Ark Vol 23 C 4

Chapter 4

Act 4: Swirl of Intrigue

Thick pillars lined up in the corridor like a temple in ancient Rome. A huge stone room was located at the end of the corridor. The walls of the stone chamber were filled with carvings and had a black aura around them. They were carvings of deformed beasts that were normally seen in nightmares. A large number of people were suffering under the claws of the beasts. The torch flickered weirdly and made it seem like the carvings were alive.

Dukong, dukong, dukong!

A steady pounding sound was heard throughout the stone room. The pounding sound came from the object placed on the altar in the centre of the stone hut. A heart.....that's right. It was the mysterious heart Alan had taken from the Hell River. With every swell and shrinking of the 10 metres huge heart, the black aura would become larger. And the black aura spread along the ground of the stone room like dry ice.

"It's been hundreds of years.....wonderful."

An old man wearing a hood murmured in a cheerful voice. And he stretched out his hand to touch the heart. Just as the wrinkled finger was about to touch the rising heart.....

"Maseutyu!"

A rough voice shook the stone chamber. The old man's eyes became displeased. The old man looked at the heart before turning around slowly and taking off his hood. With the face covered in so many deep wrinkles that it was impossible to guess his age, Maseutyu was the archbishop of the Ankh church.

".....You came?"

The person who approached was a man wearing black armour and covered in blood. It was Alan who had escaped from Silvana on the gargoyles. Alan glared at Maseutyu and declared sharply.



Alan asked in a harsh voice. Once again, Alan had two reasons to invade Silvana. One was to obtain the heart inside the stone room from the Hell River. And the other reason was to submerge Nagaran with the Hell River. But it was impossible to achieve both goals at the same time. It was impossible to leave with the heart if he made the Hell River flood. Then he accidentally stumbled on the quantum transmitter at Pabiun Canyon and discovered a method to achieve both goals at once. It was possible to immediately move the heart with spatial movement. And Alan's plan to transfer the heart was a success. But it didn't work when Alan and the Avenger members tried to use it.

'Why didn't it catch the quantum receiver's frequency?'
Alan had been thinking that question the whole time. However, the reason was simple once he reached this place.
The quantum receiver placed here had been destroyed.
"The expedition armies don't know about this place yet. There were no signs of a surprise attack when I got here. Yet why is the quantum receiver broken? Besides, it worked properly when it had to transmit the heart."
Alan couldn't accept the situation. And there was something else he couldn't understand.
"Furthermore, I was contacted by the dead Avenger members before I got here"
Alan opened his mouth again. Maseutyu who had been listening silently finally laughed and muttered.
"I was the one who destroyed the quantum receiver."
"W-what?"
Alan flinched and closed his mouth. Maseutyu was the one who broke the receiver? What was he saying? Alan looked at him with a foolish look.
"Why would you do that?"
"Calm down."
"Calm down? You're telling me to calm down?"

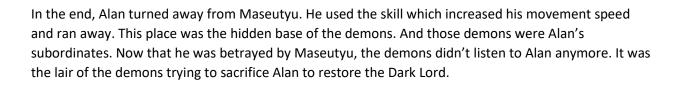
"There is a reason for it."
Maseutyu waved his hands.
"Reason? You have a reason?"
"Yes."
Maseutyu answered in a light tone. He slowly moved around the heart and said.
"It isn't necessary to explain but this heart is the most important object. It isn't an exaggeration to say that all of our plans were for finding this object. The value of destroying Nagaran is nothing compared to the heart. And the person who found this heart is the Ruin Knight. Your achievement really deserves admiration."
"Then why did you do something?"
"Well, well! Just wait a bit more. The reason you could transmit the heart here is because of the quantum transmitter. If you also took advantage of the transmitter then you could come here safely. Bu what next?"
"Next?"
"If those guys got a hold on the quantum transmitter then wouldn't they obtain the frequency to this place?"
Maseutyu shook his head.
"It is better not to risk it. If they got the quantum transmitter then wouldn't they be able to move straight to this place? Of course, those guys would die one they reach here but the concern is that they might tell the expedition forces. There are also foreigners who can track mana so they could also discover this place."

