

Ark Vol 23 C 6

Chapter 6

ACT 6 Duke Sarkin's Plot

"What are you saying?"

Ark couldn't understand what had gone wrong. The day before, Ark had painstakingly found a way to repair Silvana thanks to the help of Nagaran's lords. If he used the funds that Schudenberg Kingdom promised to pay for the military supplies than it could be used to finance Silvana's recovery projects.

'That's it. Now I can raise the funds to repair Silvana!'

The only thing left was to receive the money and start fixing the reservoir and farmlands. Of course, not all the problems could be solved with that amount of money. It would take time and effort before Silvana returned to normal. However, that money felt like he had come back alive from the brink of hell.

'I can't afford to waste even one more second or minute!'

So Ark hopefully ran to Selebrid. And he presented the document that Rokon drew up about the military supplies funding to the Finance Minister. However, the Finance Minister just tilted his head to one side and said.

"What is this?"

"What? It is the bill for the funding of the military supplies that His Majesty promised for the Nagaran battle.

"The bill for the military supplies? I don't know what you're saying."

Lipton who was the grey haired middle aged aristocrat in charge of the treasury muttered with a frown.

“That is impossible. When the demons invaded Nagaran 10 days ago, Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition couldn’t give any support troops so he promised to pay for the necessary military supplies.”

“Hrmm.....”

Lipton scanned the document after hearing Ark’s explanation. Then he nodded and said.

“Okay. Then did you bring the issued form?”

“The issued form?”

“Yes, you raised 60,000 troops according to this form. The funding you require is more than 300,000 gold. If you were promised that type of funding then shouldn’t a form have been issued?”

“T-that is.....”

Ark was totally at a loss. He had been so busy at the time that he hadn’t even thought about it. No, he didn’t want to waste even one second so he hadn’t thought about it. There was no time to collect such documents from his allies. Lipton asked in an outraged tone after seeing Ark’s panic.

“What? You want the treasury to pay 300,000 gold without such documents?”

“But it is true. Can’t you check it?”

“Check it? With who?”

Lipton glared and asked. Ark replied.

“Didn’t I tell you? The communication office who contacted the expedition told us that His Majesty had promised to pay the funding. It must be an obvious mistake if the forms weren’t submitted to the Finance Minister. If you contact the communication officer then you can confirm it!”

Lipton’s eyes suddenly narrowed and he said.

“That would be the communication officer in charge of the expedition a month ago? He was dismissed from his position a week ago due to bribery charges. His actions after that are unclear.”

“Huh?”

Ark was completely astonished by Lipton’s words. The communication officer had been accused of bribery and now his whereabouts was unknown? How was that possible? Ark made an absurd expression and said.

“Viscount Haverstein, the expedition commander was also with me when I heard it.”

“Hey.”

Lipton rubbed his face and asked in a tired voice.

“You claimed that the King promised funding but you didn’t bring any papers related to that. The witness you claimed is the communications officer who was stripped of his position due to bribery charges and ran away. And now you claim that another witness is Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition who isn’t here. That’s my summary of the situation. Yet you want the Schudenberg treasury to pay you 300,000 gold?”

.....The situation was becoming dirty and twisted up. However, Ark couldn’t possibly give up the 300,000 gold. If he gave up 300,000 gold then Silvana would be ruined. Besides, the 300,000 gold wasn’t just Ark’s money. It was the money he borrowed from the 60,000 Nagaran allied forces. In other words, if Ark couldn’t obtain the 300,000 gold then he would be in debt. Silvana would fail and Ark would be sitting on a pile of debt. In addition, it wasn’t any different from betraying the faith of the allied forces. He couldn’t just leave it like this.

“Then His Majesty, please check with the King!”

The cornered Ark shouted. Lipton’s eyes became even more incredulous.

“You want me to check with His Majesty? Are you serious?”

“Yes, if you check with His Majesty then you will know the truth.....”

Ark suddenly flinched and held his tongue. He had been desperate after hearing Lipton’s words. But now that he thought about it, he sensed a somewhat subtle nuance. Haverstein who knew Ark wasn’t here. Therefore it sounded like Ark was just trying to use Haverstein’s name to rip off money from the kingdom.

‘.....There is something strange.’

Ark had clearly confirmed the message in the headquarters of the expedition force. Yet the Finance Minister wasn’t convinced no matter what he said. Furthermore, the communication officer in charge of that communication had been stripped of his position due to bribery charges. What was the chance that such a coincidence could happen?

‘Is this someone’s scheme?’

