

Ark Vol 3 Chapter 9

Chapter 9

To Giran Again

"Hey, Hyun-woo. Over here."

As he entered the cafe, Gwon Hwa-rang waved from the side. Jung Hye-sun was also sitting next to Gwon Hwa-rang. Though it hadn't been long since they had met, there was no sense of awkwardness between them.

Well, there were many people who grew close from hunting together even back in the days when they enjoyed online games with cookie cutter characters. Gwon Hwa-rang and Jung Hye-sun had spent almost a month together with characters that looked similar to their real selves in a virtual reality game. There was no reason to be awkward.

"What's the occasion to call me out at a time like this?"

"It's because we don't have much time to talk in the game."

"That's true."

Hyun-woo nodded as he sat on the opposite side.

"Is the game worth playing?"

"Ahhh, it's really such a shame. I could explode in anger from not knowing about something this good until now."

"What about you, Hye-sun?"

"I'm having fun, too. But I'm upset I don't have much time to play."

"That can't be helped, since real life is more important than the game. You have to study, too. Speaking of which, you don't have much time before your test, right? You can raise your level anytime if mister Gwon or I help you, so concentrate on studying for now, understand? One should study when they can."

"Che, nagging like an old man..." Jung Hye-sun pursed her lips, but it didn't seem like she disliked Hyun-woo's meddling. "But what are you going to do now?"

"Hm, I thought about it, and I think I'm going to have to hole up somewhere decent and level up a lot. I felt just how terribly weak I was during this quest. Whether in real life or the virtual world, I can't stand being weaker than others, because justice can only be realized with strength."

"You're really the same as ever."

"Walk the path of work, people, and games! That's what it is to be a man!"

Enthusiasm blazed in Gwon Hwa-rang's eyes. It was a look that Hyun-woo hadn't seen in a really long time. Once again, he thought that he had done well to suggest New World to Gwon Hwa-rang.

"It's good that you're going to stay at Jackson for a while. When you log in, go meet the Lord."

"The Lord?"

"Yes, the Lord says he has something to talk to you about. Try becoming well acquainted with him. Raising your intimacy with an NPC like the Lord will be a huge help."

Hyun-woo laughed at Gwon Hwa-rang's dazed expression. After that, he ate dinner with Jung Hye-sun and Gwon Hwa-rang, visited the hospital, and returned home. Even though it was already night time, he turned on his computer and accessed the auction site as soon as he got home. He was extremely curious about the result of the auction items he had recently put up.

- Auction has ended. Gauntlets of Strength: 750,000 Won (~\$750)

- The auction has been in progress for 7 hours. Fire Slayer : 6,800,000 Won (~\$6,800)

'6,800,000 Won!

He felt like he couldn't breathe.

The Gauntlets of Strength he had put up in the 6 hour auction were sold for a final bid of 750,000 Won. He thought he'd be able to get 800,000 Won for it, but the sum was a little short of his expectat

ions. However, there was still the Unique mace he had put up in a 72 hour auction with great expectations. Within just 7 hours, an enormous price had been attached to the Fire Slayer. He had expected it would sell for a high price since it was a rare and Unique weapon, but the price had rocketed to 6,800,000 Won in 7 hours in a 72 hour auction. There were still 65 hours left. Looking at how things were going, it seemed like it could easily exceed 10,000,000 Won (~\$10,000). That was enough to live for two months without worrying about money.

"This is no different from my first harvest as a pro gamer. But I can't be satisfied here. Getting by is most important, but I'm not playing the game just

to get by. Now there's hope in passing the entrance exam. I submitted the report about getting 1st place in contribution with Alan in the event quest, so my evaluation in Global Exos has probably gone up a little.'

He had worked to death in the quest, but once the floodgates started to open, everything worked out well. Hyun-woo couldn't contain his overflowing enthusiasm and got into the unit.

Ark left Jackson Castle and went into the forest.

If he used the Magic Institute's tower in Jackson, he could teleport to Giran in an instant. Truthfully, he was impatient to get to Giran right away to check his reward for the event quest. He also had to find a way to end Snake's metamorphosis as soon as possible. However, Ark still had business to attend to in the area.

Envoy of the Merpeople

The Queen of the Merpeople regrets the past mistakes and wishes to reconcile with the Meow. For you, who has high Intimacy with both the Merpeople and Meow, you should be able to easily reconcile the two races.