Alan frowned as he thought about Maseutyu's explanation. If he thought about it like that then Maseutyu's action was understandable. While the MG had disappeared after Ark used the quantum transmitter, Ark had Wormer. There was no guarantee that Wormer couldn't develop another magic charger. If Ark came here with the quantum transmitter then the expedition army would know about this location. Therefore Maseutyu reduced the risk by destroying the receiver. Alan understood. But just because he understood didn't mean the problem was solved.

"Then shouldn't you have explained it to me before?"
"I couldn't say it."
"You couldn't?"
"In fact, I had another reason to break the receiver."
"Another reason?"
"Now"
Maseutyu licked his lips and narrowed his eyes.
"Your help has become unnecessary. No, that's not it. To be exact, you can only help one last time. You guythe immortal lives of the foreignersthat is needed. It is the last ingredient to resurrect the Dark Lord."
"Our lives?"
Alan felt an ominous feeling.
-Grrrrrr.

An eerie roar echoed from behind his back. At the same time, glossy red pupils appeared all around him. The wall carvings.....the deformed beasts on the carvings all opened their eyes simultaneously. And they rose and crawled off the wall. The room instantly filled with the thousands of animals and a nasty fish smell. Alan had seen the wall carvings many times but he never thought they were alive. The atmosphere around them were different from the demons controlled by Alan. The thousands of eyes that were thirsty for blood all focused on Alan.





'No. I can't die in a place like his!'

-Kuwaaaaaaaah!

He did his best to run away but the beasts caught up with tremendous speed and swung their claws. Alan's health was sucked out with every attack.

"Ugh, boundaries of the dead! Rampaging spirits!"

Alan rolled on the ground and persistently fired his skills while running away. And he finally reached the corridor near the entrance.

'The Avenger members are waiting outside this time so if I join them I can escape. It isn't too late. Maseutyu.....I dare him to come out! I'll do whatever it takes to make him pay!'

Alan pledged when he tried to escape the temple. Suddenly a red shape quickly ran from behind a pillar towards the entrance.

"Heok! What, what the?"

Alan swung his sword reflexively. But the shadow moved like a snake and hit Alan.

Kwa kwa kwang, jjejejejeok!

Something ripped from inside his body and there was a ringing sound. The message window appeared when the noise finished.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'
Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes.
Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>
'Chakra wave!'
Alan vomited blood and looked around anxiously. Alan knew of only one person who could use Chakra wave.
"The Red Man!"
That's right. The person who hit Alan had red hair while wearing a white mask. Alan was in a critical condition from the beasts' attacks and now the Red Man. Alan looked at the Red Man who appeared and shouted.
"Are you and Maseutyu working together?"
The Red Man just drew the two swords hanging on his waist instead of answering. Then a flash headed towards Alan who was rigid for 3 seconds. But the image that appeared in Alan's eyes wasn't the Red Man. An Asura with a frightening face attacked him with dozens of swords. The sword of light that the Asura wielded passed through Alan
Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!
Alan lost 5% health and he had almost no more left as his blood drained out.

"You, you bastard!"
Alan stared at the Red Man with red eyes. The form of the Red Man was reflected in his eyesAlan vowed revenge but he had no more opportunity to achieve it. The reason was a message that surfaced in front of Alan.
-A special item has been triggered.
All of the character's data has been absorbed by the 'Token of Darkness.' All the data absorbed by the Token of Darkness has been deleted from New World.
'Oh my god, the thing the Avenger talked about!'
Alan felt his heart fall. It had what Alan had previously tried to ask Maseutyu. When Alan had escaped from Silvana to come here, the Avenger members who did had called him. The contents were what Alan witnessed in the information window just now.
"Alan-nim, something is strange!"
"When we died, we received the message that our character data was being sucked in by the necklace!"
"What on earth is going on?"
The Avenger members had seen the same message as Alan when they died. And when the Avenger members logged back into New World, there appeared in a new character creation screen. It meant all of their character data had been completely deleted from New World's server.