Ark suddenly had that idea. That’s right. Someone had deliberately removed the communications officer who had talked to Ark. The communications officer then disappeared with a bad name. Ark had no choice but to receive confirmation from either Haverstein or the king. However, if this was someone’s scheme then the king wouldn’t know the details about the funding. If the Finance Minister talked to the king and he didn’t know anything then it would be like Ark tried to embezzle 300,000 gold. If the King then asked Haverstein then he might become known as Ark’s accomplice and be forced to resign from the position of the expedition commander. And if Haverstein was removed from the position then the person that would profit the most was.....

‘Duke Sarkin!’

The name popped into his head and all his doubts were gone. Duke Sarkin could easily bribe the communication officer to deliver the message and then remove him. Moreover, the Finance Minister Lipton was an aristocrat who belonged in Sarkin's faction. Then wouldn't the picture naturally emerge?

'Oh my god, if so.....'

In the end, the funding that had been promised was only Duke Sarkin's plot to entrap Ark and Haverstein? Ark immediately realized his intentions after thinking about it. The only way to solve this problem was to reveal Sarkin's scheme. However, the communications officer had disappeared and the only other people who knew about it were Lariette and Nadin.

Nadin was in Sarkin's pocket so it wasn't necessary to speak about it but Lariette was a user so her word wouldn't be accepted. The only remaining person was Haverstein. However, there wasn't anyone who didn't know the relationship between Ark and Haverstein. Since Duke Sarkin controlled the communications officer, the evidence didn't exist and Ark and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement.

'If I ask the check with the King then it won't be fixed!'

He knew that. But Ark couldn't just give up. If he withdrew without the recovery funds then Silvana would be ruined. However, that was nothing. The Nagaran allied forces had promised the war funds to Ark. If he didn't receive the funding then Ark would have to pay 300,000 gold to Nagaran's allied forces instead. And if he couldn't pay the 300,000 gold.....Then the 60,000 allied forces would become his enemy! Ark and Haverstein would be dropped into hell. It was a well thought out scheme from the beginning.

".....There has absolutely been a mistake. I will check and come back again."

Ark said after worrying for a while. Lipton who had expected Ark's destruction just nodded.

"It is still too early to conclude."

Ark exited the building and muttered while shaking his head. Although he was suspicious inside the office, he wasn't 100% sure that this was Duke Sarkin's plot. Maybe it was just some error?

“The first thing I need to check is whether the king actually granted the funding.”

Ark came to that conclusion. If the king was aware of it then this situation would be simply resolved. The problem was how to confirm it.

“If this is indeed Duke Sarkin’s scheme then asking the Finance Minister to check will open me to accusations of embezzlement. I have to confirm it without going through the Finance Minister.”

Therefore Ark went straight to the residence of Marquis Daltin. It was possible for him to meet the king in Selebrid and he had helped Ark before. After Ark explained the circumstances to Daltin.....

“I visited him.”

Marquis Daltin took off his coat and said with a bitter voice.

“I consulted with His Majesty about the problems in the Sinus Principality and tried to stealthily ask about Nagaran. I said that they 100,000 demons were defeated so the army should be somewhat compensated. But Duke Sarkin decisively disagreed. And His Majesty didn’t show any special interest.”

“Then.....”

“His Majesty didn’t know about the military support funding.”

Ark felt like the sky was crashing down after hearing those words.

If the King had decided to grant funding to Nagaran and then decided to pull it then he would have a reaction to Daltin’s words. The fact that he showed no reaction meant he didn’t hear anything in regards to funding Nagaran. Ark’s speculation that it was a plot had come true.

“It’s good that you didn’t respond to Lipton’s provocation and visited me first. If he tried to confirm it with the king then you and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement. Haverstein would be instantly dismissed from the commander’s position. You haven’t completely fallen into Duke Sarkin’s plot.”

He was indeed fortunate. But the results didn't really change for Ark. If he couldn't secure the funds then Ark's worst case situation would soon become a reality. Silvana would soon collapse without the recovery funds and he would owe the 60,000 allied forces a 300,000 debt. Of course, if he explained the circumstances to the lords then they would probably understand. But their good impression of him would be gone and Silvana would also disappear.

'What did I spend 10 days barely sleeping for?'

He felt his anger explode.

'Duke Sarkin.....!'

He grinded his teeth together. This was the first time he felt such fury against a NPC. Right now he was tempted to go visit Sarkin and just stab him. No, if Silvana was ruined then he really would cut off Sarkin's neck. But now wasn't the time to be thinking about something like that.