Difficulty: G

Quest Requirement: Meow and Merpeople intimacy must be over 70%.

There was a place he had to go to at least once sometime to resolve the quest he had received from the Mermaid Queen of the Underwater City, Nodelesse. Truthfully, the difficulty was so-so, and even if he completed the quest, he couldn't go back to the Merpeople to get his reward. At best, he could get a little EXP. That was why Ark hadn't been in a hurry even after receiving the quest. However, the ruins where the Meow lived weren't far from Jackson Territory, so he thought he would resolve it before leaving.

The first time he went to the ruins, he had ridden a horse. As a result, he had thought it wasn't such a far distance, but once he was actually walking there, it took quite a while. However, that was fine in its own way.

'It's been too grim lately.'

Throughout the event quest, he had fought while engulfed in Dark Fog. Although he had leveled up 10 times thanks to the quest, both his body and mind were tired. Even if he was a Dark Walker, there was no way he would be peachy since he had spent 3 days of real time in the darkness.

Ark appreciated the awesome landscape of New World as he leisurely headed towards the ruins. Of course, Ark wasn't one to let his hands idle even if it was a break. He didn't forget to root through every corner of the forest to

restock on the ingredients he had completely used up. Most of his skills were Intermediate now. Collecting or cooking low level ingredients didn't raise his skill proficiency. But Ark had already moved to a high level hunting ground, so obtaining low level ingredients was even more difficult. He needed some low leveled ingredients to make safe food, so it was better to get them while he could.

GRRR!

As he swept through the forest, a Wolf or a Dire Wolf would occasionally show up. But now, such opponents were cute instead. Killing them granted almost no EXP or skill proficiency; a player of a similar level to Ark would probably find it troublesome and simply pass by. However, Ark was different. Although he didn't go looking for them, but he could never just pass by a monster that showed up before his eyes.

'Even 1 EXP is EXP, and 1 Copper is still money!'

Accumulating even 1 EXP would bring you up a level, and saving up 1 Copper would become Gold. That was Ark's steadfast mindset. Also, it was fun to hunt comparatively low level monsters. Seeing a Wolf lose 60% of its Health in one strike made him feel he had become stronger.

Hunting that was actually comfortable!

They were no good for EXP, but it was really refreshing. When he was sweeping through the forest later, the monsters were frightened and stealthily avoided him. Just when he was growing tired of that kind of hunting, the ruins came into sight at last.

'Huh? The feeling is way different.'

The ruins had changed so much that he wondered if he was in the right place. The bleak atmosphere around the ruins had vanished, replaced by a brighter one. All sorts of wild flowers were in full bloom at the warm, sunny entrance, emitting a feeling of splendor. He saw cats peacefully enjoying naps amongst the wild flowers. Ark approached a girl who was surrounded with cats.

"Long time no see, Jana."

"Oh? Aren't you Ark?"

Looking glad to see him, Jana approached with her tail waving gently.

"Have you been well?"

"Well, there hasn't been anything special," Jana replied insincerely as she pressed her nose in at him, sniffing. Then she giggled as she looked at Ark anew.

"Hnng, back then you were a kid, but now you smell like a man. You've become quite tempting. When you have the time, want to go out with me?"

"Thanks, but I'll decline," Ark answered with a wry smile.

If your level or Fame rose, the responses of NPCs changed slightly as well. There were many times when NPCs in a new village would show a disdainful attitude if your level and Fame were low, but once your level became high, they would give you proper adventurer treatment. Jana was also merely responding to the rise in level; there wasn't any other intent to it. Even if there was, he wasn't desperate enough to want to date an NPC yet.

Of course, it would be different if a beauty like Jana were to approach him in real life...

As expected, Jana asked as if she didn't really care, "But what's the occasion?"

"I want to meet the elder, is he in the ruins?"

"Nope, after you left we took care of all the monsters left in the temple, so there's really no need to stay in the temple. We're currently making a residence around here."

"Will you take me to it?"

"Yeah, follow me."

The place Jana guided him to was a forest pretty far from the ruins. The fifteen Meow Warriors he had seen before were gathered in a sufficiently sized clearing. The Meow Warriors were concentrating on something else for a while, so they weren't aware that Ark had come.

However, there was no knowing what exactly they were doing. The big bodied men trembled as they piled up a mess of small logs. But even a child could see that the logs were poorly stacked, and they soon fell over.