'Did Global Exos take some action against us?'

Alan had thought this at first. Alan knew that this situation was a threat to Global Exos. If it was possible then Global Exos would've immediately deleted their characters and seized their accounts. But Alan was aware that Global Exos had lost control of New World. Alan had participated in the plan because he knew that Global Exos couldn't take action to suspend him. Then he could only think of one reason for his data being sucked into the necklace. Alan looked at the necklace pulsing on his chest.

-Token of Darkness (Rare)
Item Type: Necklace
Dura hilibur 60 /60
Durability: 60/60
Weight: 10
User Restrictions: Level 300 more, chaotic value of more than 300.

The ancient power of darkness is lodged in this necklace. This necklace contains a wicked magic that was created by the forces of darkness a long time ago. The person who wears this necklace with receive the effect of Demonic Sphere of Influence. However, only a corrupted person can wear this necklace.

This was the necklace that the Red Man gave Alan and the Avenger members before they left for Silvana. It was an artifact which gave chaotic users a bonus equal to the demonic monsters when the entered the Demonic Sphere of Influence. That's right. Like Ark guessed in the secret dungeon, this was the artifact which increased their abilities beyond their level. But other secrets were hidden in the artifact. When the wearer died, it absorbed the data and sent it somewhere else! That was the unidentified special option of the 'Token of Darkness.'

'This is ridiculous! An item which erases the information of the character!'

It was incomprehensible. But Alan encountered it so he couldn't deny its existence. At the same time, numerous thoughts ran through Alan's head.

'This had been planned from the very beginning. Maseutyu said.....the immortal life of the users.....it means the users' data. It is a sacrifice to resurrect the Dark Lord..... What is this? And the person trying to restore the Dark Lord.....'

Alan looked at the Red Man with confused eyes. At the same time, his body died and collapsed towards the Red Man.

Then Alan confirmed something about the Red Man as he fell. Perhaps Alan's sword that he swung when hit by Chakra Wave hadn't missed. In New World, when a equipment's durability ended then it would disappear. Alan's eyes concentrated on the mask as he fell. The moment he checked the mask, surprise and disbelief entered his eyes. The face of the Red Man hidden behind the mask......

'T-this.....huck! Ah ah ah, wahhhhh!'

Alan suddenly felt a tremendous pain in his head. The pain felt like his head was exploding. It wasn't pain from New World. His real self that was lying down in the unit in reality was in pain. Alan screamed from the pain. The next moment, a weird phenomenon occurred to Alan's body. A deep black lump rose from the stone room and flew towards his body. Maseutyu also walked out from the stone room.

"Huhuhu, the Ruin Knight has absorbed the heart."

Maseutyu looked at Alan's dead body before saying towards the Red Man.

"The necessary souls have already been collected."

".....Let's move to the location."

"Yes. But what about those people shivering outside?"

".....Kill them."

The Red Man replied in a low voice.

"Don't think of them as ordinary users. Think of them as terrorists."

A middle age leaning next to the door said in a low voice. The 10 people in a circle around the door nodded with tense expressions. The foreigners with blond hair and a south-east Asian origin had badges engraved with G·A·S·P attached to their chest. G·A·S·P.....it stood for Global Exos Special Security Personnel. That's right. These were the special security agents that Global Exos had dispatched. And they were currently surrounded a villa in the suburbs of Hong Kong.

"Everybody move to their assigned positions.

The members scattered from the leader's order. It resembled a scene of FBIs fighting against terrorists in a movie or drama. Although they weren't holding real pistols, they had gas guns in their hands. They were blocking the villa because of an order that came from the headquarters in Korea. They wanted to seal off the Hong Kong villa 1134-46 in order to meet a user playing New World. The relevant legal procedures had already been handled between headquarters and the Hong Kong police.

The reason for the order was related to a top secret project that headquarters was working on. It was a project that Kim Gwon-tae had rallied a large number of hackers to work on. The project started after Hyun-woo told them that Alan was working with the demons. However, by that time Alan had already escaped to Hong Kong. Kim Gwon-tae had rallied the programmers to hack the Hong Kong servers so they could find Alan's residence. And they finally succeeded in the backtracking and discovered Alan's residence. But the villa that the special security agents sealed wasn't Alan's residence. It was because of Kim Gwon-tae's opinion.