'Is there another way?'

"If we find the communication officer that Duke Sarkin bribed then the situation would be simple to fix. Then it wouldn't be a problem. That officer impersonated His Majesty and sent a false message to the battlefield. If that was revealed then even Duke Sarkin wouldn't be safe. Do you understand?"

He understood. This was Duke Sarkin's scheme. It was a scheme that he prepared carefully. Then wasn't the key to this scheme the communication officer? Lipton said that the communications officer had been charged with bribery but he had probably been removed by Sarkin. The problem was that the communication officer had disappeared. While Ark had fallen into despair, he grasped Daltin's hand and said.

"Will the Marquis help me?"

"What did you say? I can't do anything unless you find the communications officer."

“It is no use revealing Duke Sarkin’s scheme.”

“Then what can I do to help?”

“Needless to say, the promise of support money for Nagaran was all Duke Sarkin’s scheme. But no matter the scheme, doesn’t Nagaran’s allied forces deserve Schudenberg’s support? If Nagaran’s allied forces hadn’t stopped the 100,000 demons and the Hell River from flooding then the demons within the Sinius Principality would become even stronger. Didn’t Nagaran’s allied forces stop that? Can’t you remind His Majesty and suggest the possibility of some support funding?”

This was the final method that Ark came up with. Even if he wanted to now, assassinating Sarkin wouldn’t solve Ark’s problem. More than Sarkin’s neck, Ark needed to obtain 300,000 gold. It didn’t matter how he got it. Getting 300,000 gold from the kingdom was the most urgent problem.

“That is difficult.”

Daltin sighed and shook his head.

“Duke Sarkin wanted to hang you and Haverstein with this scheme. But you didn’t give into Lipton’s provocation so he missed the chance to get Haverstein. Can’t you be satisfied that you dealt some damage to Sarkin’s plot? Duke Sarkin is the one who arranged everything about this scheme. Of course you want to make a desperate stand against Duke Sarkin. Even if I try to oppose it, Duke Sarkin is the one who controls the kingdom’s finances so the King won’t easily agree.”

“But if you and Marquis Halben join together.....”

It was the only thing he could believe in. Ark desperately entreated. However, Daltin’s reaction was still sceptical.

“.....It might be possible. But the timing right now isn’t really good.”

“The timing isn’t good?”

“You just came from Nagaran so you wouldn’t know about it yet.”

Daltin scratched his beard and murmured.

“Not long ago, the Bristania and Schudenberg expeditions managed to drive all the demons from the Sinus Principality. No, to be exact the demons felt a crisis after the expeditions advanced and retreated.”

Of course Ark knew that information. He had received it from the Dark Eden members who were delivering supplies to the Sinus Principality. In addition, the news about New World on the TV and internet were all concentrated on the Demonic War. The demons retreating from the Sinus Principality was a major event. However, the reason why the demons retreated was still unknown. The expedition armies had gained consecutive victories and managed to control the Silrinad area but there were still lots of demons left. Yet all the demons had suddenly retreated from the Sinus Principality like a flood. Therefore the users had many differing opinions about why the demons disappeared. It was the same for the NPCs.

“There are various theories but nothing is certain. But thanks to that, the Bristania-Schudenberg expeditions succeeded in regaining the Sinus Principality.”

..... And a new problem began from this.

“It isn’t an exaggeration to say that the Sinus Principality is impoverished and on the verge of collapse thanks to the demons. Furthermore, most of the royal family and nobles were killed. Only several royalty and local lords barely survived. So Bristania and Schudenberg has agreed to divide the Sinus Principality and govern it for the next 10 years.”

Daltin spoke while tapping his finger on the table. Ark immediately grasped the aims of Bristania and Schudenberg after hearing Daltin’s speech. Bristania and Schudenberg had sent military expeditions to regain the Sinus Principality from the demons. While it was to stop the demons, they had another reason for saving the Sinus Principality. It was the right to request a reward from the Sinus Principality. However, the Sinus Principality was devastated by the demons and couldn’t afford to give anything. Therefore Bristania and Schudenberg gained the right to split the Sinus Principality and govern it for the next 10 years. But that was just a pretext. The Sinus Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. The atmosphere was polluted after being exposed to the black fog for a long time so there was no guarantee it would be properly restored in 10 years. Even if Bristania and Schudenberg governed for

10 years, there was no benefit in it for them. No, they actually had to invest a lot of money into the recovery work. Yet there was a simple reason why the two controls divided it up.