"Agh, dammit! This is so frustrating!"

"I can't take it anymore! Nya, nya, nya!"

Whenever that happened, the Meow youths angrily scratched the logs with their claws.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I told you. We're building a house."

"But I can only see that you're playing around?"

"What I'm saying is..."

Jana heaved a sigh. "Meows are originally Warriors from birth. We can fight for days without rest, but our handicraft skills suck. Thanks to that, we've been building a house for two months already, but it's as you can see. I think it's gonna take about 10 years or so."

"Then where did you live before you trapped in the ruins?"

"Our friends among the Humans built the village we lived in before. However, it was neglected while we were locked up for a long time, so now there isn't even a trace of it left. The Humans we knew all grew old and died, and sociability isn't our strong suit. So we haven't been able to ask the Humans and ended up like this."

"Can't you live in the ruins?"

"It's not a ruin. It's a temple, and a temple is not a place for the homeless to live. It's alright for me since I'm the temple's Shaman, but the other Meows can't. We finally cleaned out the monsters, so if dirty men were crawling around in there, what would be the difference from before?" Jana retorted with pouty lips.

So she was saying she didn't care if the Meow built a house or slept in the open, huh? Just like a cat.

Anyway, whether she was a cat or a dog, it wasn't Ark's concern. Once he passed the Meow who were either building the house or breaking it, he found Hassan under a huge tree. Hassan had given the work to his underlings and was stretched out in a nap.

When Jana gave him a kick, Hassan sprang awake. Then he looked around, shaking his head like crazy, and when he saw Ark, he greeted him with a grin.

"Ohh, who's this? Isn't this our friend, Truthseeker Ark?"

"I have come to meet you, elder."

"Me? Okay, what's the problem?"

"The truth is..." Ark fully explained the situation between Hero Maban and the Mermaid Queen, as well as how the Merpeople had misunderstood the Meow due to conflicting opinions on their relationship. Then he added, "The current Mermaid Queen wants to clear up the past misunderstanding and reconcile with the Meow. How about accepting their apology, at least in consideration for Hero Maban and Adelaine's sad love, which ended in

tragedy long ago? Apparently the Merpeople one-sidedly hated the Meow, but isn't that all in the past now?"

"Aahh, right. Something like that did happen," answered Hassan indifferently as he scratched his messy head.

It seemed like he hadn't thought much of the fight with the Merpeople.

"Well, I didn't really care, but it was certainly a nasty incident. However, as you said, that, too, is a thing of the past, since the latest friction with the Merpeople occurred when I was young. The other kiddos probably haven't even seen the Merpeople."

"You've met the Merpeople before?"

"Of course."

"The elder has lived for hundreds of years. He's a living fossil," Jana commented with a laugh.

"Shush, who are you calling a fossil?" Hassan pierced Jana with a glare before opening his mouth again with a cough. "Honestly, I don't really care whether the Merpeople want to reconcile or not. It's not that hard to accept their apology, either. However, it's a bit much to accept an apology for such

an old grudge with just one word. It's like we've been waiting on our hands and knees for it or something."

"Don't be like that and please accept for me, at least."

"Hmm, if you say it like that, I can't just refuse... How discomfiting." Hassan scratched his head with an uncomfortable look. Then, as if a thought had suddenly struck him, he asked with flashing eyes, "Now that I think about it, you are a Human. Then how about we do it like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look around. As you can see, we're currently stuck in a very big predicament. If we go on like this, we won't be able to build a mud hut, let alone a house, even after a few years. I would like you to solve that problem for us."

"Me?"

"Yeah, since you're a Human, don't you have one or two friends in the nearby village? Go ask them to build a house for us. A simple cabin shouldn't even take a week to build for a Human. Only then will I accept the Merpeople's apology," said Hassan with a proud expression, as if he had cooked up a great idea.

In contrast, Ark's expression contorted strangely. "What does that have to do with accepting the Merpeople's apology?"

"It's related. You're our friend, but didn't you come as the envoy of the Merpeople? Then you should help us. Then doesn't that give us a justification to accept the apology in exchange?"

Put that way, it made quite a lot of sense.

'There's a saying about being as wily as a cat; contrary to his looks, Hassan really used his head.'

