Ark had contacted Sid in order to purchase the Sacred Blood for him. But Sid had leaked the information to Nadine.

"How dare that bastard.....?"

"Bah, did you think I would stay under you forever?"

"You bastard!"

Ark was about to approach him.

“What does that mean? This merchant is my guest.”

“Guest?”

“Yes, if you want to see him then you’ll have to explain and ask permission from me first.”

Nadin declared sharply before taking Sid and entering the tent. Then Shambala whistled and muttered.

“How is it? Isn’t this quite fascinating?”

“Shut up!”

Ark shouted angrily. He thought Sid was becoming more impertinent these days but he never imagined that Sid would secretly communicate with Nadin. But the problem wasn’t Sid’s betrayal. He could find another hobbit.

‘Sid is the one I asked to secure the Sacred Blood forme.’

That was the biggest problem. Ark had known about the Sacred Blood since Shangri-La. So he had contacted Sid and ordered him to buy the Sacred Blood. Sid had considerable connections in various places so he could secure the Sacred Blood. It was why Ark accepted the competition. But Sid had attached himself to Nadin. The Sacred Blood that Sid purchased also went to Nadin. It was like Sid had transferred the exclusive trading rights to Nadin. In return for his betrayal of Ark, Nadin had probably promised him a share of the Sacred Blood profit.

‘How dare he betray me?’

A harsh sound emerged from Ark’s mouth. If he kept on grinding his teeth like that then it would wear away. Now that Sid had aligned with Nadin, Ark no longer had a solution to his problem.

He was facing a large crisis.