“This is a chance to swallow up the territory of the impoverished Sinius Principality.”

Daltin laughed as he laid both elbows on the table. That’s right. Bristania and the Schudenberg kingdoms intended to colonize the Sinius Principality. On the pretext of dividing the territories, the Governor of each estate intended to fully absorb it. From the moment they organized the military expedition, they hadn’t been thinking about profit. But it wasn’t as easy as it sounded.

“Didn’t you say that some of the royal family survived? If some royalty is still alive then wouldn’t the two kingdoms have no justification for absorbing the territories?”

“That is normally the case. But this is the Sinius Principality.”

Daltin smiled and explained. The land in a kingdom was basically the property of the king. While the reality is a little different but each Lord and general citizen is just borrowing the real estate from the King. That’s why no other country could claim the territory if the Lord died. But the Sinius Principality was different from other kingdoms.

“Sinius is not a kingdom. It is a principality where dozens of species combined together. The royal family of the Sinius Principality are nothing but representatives of the species. And the representatives of each species each have a territory. But after a long time, the various species mixed together.”

That’s why the Sinius Principality was engulfed in chaos. With the territories deprived of their representative, chaos and anarchy crept in and there were quite few cases of aggression against neighbouring territories. Therefore the Sinius Principality felt it was necessary to establish leadership for each territory.

“Those with the right tokens will gain ownership of the territory in the Sinius Principality.”

“Tokens?”

“Yes, look at this.”

Daltin opened a piece of silk fabric and showed a piece of jewellery. Inside was a ring with a glowing purple stone.

-Soul Ring (Legendary)

Item type: Ring

User Restriction: NPC aristocrats only

A ring inlaid with a brilliantly shining ore.

The residents who live in the northeast area of Morai on the continent believe that the soul of their ancestors reside in the ore. A long time ago, the King of the Sinus Principality was asked to pick a symbol to represent Morai and he picked this ore ring with no hesitation. When shown this ring then all Morai residents will pledge vows of loyalty. Those who own this ring will be given the right to govern Morai territory. However, this is impossible for foreigners as a large majority of residents in New World don't respect them. Therefore it is only for NPCs. Only a noble NPC with a high status can use this ring to claim ownership of the territory.

“This is a symbol that the Bristania expedition got their hands on.”

“Bristania? Then why does Marquis-nim own this?”

“The token ended up with the Schudenberg expedition. Because the territory that the Soul Ring rules over is located in the northeast area governed by the Schudenberg Kingdom. We gave the Bristania expedition a token for an area in the northwest. This was due to the negotiations.”

Ark now understood the situation. The Sinius Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. And the Bristania and Schudenberg army had defeated the demons. They also recovered the tokens representing the territories from the demons. But these tokens weren't primarily a possession of the Sinius Principality. Each of the lords for those territories were dead so the expedition who found the tokens claimed ownership. So the tokens were divided between the Bristania and Schudenberg kingdom after the war was over.....and they were able to claim the rights to the territory.

"The Sinius Principality has 26 different territories. Only 9 royalty and lords survived. In the end, that means that 17 territories have no owners. The Bristania Kingdom is governing 7 territories in the northwest while Schudenberg is governing 10 territories in the northeast."

Schudenberg was able to gain more territories because they reached Silrinad first and gained the initiative.

"Then 10 territories in the Sinius Principality belong to Schudenberg Kingdom?"

"That's not it."

Daltin shook his head with a tired expression.

"Out of the 10 territories given to Schudenberg kingdom, only tokens for 6 territories have been found. The whereabouts of the remaining tokens are unclear. That is why I can't take to His Majesty about funding for Nagaran's military supplies."

The Schudenberg kingdom only had tokens for 6 territories out of 10.....In other words, most of the aristocrats with the tokens would own the estate while those without one would have to return the token after 10 years. So there was a fierce fight between the three factions of Duke Sarkin, Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin to find the token so they could gain an advantage over the other factions. That was because their influence would become bigger if their subordinates governed a territory. And tomorrow was the final meeting to decide what nobles to dispatch to the territories. If Daltin mentioned funding 300,000 gold to Nagaran's allied forces then it was just an opportunity to be caught by Duke Sarkin and Marquis Halben.

"If I mention this then I won't have any influence over who to send as a governor. The meeting is tomorrow and I've only managed to secure two tokens after negotiations with Bristania."

“Then what about Marquis Halben?”

“Marquis Halben was also able to obtain two. But Haverstein is the commander of the expedition force so one territory will be entrusted to him. That means his faction has 3 territories.”