But to Ark, it was an unwelcome condition. He hadn't come all this way expecting a great reward. He just wanted to finish off a quest he'd picked up while he was here. But if he were to go Jackson and back for a G level quest, he'd be wasting too much time. He also couldn't be sure of finding an NPC craftsman. All the NPC craftsmen in Jackson were mobilized to repair the damages from the war. No matter how high his intimacy was, a request without a decent reason would be rejected, and there wouldn't be an NPC willing to fling away Jackson to follow him all the way here to build a house for cats. Even so, not being able to finish the quest after coming all this way here bothered him.

'A house for cats... maybe that...?'

At that moment, an idea sparked in Ark's head. There was a quest that fit this situation perfectly.

'The 'Find New Settlers' quest!'

He hadn't been able to find a clue to solving that quest after receiving it in Lancel Village. Actually, he had brought it up with a few NPCs, but they had all refused. But shouldn't there be a high chance of success if it was the Meow, who weren't tethered to the territory and were looking for a place to live?

'Yeah, the Meow are homeless right now. Then should I try bringing it up once?'

After thinking about it for a bit, Ark said with a subtle tone, "Then how about this?"

"Go ahead."

"There is a settler town I know well not far from here. Many people left, so there are a lot of empty houses there. If you ask them, they will supply the Meow with the necessary housing."

"A Human village? Are you saying the honorable Meow should sponge off a Human village?" Even before he finished talking, Hassan grumbled with an unpleasant voice.

It was the reaction he had expected. Unlike dogs, cats were originally animals that didn't match well with humans. Even if one was raised with affection from kittenhood, it wasn't subservient to the human as its owner. There were even many cases where some cats acted charmingly only at mealtime, only to immediately abandon the facade after mealtime and leave the house.

To put it badly, they are mannerless; to put it nicely, cats are animals with a strong sense of independence and pride.

Having inherited such catlike natures, the Meow wouldn't want to become beholden to Humans. That was also the reason they struggled to build a house for 2 months without being able to go ask Humans for help. Once their friend Ark showed up, they were being "generous" and asking for help. But that was what Ark was aiming for.

Ark let out a sigh as he nodded. "You really don't like it, huh? Truthfully, I also thought it was a shameless request. It's also dangerous..."

"What? A request? It's dangerous? Just what are you saying now?"

"No, it's fine. Pretend you didn't hear anything."

"Dammit, do you want to see someone explode and die? I can take pain but I'm the kind of person who can't contain curiosity. Whatever it is, just give it to me straight!"

Did they say curiosity killed the cat? Just like a cat, Hassan couldn't contain his restlessness and got caught.

'Huhuhu, got him. I've got him on the line.'

Ark hid a satisfied smile as he pretended to be against it. "Yes, the truth is the village was once under attack by monsters and pushed to the brink of life and death. Thankfully it has become safer than before, but monsters are still around. There's no knowing when it could face danger again. That's why I thought it'd be nice if the valiant Meow could protect them. It's not sponging off, but being reasonably rewarded while protecting them. Just like nobles."

"Ohh, monsters? Are there a lot of monsters in the area?"

"Yes, there are a lot of strong monsters. The ones called Gnolls in particular are pretty dangerous."

"Gnolls! Did you just say Gnolls?" Hassan yelled, jumping up. The Meow building the cabin also approached, their eyes wide. "If they're Gnolls, then they're the dog-heads! Right?! You're talking about the noisy dog-heads that bark?"

"That's right. They are quite strong and vicious. Even for the Meow, protecting the village from such monsters would be..."

"Nonsense!" As Ark subtly slowed to a stop, Hassan shouted. "Even if hundreds of the likes of those stupid dog-heads were to press in, they'd be no match for the brave Meow. Yes, the dog-heads have long been enemies of the Meow. Why? Don't ask, because I don't know either. Anyway, I hate the dog-heads like crazy! To think those dog-heads got this close to the sacred temple of the Meow while our eyes were briefly turned away! Knowing this, we can't just overlook it!"

"Then are you accepting my suggestion?"

"Yeah. If they're being threatened by the dog-heads, then we must go help Lancel Village or whatever it's called. It is definitely not because of a house or food. We're just staying there a bit to defend the pride of the Meow while we wipe out the dog-heads for them. Though of course, to do that we must rest comfortably and eat our fill..."

"Don't worry. If you will protect the village, the residents will gladly cover the room and board the Meow desire."

