

Ark Vol 22 C 5

Chapter 5

Act 5: Nagaran's Coalition

"Rulrulru....."

Gwon Hwa-rang hummed and smiled. Something about Gwon Hwa-rang was different today. He had polished his shoes, applied a face mask earlier and even shaved his beard. Instead of wearing his old leather jacket, he was wearing a sharp suit. Gwon Hwa-rang was fully armed because today was the day of the decisive battle.

"Huhuhuhu."

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed like a crazy person as he took out a small box from his pocket. And he slowly opened the box. Inside the box was a ring. Although it wasn't very big but it was still a diamond studded ring..... That's right. Today was 'the day.' A satisfied feeling rose inside Gwon Hwa-rang as he looked at the box.

'It has come! The day has come!'

Gwon Hwa-rang had been waiting for 'this day' for a few years. However, a few trivial problems had popped up that prevented him. And the most worrisome problem was Gwon Hwa-rang himself. After being stabbed in the leg with a knife, his leg had a limp. Furthermore, public opinion was against him and he had been reluctantly driven from police work. He couldn't stay at work with a disability. He had a great sense of pride in his work so the loss was difficult for Gwon Hwa-rang to express in words. He felt like a straggler abandoned by the world. Of course, the police considered the circumstances and gave him management of the ex-convicts rehabilitation program but he still felt a sense of loss. In this situation he hadn't even dare try. However, Gwon Hwa-rang's situation changed dramatically two years ago.

Over the last few years, Gwon Hwa-rang had gradually recovered and lost his injury. And he unintentionally received an income from the various work he did helping Hyun-woo. It wasn't just Gwon Hwa-rang that changed. Two years ago Hyun-woo also started to gradually raise his income for so his lifestyle had improved. Park So-mi was also quickly recovering. All these changes to Gwon Hwa-rang,

Hyun-woo and Park So-mi were because of New World. Their health and income improved because of New World.

“Ah, my life had been a dark tunnel. But I encountered New World and my life changed. Darkness changed to light and despair changed to hope. I’ve been saved. Hallelujah!”

Anyway, the present situation had changed around Gwon Hwa-rang. And the timing was important. Gwon Hwa-rang might’ve wavered in the last few years but he had finally made up his mind.

Pro-po-sal!

That’s right. That was what Gwon Hwa-rang had been hesitating several years over. And he finally decided today was ‘the day.’ His heart trembled at the thought of proposing to Park So-mi. According to Hyun-woo, his success rate if he proposed now was 90%. Therefore Gwon Hwa-rang’s confidence increased because of Hyun-woo.

‘Then.....’

His chest felt tight as he arrived in front of the house. He visited the house often so it felt like home but now it seemed large and scary. But overcoming that horror was the true sign of a man!

‘I’m going to do it! I will! Gwon Hwa-rang, if you’re a man then you can do it!’

Gwon Hwa-rang placed the ring box back in his pocket and entered the house. Gwon Hwa-rang grinned as Park So-mi greeted him at the door.

“Welcome.”

“Ah, this is it, this is it. What I wish.....’

For a wife to lovingly greet her husband when he comes home. It might’ve been an ordinary routine for others but the thought was impressive enough to cause tears to flow for Gwon Hwa-rang. It was

impressive for a man who lived by himself for decades. It might be because he had decided to propose today but Park So-mi was looking exceptionally pretty. With neatly arranged hair and wearing a blue cardigan, a beautiful light appeared around her even when she was sitting in the wheelchair.

"I'm a little surprised. You suddenly wanted to eat out and now you're wearing conservative clothes. Am I underdressed?"

"Ah, no. You look beautiful. Really pretty! So pretty that my head has become strange!"

Gwon Hwa-rang jumped with surprise and hurriedly said. Park So-mi blushed and turned to look at the door to Hyun-woo's game room.

"Thank you. But what is that boy doing? A guest has come to that house and he doesn't even show his face."

"No, it's okay. Since when have I been a guest? He seems to be busy so let's just leave."

"Then we're the only ones going out today?"

"Huh? Oh, yes.....I call Hyun-woo earlier today and he said he was too busy to go anywhere."

"Then isn't it better to go next time? Isn't this a precious experience eating out?"

"That.....it has already been booked. We can't just cancel.....we'll have another chance next time with Hyun-woo."