Ark tilted his head after hearing Daltin’s words. Schudenberg Kingdom had found 6 tokens. Marquis Daltin had 2 and Halben had 3 so only one was left.

‘Then Duke Sarkin only managed to obtain one token?’

Duke Sarkin’s faction was the most influential among the three factions. So wasn’t it strange that he only found one token? Daltin nodded after hearing Ark’s question and replied.

“Yes, Duke Sarkin only secured one token. So he will obtain the right to temporarily govern the 4 territories where the tokens haven’t been found.”

“But what happens if he can’t find the token after 10 years? Moreover, the territories have become ruins. He would have to invest a huge amount of income in order to restore the businesses. There is no guarantee how long that will take. There is no security that he can recover the amount of funds invested after 10 years.”

“That’s right. But he might be able to find the tokens without those 10 years.”

‘Is it really like that?’

Ark couldn’t completely agree with Daltin’s words. If Sarkin found the token during those 10 years then he could claim ownership of the territory. If that happened then Sarkin would obtain 5 territories in the Sinus Principality. However, it was just a gamble. The odds of victory were low.

The reason was simple. The Sinus Principality had been occupied by the demons so of course the tokens would be lost. But the expedition forces defeated the demons and couldn’t find all the tokens. If the demons retreated then it was natural to think that they took the tokens with them. In the end, it was

highly unlikely that the token would be found within the territory. Daltin and Halben didn't want the territories with no tokens so it had passed onto Sarkin. The question was why Sarkin accepted. Even if he invested huge amounts of money into the territory, if he couldn't find the token then he would have to return it 10 years later. The revenue he would gain from the territory would be no match for how much he invested. So why would Sarkin do something that would lose him money? There must be something. Sarkin was clearly up to something.

'If I was Duke Sarkin, what would be my reason.....?'

Ark's eyes suddenly flashed. There was only one reason Ark could think of for Sarkin's behaviour.

'Sarkin must've already obtained the tokens!'

That's right. If he thought like that then all his questions were answered. Over 30% of the soldiers in the expedition army belonged to Duke Sarkin. If Sarkin used those soldiers then he could easily smuggle the tokens from under Haverstein's eyes.

'That is why Haverstein couldn't find the tokens. If Sarkin only had 1 token then Daltin and Halben would easily concede the four territories to him. In the end, Sarkin will sneakily manage to obtain 5 territories.'

He could recognize the smell of someone similar to him! If Ark had the same power as Sarkin then he would probably do the same thing to obtain the four territories.....

'What if these facts were made known?'

Of course Sarkin would pay the price for tricking the King!

'But how do I prove it?'

.....That was the problem. If Sarkin succeeded in gaining 5 territories then he would have even more influence. However, if it was revealed then Sarkin would receive a fatal blow. That's why all the soldiers involved in retrieving the tokens must be kept under tight security. Ark had one day left to find a way to damage Sarkin. The meeting tomorrow afternoon will bestow the rights to the 4 territories to Sarkin.

How could he prove that Sarkin had discovered the tokens beforehand? He had to prove that Sarkin had the tokens before the meeting started.

'Sarkin is probably the only one who knows where the token is hidden. It is probably hidden inside Duke Sarkin's house.

That's right. Sarkin was a person who plotted several schemes. If there was something dangerous that could strangle him then he would always place it right next to him. And that was Ark's biggest difficulty. Once again, New World was a game which allowed infinite degrees of freedom. If the user wanted to then they could assassinate a NPC or steal from one. Even so, there was one reason why they couldn't rob the house of an NPC! Most of the houses of high ranking NPCs had crime prevention security that couldn't even be compared to dungeons. If they did one thing wrong then the user would become chaotic and guards would flock like bees. Moreover, Duke Sarkin was one of the most influential nobles in Schudenberg. Even a professional assassin like Shambala wouldn't be able to enter without being detected.

'I only have one day left. After that there will be no more chances to find evidence. If I want to enter directly then I need a search warrant like in the movies. Anyway, now I have nothing to lose. Either he dies or I die.....'

Ark made a determined expression. Suddenly there were fierce sparks inside Ark's head.

'That's right. There is such that method!'

After organizing his thoughts, Ark stood up and shouted.

"Marquis-nim, do you have any papers with Duke Sarkin's seal?"

"Duke Sarkin's seal? I have a few but...."

"Please prepare it for me."

A brutal smile appeared on Ark's face as his eyes narrowed and he began to talk.