"Okay. Mobilize the security staff in Hong King to arrest Alan!"

When Ha Myung-woo first received Kim Gwon-tae's report, he immediately mobilized the troops. Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

"No, just wait."

"What does that mean? Don't you know the current situation in New World? We have to arrest him and appease our customers. The first thing to do is stop those guys!"
"Don't you think it would become a problem if people discover that we hired hackers to hack our own servers?"
"Then what?"
Ha Myung-woo wrinkled his forehead as he frowned. Kim Kwon-tae tapped a thick paper file with his finger and explained.
"After we discovered Alan's server tracks, we traced his movements. As expected, Alan is deeply involved with this event. But he is not the mastermind."
"He's not? Then?"
"Yes. Using Alan's circuit, we tapped all of the Avenger members and the transcripts of the NPCs he talked to. As a result, we're certain that the Red Man is the mastermind."
"Didn't we expect that? But what does this have to do with holding back on punishing Alan?"
"If we want to fry a large fish then it is better to leave the small fish as bait."
Ha Myung-woo's eyes narrowed at Kim Gwon-tae's answer.
"You're sayingthere is a way to catch the larger fish?"
"Didn't I tell you from the beginning?"

Kim Gwon-tae pointed to the office infested with hackers.

"We've hacked into the Hong Kong circuits and are keeping track of Alan. So we can intercept all data exchanged with the main server. That doesn't just mean that we can see information only related to Alan."

That's right. Whenever a user took some action in the game, the commands would be sent to the main server. For example, if Alan swung his sword when fighting an enemy then a command would be sent to the main server telling it that Alan swung the sword. But if the enemy attacked Alan then the main server would communicate that action to Alan. In other words, all actions applied to Alan within the game relied information exchange with the main server. If they hacked the circuit where the information was exchanged then they could discover all users, items and NPCs that Alan got in contact with. That's why there were 100 hackers analyzing the data day and night......

Anyway, Kim Gwon-tae and the 100 hackers discovered all of the information exchanged with the main server in a few days. That's why they were convinced that the Red Man was the main person in charge of this event.

"Alan made contact with the Red Man last time."

Kim Gwon-tae said with sharp eyes.

"We've figured out Alan's residence so we no longer need to track him. So he rallied all the hackers and chased the Red Man's circuit that had got in contact with Alan's. There were a few minor problems but they were professionals....eventually they found the place he was connecting from.

"Where is it?"

"That fellow is also in Hong Kong."

"Hong Kong? Then that is why Alan went to Hong Kong in the first place....."

"He must've made contact with the Red Man then."

"Then you've decided not to catch Alan?"

"If they've made contact then the Red Man will probably notice if we grab Alan. Then the Red Man will cut the connection loop with Alan and move behind even more sophisticated firewalls. We know his plan is to shake Global Exos. Then he has that kind of ability. If that guy notices out movements then it will be difficult to find his trail again."

Just like Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members, Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo had determined that the Red Man's purpose was to either cheat, blackmail or manipulate the stock prices in order to raise huge revenues. If that happened then hundreds or thousands of billions of won would be moved. Then this simply wasn't an event in the game anymore.

It was an act of global terrorism aimed at a huge business. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the Red Man was a terrorist. A large organization would be moving behind the scene. And they would've had contingencies for every conceivable situation. Kim Gwon-tae was sure that one of those precautions involved Alan.

"The Red Man must have some sort of safety device for Alan. He would probably hide if Alan was exposed."

"Then we will leave Alan alone until we grab the Red Man?"

"That is the only way to catch the Red Man."

"How much time is needed to track the Red Man's circuit?"

"I've already learned Alan's residence so I don't need to backtrack his line anymore. If all the hackers only concentrate on the Red Man's circuit then we can find his residence in a few days."

"Understood. Hurry!"