Gwon Hwa-rang prevaricated like Hyun-woo taught him. Fortunately Park So-mi didn't question him and just nodded.

"Really? Then it can't be helped. Sorry but can you push the wheelchair?"

“Yes, I’ll be happy to! I’ll push it forever!”

Gwon Hwa-rang enthusiastically grabbed the wheelchair handle. Park So-mi looked at him strangely as Gwon Hwa-rang’s attitude seemed different from normal.

“Well, is something good happening? We’re suddenly eating out and your attire seems different from usual.....”

“A good thing? There is.”

“What is it? Am I not supposed to know?”

“That’s impossible. I’ll tell you slowly over the meal.”

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed and was about to push the wheelchair.

Kwatang, udandandang!

Suddenly there was a commotion and Hyun-woo ran out of his room. Gwon Hwa-rang and Park So-mi turned their heads with surprise and looked at him.

“Eh? Hyun-woo? What’s the matter?”

“Don’t make me talk. I’m busy now!”

Hyun-woo didn’t even look at them and picked up the telephone quickly. He pressed the buttons at a furious speed and called someone.

Diririri, diririri.....

Then the cell phone in Gwon Hwa-rang's chest pocket rang and he took it out. Hyun-woo's desperate voice was heard from two phones.

"Gwon ajusshi? Where are you now?"

"What are you doing?"

Gwon Hwa-rang muttered in an incredulous voice. Hyun-woo alternating looking at the phone and Gwon Hwa-rang standing by the door with a confused expression. He belatedly realized the situation and threw the phone away before running towards Gwon Hwa-rang.

"Gwon ajusshi, it's serious!"

"It's serious? What are you saying?"

"I can't do this now. Call the rehabilitation hyungs here because I need to speak with them."

"Hey, you. Have you already forgotten? Today's the day."

"I don't know what day it is when Silvana might disappear!"

Hyun-woo pulled his hair and shouted.

"What the, that is ridiculous....."

Jjak-tung stuttered with an absurd look. It wasn't just Jjak-tung. All the rehabilitation members summoned to the emergency meeting also looked the same. The contents of Hyun-woo's words were shocking. Silvana had been attacked by demonic monsters! And Alan's purpose was to unseal the Hell River on the lowest floor of Silvana's secret dungeon and flood Nagaran. In addition, if the Hell River was

unsealed then everything would die and not even a blade of grass would grow for the next 60 years. Nagaran would become like a non-existent land on maps.

“It really is absurd.”

What is that fellow thinking?”

Bul-kkun muttered after hearing the explanations.

Then Yapsab sneered and retorted.

“Do you have to ask? Of course it is revenge.”

“That’s not the only reason.

Hyun-woo said as he shook his head.

“It’s not? Then what else is there?”

“I haven’t told you this but the things happening in New World now isn’t a scheduled event. A group which exists in New World is using an item which shouldn’t exist to cause chaos. And Alan belongs to that group.”

Hyun-woo finally explained everything that Global Exos told him. Alan had even anticipated this incident a few months ago and escape abroad.

“If the Hell River is unsealed then the damage to Nagaran would be huge. That is enough of a target for Alan. But judging by Alan’s behaviour, his goal in unleashing the Hell River has to do with the Demonic War. That is why he mobilized 100,000 monsters despite Silrinad being surrounded.”

“He even went abroad to escape being caught?”

“Then what is he after?”

“He escaped now but what will happen if he returns home later?”

“These guys probably have a lot of things planned. If they succeed then it won’t be a problem returning home in the future.”

Jjak-tung crossed his arms with a serious expression and muttered. Then one of the rehabilitation members hit the table and said.

“What do you think would happen if Alan wins the Demonic War?”

“What? Global Exos would be screwed.”

The answer was a no-brainer.

“They’ll be screwed?”

“Yes and Alan will be able to avoid any problems.....”

The rehabilitation member flinched and closed his mouth. Then Jjak-tung smiled and laughed.

“That’s right. Like Hyun-woo said, currently there is no way for Global Exos to stop Alan’s movements. So they had no control over his actions. That is why Alan and the demonic monsters can move freely to try and swallow up New World. In other words, Alan could use the demons to take control of a city and act as the city guards in New World.

.....He could become the absolute dictator of New World!

“He’s trying to make a situation where users can’t play the game. And there is no way for the publisher to stop them. So there is only one option if the publisher wanted to maintain New World.”