As Ark said that with a grin, a message popped up with a cheerful sound effect.

- Art of Communication has increased by 3.

The quest 'Find New Settlers' has been updated.

You have wisely convinced the Meow Elder Hassan to migrate to Lancel Village. The Meow are a valiant tribe possessing a natural Warrior disposition. If they guard Lancel Village, the villagers will no longer have to fear monsters.

This will be a great help to the Lancel villagers, who wish for safety more than anything else. As they will get what they want thanks to the Meow, they will readily provide a housing and food.

Finding new settlers: 15% complete.

You have found settlers with special abilities.

With the migration of the Meow, a Warrior tribe, Lancel Village's safety has risen by 40%. However, since they have to be steadily furnished with food, the food situation has worsened by 10%.

If you invite a settler with a special ability, trade, safety, and the food situation values will increase. Depending on the values, you will be able to receive a bonus reward upon quest completion.

'What's this?'

After checking the message, Ark's eyes widened.

It was an unthought-of message. He had thought that he just had to increase the number of people. But looking at the message that popped up last, it seemed there was a hidden achievement system besides the completion value. Just like a RTS (Real-time Strategy) game he had tried a long time ago, safety increased if he sent a Warrior, and a Craftsman NPC would increase trade. The reward would change depending on the result when the completion hit 100%.

'I'm not supposed to just send random refugees!'

It was obvious if he thought about it a little more deeply. The quest's objective was to revive Lancel Village. If he supplied the village with good manpower, then of course it would develop more.

There are countless ways to resolve a single quest. There was no knowing how an action or a single word would take effect. Ark realized that point once again. It was a system that could either be called picky or fun.

'But only 15%?' Thinking the quest would definitely be completed, Ark was displeased. 'I sent fifteen folks but it amounted to 15%? So does that mean I need to find at least 80 more?'

He had found fifteen people one month after receiving the quest. Considering he needed to go looking in other places to gather another 80, his mind reeled. But in any case, he'd found a clue to resolving the quest.

'Well, if a quest is difficult, it's better the more difficult it is. 'Cause that means the reward will be greater.'

Ark was positive at all times.

"Dog-heads, you say they're the dog-heads? Huhuhu, you've given us good info. My blood is boiling for the first time in a while."

Hassan's whiskers were already stiff as his will blazed. He thanked Ark, who had changed their boring house building to Gnoll hunting, by rubbing his entire body over him.

"We don't have to build a house now?"

"We can really play around and eat while only hunting, right?"

"Hooray, freedom!"

The gathered Meow Warriors also wagged their tails like crazy as they leapt around.

"You are truly a lump of good luck. I mean, we can't help but love you since you solve our problems whenever you show up. No, I shouldn't be doing this, I want to give you some kind of reward... Dang it, we've got nothing right now because that Debra rascal ransacked the temple..."

When Hassan fretted about wanting to do something for Ark, Jana snapped at him with a pitying voice. "Elder, do you have dementia? There's that one thing you said you'd do for Ark if he happened to come again."

"What? Ahh, yes. That's right. I completely forgot about it."

"You'll do something for me? What are you talking about?" asked Ark with a piqued expression. Could he possibly receive a separate reward with the Envoy of the Merpeople quest?

"Huhuhu, we have a surprise present prepared for you. No, I shouldn't be saying it, follow me."

Hassan and Jana took Ark to the temple. With the monsters gone, the inside of the temple had become much neater. They walked along a long corridor and the chamber that Debra had inhabited soon appeared. Once they arrived in the room, Hassan extended his hand.

"Fortunately you still have the Cat Paws I gave you. Give them to me for a bit."

As Ark took off the Cat Paws, Hassan explained, "You probably don't know how valuable these are because I gave them to you so suddenly. Actually, they are an extremely precious magic armament that can completely draw out the wearer's ability. However, to draw out the full ability of a Meow armament, it has to receive a Shaman's blessing. But the temple was polluted when I gave the armament to you, so we couldn't bless it. You also looked like you weren't qualified to equip a blessed armament."

His question of 'then shouldn't you have told me that sooner?' was resolved by Jana.

"Che, you're just making that up... you just forgot about it."

"S-shut up! Don't talk back and bless it already!"

Hassan hurriedly equivocated and put the Cat Paws on top of the altar. Jana's face sobered. A short while afterwards, he heard a melody, as if an acoustic guitar was being played somewhere.