So they moved on to tracing the Red Man's circuit. After two days of staying up all night and nosebleeds, the hackers were finally able to figure out where the Red Man connected from. Ha Myung-woo

immediately contacted the Hong Kong branch and dispatched security personnel to the Red Man and Alan's hiding places. Currently the security agents were surrounding the Red Man's residence. Of course, they were only the security staff of a private company. They didn't have any right to search or arrest the culprit. However, Global Exos had poured tremendous funds into this project. Therefore the security agents were accompanied by the Hong Kong police, but they just watched with arms folded.

"Rush in!"

The assault crew kicked the door and rushed into the villa. And they were followed by 10 more agents.

"They're not on the 1st floor!"

"Wait on the 1st floor for 1 minute. Enter the 2nd floor in 2 minutes!"

The security agents move quickly like a real SWAT team. The sealed each corridor and climbed to the 2nd floor while quickly searching all rooms.

"I found it. The unit for New World. But....."

After a while, the voice of a security agent stuttered with confusion. Confusion also spread over the leader's face after he entered the room.

Wiiiing, wiiiiing.

Heat and mechanical sounds flowed from the room. The unit was inside the room just like the agent said. And the unit was moving like it was connected to the game. But the user couldn't be seen. Instead of a user, hundreds of cables were stripped and connected to a computer in the corner of the room? A huge circuit? The computer was connected to the unit.

"W-what is this?"

out voice.
"It is connected to the unitthis computeroh my god, it is a giant auto program."
"Auto program?"
"The user isn't moving directly but the program is sending orders telling the character how to move."
"What does that mean? Is this 2010? Why are they using an auto program? And how much terabytes would the auto program need to be able to operate a character in New World? Wouldn't it be easier for the user to move directly in New World?"
"It is unbelievable even though I am seeing it with my own eyes."
The system staff muttered while sweating.
"This computer changes the data to brain waves and transmits it to the unit. For a program like this, millions of terabytes is used to respond to any situation. The unit has also been perfectly remodelled. An ordinary user couldn't do this. They have to understand New World then"
"Then?"
The leader asked in an anxious voice. The staff suddenly shouted in a stricken voice.
"This computer's hard disk is empty!"
"What? Didn't you say it had millions of terabytes just before?"

The leader looked at the other members with an astonished look. Then a system management staff connected a laptop to the machine. They typed into their keyboard for a while before saying in a freaked

"That is certain. This computer's hard disk had millions of terabytes worth of information. But it's not there now. And the data.....has all been transferred to New World's main server. "What nonsense is this? The data was sent to New World's main server through a mere unit? That isn't possible!" "Yes. It's not possible. It is impossible...." The server management agent stuttered with perplexity. That's right. It was impossible to move new data to New World's main server. Even Global Exos had lost control of the main server and couldn't add new information to it. Yet a mere unit had managed to forcibly transmit information to the main server? An auto program had managed something that thousands of hackers couldn't do? It was complete nonsense. But if it was really possible......And this auto program was the data of the Red Man...... Didn't that mean the Red Man had become an NPC in New World? The Red Man created by the auto program have evolved into a life form in New World! Even if they smashed the computer or caught the person who created the auto program, it was impossible to stop the Red Man. "What on earth? Gather the computer and unit and contact headquarters immediately!" The leader commanded. Then one of the crew members came in and shouted. "Captain-nim, the Bravo Team has entered the office that Alan rented. Then....." "Then?" What is it? Was Alan not there?" "No, that is....." The member hesitated before finally replying. "Alan was connected to the unit. But he was already in a brain-dead condition when we secured him."

"Brain-dead condition?"
"Yes, one of the staff investigated and said it was likely due to the shock caused by a backflow of data."
The leader's face darkened at the report.
"What is he doing?"
Timosi muttered. After escaping from Silvana, Timosi and 30 Avenger members were gathered in front of a temple.
Alan had gone inside the temple to receive an explanation from Maseutyu about the broken receiving and they were waiting for him. However, it had already been more than 10 minutes and Alan hadn't returned. One of the Avenger members looked at the temple with a bored look.
"What are they talking about?"
"How long do we have to wait?"
Timosi shot her bow with an angry expression and declared sharply.
"Damn, if they don't give us a good reason then I won't leave Maseutyu and the Red Man alone!"
"I wonder what the reason will be."
The Avenger member replied to Timosi. Timosi was glaring at the temple when she suddenly blinked. A small object was flying from the entrance of the temple.
"Eh? What is that? Hawk's Eye!"