“We have to stop Alan!”

“That’s right.”

Jjak-tung tapped his fingers and replied. The atmosphere became quiet. Hyun-woo, Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members thought about the situation. If the demons conquered New World then the users on the continent could be wiped out anytime. If that situation repeated many times then they users would obviously become dissatisfied and complain to Global Exos. They would also receive various lawsuits. There was only one way for Global Exos to stop that. It was to stop Alan from conquering New World. And they spent a considerable amount of money for that goal.

“I heard that New World accounts for 30% of Global Exos sales. Can you imagine? The annual profit of 30% of a big business would be in the thousands of billions. If a problem happened to New World then Global Exos might collapse. Billions of won was also invested in operating New World. That’s not all. Global Exos’ stocks would also be affected if something happened to New World.

“Stocks?”

“Yes, when the Demonic War started and users protested then the stocks related to New World plunged. After they announced that the war was a scheduled event, the stock price eventually returned to normal.”

That’s right. It was why Ha Myung-woo invested 10 billion won on the event. Compared to the plunging stock prices, 10 billion won was nothing.

“This is all the result of Alan’s group. Then those guys probably have a way to gain money from it. They could buy the stocks when it plunged because of the demons. Then they could have the demons retreat and sell the stocks when the price rises. If they conquered New World then there are various methods to earn a profit. They could make tens of billions or even hundreds of billions in profit.

“Tens of billions, hundreds of billions.....!”

“Damn, we stabbed someone and only earned tens of millions of won a month. Meanwhile those guys can just sit back and watch the game while earning hundreds of billions of won?”

“A real villain is like this.”

Jjak-tung muttered in a pessimistic voice. Anyway, Hyun-woo wasn't exactly astonished by Jjak-tung's words. He had already guessed the general principles after hearing that Alan escaped overseas. It was natural. Alan was a clever criminal so he wouldn't do something reckless. He would be aware of the risks of becoming a criminal. If his plan succeeded then Global Exos wouldn't be able to punish Alan when he returned. If he failed he was a criminal, if he succeeded then he was a tycoon! Alan was risking his life on this gamble. Therefore Hyun-woo judged that Alan wouldn't make any disadvantageous choices in the Demonic War. The fact that he was concentrated on releasing the Hell River underneath Silvana instead of Silrinad meant that it was important.

‘Well, I don't care whether Alan is scamming Global Exos. But.....’

The problem was that Hyun-woo would receive huge damage as a result. Alan had a deep grudge against Hyun-woo so if he conquered New World then Hyun-woo would have nowhere to run.

‘I have to do whatever it takes to stop him’

After going round and round, he eventually ended up with his first conclusion. The rehabilitation members also came to the same conclusion and shouted.

“Now's not the time to be talking about this!”

“You have to let the Schudenberg expedition know so they can recapture Silvana!”

“I've already told them.”

Hyun-woo murmured with a sigh. After Hyun-woo discovered Alan's plan, he had run from Shangri-La straight to Haverstein. And he immediately delivered the contents to Haverstein. But his response was

different from what Hyun-woo expected. The Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions were still focused on the invasion of Silrinad.

“What are you saying.....?”

The rehabilitation members stuttered at Hyun-woo’s words.

“No way! They don’t care if Nagaran disappears?”

“They said it was unrelated.”

“What?”

Hyun-woo sighed painfully and recalled his conversation with Haverstein.

“What on earth? Do you not believe my information?”

“Even if your information is certain, it doesn’t change anything.”

“Why.....?”

“That’s because the location is Nagaran.”

Haverstein replied with a heavy look. That’s right. It was the reason the Schudenberg Kingdom didn’t seriously consider Hyun-woo’s words. Originally Nagaran was an area that the Three Kingdoms fought over. But the Three Kingdoms became tired of the endless competition and called for a ceasefire before agreeing to give the buffer zone to the foreigners. In other words, it was an area not owned by any of the kingdoms. The foreigners who became the Lord of the territory had to pay taxed but it was split between three countries so the money wasn’t that much. There was no reason for them to stop the invasion.

On the other hand, the Sinus Principality was definitely money. That's why the Schudenberg and Bristania kingdoms embarked on an expedition to take it back before it was destroyed by the demons. They could receive enormous compensation from the Sinus Principality. No, in some cases the marching army might even be able to increase the land of their respective kingdoms. It was why both kingdoms poured an absurd amount of money into the expeditions.