That was when Jana started dancing around and around the altar in rhythm to the melody. The cats that had followed them into the temple chased Jana as they sang.

Nya, nyaa, nyaaaa, nya, nya, nya~

Just what should he call this... A scene like the one where animals had performed a musical in a cartoon film he'd watched when he was young?

Since a girl that looked perfectly normal was doing such a thing, the watching Ark was more embarrassed, but it was fun in its own way. Then, after some time had passed, a beam of light suddenly shone in from above the altar; when it touched the Cat Paws, a bluish light flowed out.

"Phew, it's done. That was frickin' embarrassing," Jana mumbled as she wiped the sweat that had soaked her. As expected, she had been embarrassed too.

"Tsk, what poor conduct despite being a so-called Shaman..." Hassan grumbled as he handed the Cat Paws to Ark. "Alright, they're all done. Here, try equipping them now. You'll find out why the Meow are so strong."

They didn't look any different except for a blue light shimmering at the ends of the fingertips. But the moment he checked their info, his mouth fell open on its own.

Blessed Cat Paws (Rare)

Armor Type

Leather Gloves, Knuckles

Defense

30 (+7,8)

Attack Damage

9-15 (+7,8)

Durability

50/50

Weight

5

Usage Restriction

Cat Knight only, at least level 60

A defensive weapon that has been passed down for generations among the Meow, new abilities have surfaced after receiving the blessing of the Meow temple. Now, the Cat Paws will display their true abilities, as befitting of a Truthseeker's equipment. As the wearer becomes stronger, the Cat Paws will also become stronger.

Options: Attack speed increased by 15%. Agility increased by 20. Critical hit rate increased by 15%.

Special option: Defense and damage will increase by x0.1 of the wearer's level.

'A growth item!'

The fundamental stats hadn't changed. But the important part was the special option attached at the end!

They had changed to a growth item with added defense and damage according to his level. Therefore, when he reached level 100, the damage and defense would also rise by 10. In the game world where one is constantly out

of breath to find a better item every time they leveled up, a growth item was a tremendous treasure.

With its stats raised, the Cat Paws' defense was on par with the Black Bear Mouse Leather Armor, and the damage wasn't too far behind Lancel's Sword, either. He could only be more surprised the more he looked at them.

He hadn't been able to acquire a decent item for himself because he'd been concentrating on the event quest for a while. But once things started working out, he had been effortlessly striking it lucky. The quest was resolved successively and items were randomly pouring in.

'So that's how it is, the purpose of the Envoy of the Merpeople quest was this!'

When Ark was given a quest that told him to return to a low level area despite having returned from clearing the White Whale's labyrinth, which could normally only be done at a considerable level, he had thought it a little strange. But now he knew the reason.

The profession exclusive item that is given to those who clear a profession quest— Envoy of the Merpeople was a scenario quest to give him that reward.

"This is a true armament of the Meow. How is it? Do you like it?"

"Yes, thank you. It really makes me think I did well to become a Truthseeker."

"That must be so, indeed. Uhuhuhu. Of course you should like it. Because a Truthseeker is honorable. Anyway, I'm happy because you're satisfied with it. Now, shall we finish this? Having come to me as the envoy of the Merpeople, you listened to my request, and I gave you a just reward. Since we both got what we wanted, now we have a justification. I, Hassan, the Elder of the Meow, will formally accept the apology of the Merpeople. The Meow scattered all over the world will think of the Merpeople as comrades from today onwards."

Th-th-thump, the quest information window opened.

The quest 'Envoy of the Merpeople' has been completed.

You, who sought the Meow as the envoy of the Mermaid Queen, convinced Elder Hassan and achieved the objective. Now the two races have promised to forget the grudge of the past and be concordant. As the witness of this promise, you have become the first Human to receive respect from both races.

Reward: Item upgrade, EXP +500, Fame +35.

Even with the completion of the quest, his experience didn't go up by much.

But he was more than satisfied with the upgrade of the Cat Paws alone.

"Now, we've finished our business here. Shall we go rescue the village called Lancel?"

"Wait a minute. There's something I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Actually, I found a legacy of Hero Maban when I went to the Underwater City."

"A legacy of Hero Maban?"

"Yes, this is it."

When he took out the Star Fragment and showed it, Hassan made a surprised expression. "This is definitely one of the Three Marvels that disappeared along with Hero Maban."