Timosi immediately used Hawk's Eye. The scenery zoomed in many times like she was looking through a telescope. Timosi examined the object with Hawk's Eye and laughed.

"Hohoho, what the? Alan's eyeball? Doesn't he know that I can't stand seeing it? Anyway, it can't be helped. It belongs to Alan so isn't it quite cute?"

The Avenger members made expressions that said 'no way' after hearing Timosi's words. Timosi was different from the other Avenger members. Most of them were chaotic users that joined after being scouted by Andel. However, Timosi had seen Alan on TV and voluntarily joined the Avenger guild. It was all so that she could ogle Alan night and day.

'That woman seems partial to rich men.'

That was Timosi's reputation among the Avenger members. Even so, there was a reason Alan and the Avenger members didn't mess with her. Although Timosi was a crazy woman with a few screws loose, her skills and level made her the strongest user in the Avenger guild.

"Hohoho, is he trying to record me?"

Timosi immediately took out a mirror after seeing Alan's eyeball. She also pulled out a cosmetics set and applied it. At that moment, the eyeball suddenly fell to the ground.

"Eh, it fell!"

"Is it because it saw Timosi's shocking makeup?"

"Well.....it certainly is fearful when looking at it in the evening...."

"What? Do you want to fight?"

Timosi huffed and angrily hit the Avenger members for their words. But then the eyeball which fell to the ground started rotting? The Avenger members exchanging jokes flinched and shut their mouths. Alan's eyeball was rotting. There were only two reasons for that. One was that Timosi's painted face was horrible enough to make it rot, or more likely it meant that the person who used Vampire's Eye was dead. But how could Alan die at the secret base of the demons? Timosi and the Avenger members hurriedly ran to the rotting eyeball. Although it was rotting, the memory crystal lodged in it was still fine.

"What the hell happened in the temple?"

That information would be left in the memory crystal driven into Alan's eyeball. No, clearly Alan had sent the eyeball to them to inform the Avenger members of something important. Timosi had that idea and hurriedly played the memory crystal. When the crystal was used, an image began to form in the sky.

"What, what the? T-this is.....!"

Timosi and the Avengers burst out as they watched the video. The memory crystal played from the moment Alan entered the temple to when he tried to escape. In other words, it showed the words Alan exchanged with Maseutyu and when he was chased by the beasts. That's right. Alan had sent the eyeball to the Avenger members for help when he was being chased by the beasts. And it fell to the ground when the Red Man dealt the final blow near the entrance to the temple.

While the scene of the Red Man killing him wasn't recorded, the rotted eyeball clearly meant that Alan was dead. Timosi grinded her teeth together after the video ended.

"Maseutyu dared do that to Alan.....!"

"Timosi-nim!"

An Avenger cried out next to her. Timosi raised her head after hearing the panicked noise.

-Kuwaaaah!

A large number of beasts were exiting the temple. They were the beasts that attacked Alan. Even people with an IQ in the single digits would be able to tell why the monsters were coming. It was to kill Timosi and the Avenger members like they did Alan!

Paduduk!

The sound of Timosi's tooth breaking was heard. She wanted to kill those beasts and roast their flesh. But according to the information Alan left behind, all of the beasts were elite monsters. No, even if they weren't elite monsters it was impossible for 30 Avengers to fight against thousands of monsters. When considering the power inside the demons' lair, it was almost impossible to escape. If they fought they would be 100% wiped out. Then there was no reason to think too much.

"Damn, Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!"

Timosi turned and shot dozens of arrows. The movements of the rushing beasts became a little dull.

"Let's get out of here for the moment! Maintain formation and retreat!"

-Kuwaaaah!

Timosi's voice was soon buried by the roars of the beasts.