"That's why I've been told to keep on marching. What would happen if the Schudenberg expedition suddenly exited after joining up with the Bristania expedition? We've only just managed to take the initiative in leading the expeditions in the Sinus Principality. Even if the Schudenberg expedition reclaims Nagaran, it isn't a land that Schudenberg can insist ownership of. We would end up losing more than we've gained."

"But if the Hell River is unsealed then it won't just be Nagaran that is submerged. According to the records, it has the power to strengthen the demons and their magic....."

"Have you forgotten?"

Haverstein interrupted the conversation and looked at him.

"The Schudenberg expedition has the Ark of Creation."

Hyun-woo's body instantly stiffened. That's it. The Ark of Creation which was able to get rid of the 'Sphere of Influence!' If the Schudenberg Kingdom had that then they didn't need to fear the threat of the demonic influence anymore. No, if the demons became stronger and the Schudenberg Kingdom had the Ark of Creation then Schudenberg Kingdom could exert an influence on the entire continent. Therefore the Schudenberg expedition just dismissed Hyun-woo's report. In the long run, Hyun-woo finding the treasure had become a burden to him. However he still couldn't give up.

"But Alan knows we have the Ark of Creation. Yet his purpose is still to unseal the Hell River. That means even the Ark of Creation can't prevent it."

"Is there anything which proves that?"

"T-that....."

Hyun-woo was speechless from Haverstein's question. That's right. It was just Hyun-woo's guess. Hyun-woo couldn't answer Haverstein so he just sighed and shook his head.

".....I'm sorry.

The rehabilitation members instantly became angry when Hyun-woo explained.

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"Then contact Lariette and tell her to leave with the Ark of Creation!"

One rehabilitation member clamoured with an angry voice. Hyun-woo shook his head. Hyun-woo had also thought about that at first. However, the aristocrats of the Schudenberg Kingdom wouldn't be so lenient. After the Ark of Creation was used the first time, the soldiers thought of Lariette as a goddess and protected her. Even Hyun-woo had to go through several checks in the game before he could meet with Lariette.

'Although I say that Lariette was protected.....'

It wasn't that simple. To be exact, it wasn't 'protection' but 'surveillance.' The Schudenberg nobles knew about the power of the Ark of Creation through Haverstein's report and kept a close eye on Lariette and the prophets.

"High ranking people are the same whether it is reality or the game."

"So? What about Lariette? Even if the NPCs are watching, isn't Lariette a user? If she is threatened then can't she just end the connection?"

"I've also thought about that....."

Ark sighed and shook his head. Hyun-woo had also thought about threatening the Schudenberg Kingdom like that. However, the situation wasn't that simple. The Ark of Creation was a key item in the Demonic War. And it wasn't just the expedition who was interested in the treasure. Global Exos wanted the Demonic War to end and were also looking at the Ark of Creation eagerly. And Lariette was one of Global Exos' candidates. So Lariette had already provided information about the Ark of Creation and Global Exos had negotiated with her. Lariette had accepted the conditions and now she didn't go to work but just concentrated on the game and using the Ark of Creation. There was no way Hyun-woo could convince her to use it for his benefit. Although her existence did help his cause.

'It is thanks to Lariette-nim that Schudenberg promised some military supplies.....'

Hyun-woo had been despondently leaving headquarters. Then he heard from behind him.

"Wait a minute!"

10 people escorting Lariette was approaching headquarters. And she said with a resolute expression.

"I heard the general outline of the situation. I understand the position of Schudenberg Kingdom. But isn't Nagaran a territory that offers the Schudenberg Kingdom some taxes? The ones making the decision might think it has nothing to do with their kingdom but that's not exactly true. In addition, Ark was the one who played a crucial role in finding the Ark of Creation. It is because of Ark-nim that I am able to use the Ark of Creation for Schudenberg's benefit."

Hyun-woo was aware of Lariette's arrangement with Global Exos. However the NPCs couldn't understand those circumstances. They knew the importance of the Ark of Creation so they couldn't ignore the light threat in her words. Furthermore, the commander of the expedition force was Hyun-woo's friend. Haverstein inflated Lariette's threat by 200 times.

"Therefore the Schudenberg Kingdom should supply all the munitions he requires to retake Nagaran."