"As an honorable Truthseeker, I wish to find all of Hero Maban's legacies."

"Indeed. After all, it's said that Hero Maban first started with the work of finding the Three Marvels. He didn't need the help of the Three Marvels after realizing his true strength later, but the Three Marvels were certainly the origin of Hero Maban's power. If you're a Truthseeker, of course you'd want to gather the Three Marvels."

"Do you happen to know where the other Three Marvels are?"

This was Ark's second objective. The Three Marvels were absolutely necessary for him to grow as a Dark Walker. As such, it meant that finding the Three Marvels was his main goal in the game, for the moment. But the clues were currently too insufficient. Therefore, he had thought that the Elder of the Meow, who had served Hero Maban, would have a clue.

"I said this earlier, the Three Marvels disappeared with Hero Maban. I only know about the origin of the Three Marvels. I don't know if it'll be a clue or not. If even that is fine, it's not hard to tell you."

"Yes, even a small clue is fine."

"Hm... it's a bit of a long story, but... I'll put it simply. First, you have to know the Three Marvels didn't originally belong to Hero Maban. They were ancient legacies of the three races that represented the Beasts. Around the time when the Dark Age was starting, Hero Maban went searching for them,

asking to borrow their power, and he received the Three Marvels at the cost of undergoing their trials. And it's said that Hero Maban, who later achieved complete power, returned the Three Marvels to their original owners."

"He returned them all?"

"That's right, it's actually ridiculous that Adelaine stole the Star Fragment. The Merpeople who inhabit the ocean serve the stars. The Star Fragment was probably a treasure of the Merpeople from the very beginning. Hero Maban likely intended to return it to the Merpeople sometime as well."

"Where are the other two races that gave Hero Maban their treasures?"

"I don't know that." Hassan scratched his head. "Humans lump us all into the Beast category, but in truth, the Beasts hardly interact with each other. Moreover, we were locked up for a long time, so there's nothing more to say. I heard Hero Maban also went looking for countless Beast races in the past and spent a long time before he found the Three Marvels."

"Then have you heard of the Underground World?"

"The Underground World?"

"The Mermaid Queen said that one of the Three Marvels might be in the Underground World."

"To be sure, she might know the whereabouts of the Three Marvels, since she receives information from all sea creatures. But the Underground World... I remember hearing a snatch about it somewhere."

With his arms folded, Hassan fell into thought for a while.

"Yes, that's right. There were a few times when we traded with the Beast race of the Underground World when I was young. Among the Beast races, they're the only ones who have good craftsmanship. Well, we always traded through a deputy so I've never seen them myself, but... there was always the same shape carved into the goods that they made. That's right. It was probably this shape."

Hassan drew a picture that was like three triangles overlapping.

"Though I don't think it'll be much help..."

"That's not so, thank you."

The only information he'd gleaned was a simple figure, but Ark wasn't disappointed. For now, he'd gotten a clue. It was a big advancement

compared to when he didn't know what he had to look for. What was left to do now was to thoroughly go through New World, as he had been doing until now. As he gathered information and completed quests, he would definitely be able to find a connected clue.

He sometimes forgot, but this was a game. It was a world made for the players.

For the time being, Ark returned to Jackson Castle. When he entered the Magic Institute's tower, a Magician NPC approached him.

"What service do you desire?"

"I've come to apply for letter movement."

"What is your name?"

"It is Ark."

"Ah, Ark-nim! I've been waiting for you."

"Huh?"

"Wait a sec. Here it is. This is a letter was entrusted to me from a person who utilized letter movement here a few days ago. Looks like the sender is Shambala-nim."

'Shambala!'

Ark quickly took the letter and read it.

FROM Shambala

I'm leaving first because of an urgent quest.

Fighting with you was fun in its own way. But if possible, I want to try a proper test of our skills with you. Ah, I'm not saying we should be enemies, 'cause I don't want to get mess with a dude like you as an enemy. If you think the same way, then come to the arena in Selebrid, the capital of the Schudenberg Kingdom, later on. 'Cause I'm planning on being there for a while starting from next week.

PS: I'm taking the Mermaid Scale.

'So Shambala thought of the same thing as I did.' A smile spread on Ark's lips.

As he looked at Shambala's fighting skills, he'd thought of really wanting to test their skills. It was made so that no matter the martial art, anyone who had learned a certain level of hand-to-hand combat would harbor a competitive spirit, regardless of whether or not the opponent was friend or foe. In addition, this was a virtual reality game. They could fight with not just martial arts, but with the special skills they had learned while playing the game. They would be able to feel a completely different pleasure that was impossible in an ordinary match.

'An arena, I'm getting curious about it...'

Ark remembered the arena advertisement flyer that had been pasted on the village message board. The arena was a place where player vs monster, player vs NPC, and player vs player hand-to-hand matches unfolded. There, it wasn't just that you weren't penalized even if you died, but you could also be rewarded Gold, a rare item, or a title depending on your points. Several kinds of match events were also prepared, so there was no guarantee a high leveled player would definitely win. The kinds of skills you had learned and how you used them were more important than level.

'He said in a month, right? Okay. I've got plenty of time, so I'll raise my skills a ton until then.'

Actually, Ark had determined Shambala was at a level higher in martial arts skill. But this was the virtual reality game world; martial arts skill wasn't everything. He still had a grace period of a month, so it shouldn't be impossible to catch up to Shambala.

Alan was an enemy to Ark, but Shambala was a rival who meant well. While he was having such thoughts, the Magician spoke.

"There's normally no incident of holding onto a stranger's letter. However, I specially received it because the receiver was you, a famous personage in Jackson. When you give and send letters next time, please utilize the Transfer Mailbox."

"The Transfer Mailbox?"

"You don't know of it? It is a service operated by the Magic Institute. If you're interested, please read this. It hasn't been long since we started the service, so we are giving a special 20% discount during our event period. If you register now, we will also discount the usage fee you'd have to pay next month."

Speaking like a cellphone sales representative, the Magician pointed to a pamphlet pasted on the wall.

Transfer Mailbox

Have you been worrying because there is no way to contact a faraway friend? Worry no longer, for there is the Transfer Mailbox, developed by the Magic Institute at the end of long research!

The Transfer Mailbox will allow you to contact your friends spread all over the continent at any time.

An initial registration on a Transfer Mailbox costs only 50 Gold. The usage fee is 5 Gold a month (Usage Restriction: At least level 50)

How to send a letter using the Magic Institute's transfer magic: If the player writes a letter and puts it in a mailbox prepared all over the continent, it will immediately be transferred to the Magic Institute. The transferred letter can be found at the Magic Institute in your area of choice at any time. If you pay an additional fee, you can even send an item. However, usage is only possible if you have a Transfer Mailbox. If the receiver doesn't have a Transfer Mailbox, of course they cannot send a reply.

'Ehh, so there was a function like this.'

Ordinary mail could only be sent to a village designated by a player. In other words, if the receiver left for another region, then they wouldn't be able to

receive the letter. In addition, unless you asked someone, there was no way to send an item to a faraway person. But there had been a method like this... Ark still didn't know even a tenth of the vast New World.

However, there weren't really any players Ark currently knew besides Shambala. Calling JusticeMan and Roco by phone was much faster and more convenient than a letter. He had no reason to fork over 50 Gold and a monthly usage fee of 5 Gold.

"No thanks."

At Ark's reply, the Magician nodded with a sullen face. "Understood. Then I will impart the letter movement. If you enter the magic circle on the top floor and use the Letter Movement Orb, you will immediately move to the Giran Magic Institute. It is still a technique in the testing stage, so the situation won't be that comfortable. Please prepare yourself firmly before departure."

Ark went up the stairs and stood on the magic circle. He pulled out the Letter Movement Orb and gazed at Snake for a moment. Having been resummoned after 24 hours, Snake looked even more haggard.

"Just hold on a little, Snake. I'll definitely be able to find information that will help you when we return to Giran. There are many Merchants, and there are

high ranking Magicians in the Magic Institute, too. No matter what, I'll help you complete metamorphosis successfully."

Hiss, hiss...

Stroking Snake's head as he spoke, Snake nodded weakly. When Ark raised the Letter Movement Orb to his forehead, the scenery of Giran popped up in his mind like a panorama.

His body instantly turned into particles of light which were then strewn asunder. Then, sucked into the uppermost floor through a narrow glass pipe, Ark was flung out towards Giran from the transmitting tower.

He was pressed forward at a tremendous, dizzying speed.

TO BE CONTINUED...