This was the condition she proposed to the Schudenberg Kingdom. Lariette withdrew once more after making the strong request. The rehabilitation members nodded as they were told this.

"Huhuhu, as expected from Lariette. She is normally careful in her conduct but also has strength."

The rehabilitation members looked at Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo knew that Lariette had done that for him. And he felt gratitude as well as a mysterious emotion when she appeared. After discovering that Lariette didn't have a relationship with Alan at Pabiun Canyon, he had been feeling that emotion more often. But now wasn't the time to consider it.

"The thing we need most is troops."

Hyun-woo sighed and muttered. That's right. Right now troops were absolutely necessary. If he didn't have any combat troops then what was the point of military supplies? The rehabilitation realized the situation and once again complained.

"There's no time to complain."

Jjak-tung spoke with a serious expression.

"If the Schudenberg kingdom won't help then Bristania will be the same. There is no need to even mention the Sinus Principality. In the end we can't receive help from the NPCs."

There was a heavy silence around the table. That's right. There were several issues but this was the biggest problem. They would have to regain Silvana overrun with 100,000 demons without any troops. It was for that reason that Hyun-woo gathered Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members. But Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members couldn't think of a way. Hyun-woo scratched his head and asked.

"Is there any way to gather troops?"

"Let's see..... Even if we reduce the number of troops in the supply unit, that is still only 1,000 people. If we pull out more soldiers then there might be a problem with the supply of munitions."

"Then we've secured 1,000 people. Is there any other ways?"

“Even if we gather the users in Seutandal.....most users are already in the expedition force and other users aren’t connecting at all because they can’t hunt or trade.....even if the Baran warriors are included, that is at most 3,000 or 4,000 people?”

Gwon Hwa-rang murmured but Jjak-tung shook his head.

“Seutandal won’t get there quickly enough. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”

Hyun-woo answered absent-mindedly. Jjak-tung clicked his tongue and said.

“Silvana is already occupied by the demons so there isn’t a lot of time.”

That’s right. It had already been three days since Silvana was occupied by the demons. Alan was after the Hell River on the lowest floor of Silvana’s secret dungeon. While it had taken Hyun-woo 18 days to reach the lowest floor of the dungeon, it wouldn’t take Alan that much time. Hyun-woo had the Dark Eden members train in the secret dungeon so a lot of monsters had already been cleared.

‘Alan also rallied 100,000 demonic monsters to attack Silvana. If they arrange some for defending Radon and Beiku, then he probably has 10,000 monsters with him.’

In the end, Alan probably only entered the dungeon with 10,000 demons.

“Will it take a few days?”

“Presently Dark Eden is hunting on the 58th and 59th floors. The 50th floor is where there is an ancient maze while the 51st floor is the Abyss so the terrain becomes more complicated and there are a lot of traps.”

This was one of the reasons why Seutandal won't work. It would take 4~5 days to move troops from Seutandal to Nagaran. Alan had already entered the secret dungeon for three days so it would be over by the time they arrived. And 3,000~4,000 troops wouldn't be enough.

"In the end, we have to gather troops that can make it to Nagaran in one or two days."

The rehabilitation members fell silent at Jjak-tung's words. Nagaran wasn't under the demonic sphere of influence yet. There were 100,000 monsters so at least 50,000 troops were necessary. If there was a time limit then users waiting for the resurrection time to be over wouldn't be able to join. When considering that point 50,000 was the minimum. They needed 50,000 troops from areas adjacent to Nagaran. It was an almost impossible task.

Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members sighed as time passed. Yapsab noticed the heavy atmosphere and stealthily headed towards the living room. All the rehabilitation members turned their heads as the TV turned on. Hyun-woo also looked at the TV without thinking.

"Damn, if we were celebrities then it would be possible....."

Yapsab smacked his lips and muttered as he looked at the TV. Yapsab was watching a guerrilla concert that was being broadcasted. The concert was being held by an amateur singer who had gathered an audience through various promotions. The TV was broadcasting the concert where 10,000 people were gathered to watch the new singer.

"If we were celebrities then gathering people won't be a problem."

"Yeah....."

Hyun-woo who was watching the TV sighed and answered. Then an intense spark occurred in his head.

'Celebrity? TV? People?'

Those three words entwined together and formed an idea. Hyun-woo jumped up and shouted.

“There might be a way!”