

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR




Author: **Ryota Hori**
Illustrator: **bob**

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“Julianus is ill?
And O’ltormea
has advanced
on Xarooda?”

Ryoma turned
pale as the
secret envoy
relayed his
message.

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR



The audience
hall—filled with
activity—fell into
absolute silence.

“His
Excellency
Grand Duke
Mikoshiba
has arrived!”



“All
right...
I look
good.”

Asuka
donned the
same outfit
from when
she arrived
in this world.

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Prologue

Haggard breathing echoed throughout the dark, dense forest as a man sprinted eastward. Even though he had already confirmed no one was pursuing him, he made sure not to use any form of light on the off chance someone still was following him. Using light in that kind of darkness would alert the enemy to his presence, putting a target on his back. That meant he would need to keep running.

Simply put, it was a suicide run.

On Earth, monsters, no longer mere beasts, roamed. The man wasn't an amateur, so he was capable of fighting. Though, one couldn't deny that his chances of victory were low in a forest in the middle of the night.

While the man had a higher chance of succeeding than an ordinary person because he knew martial thaumaturgy, he could not match a monster's physical build and strength. There was only one way for humans, the weaker beings, to balance out the difference. That was to have more individuals in combat. The strong went alone, whereas the weak favored numbers.

It was the natural law and an effective choice when fighting for one's life.

However, it's a little hard for me to pick that option right now, thought the man.

He would be safer with more people, but that would also mean he'd stand out more. When the man thought about the secret message he had tucked away in his clothes, he really didn't want to stand out.

Bringing a party might also end up stirring the monsters in the forest, which I'd like to avoid.

Of course, the monsters wouldn't do anything if they viewed the group of humans as a threat. But they might see them as food. Or they might see them as intruders in their domain. It all depended on how the monsters in the forest would react. The man would also have to factor in each member's stamina and

strength and move accordingly. While he could get rid of any dropouts or deserters, it wouldn't be without sacrifice.

It's better to be alone when avoiding an attack and to be in a group when expecting an attack.

Either way, the risk was never zero. It all depended on what possibility he focused on and what he decided didn't matter.

After giving the situation plenty of thought, he had made a break for it on his own through the dark forest.

Of course, just running only gives me a smaller chance of actually getting out of here.

No matter his choice, he was still a renowned spy from the Kingdom of Xarooda and faced a life-threatening gamble. In other words, he had bet on his life. The odds weren't in his favor, and he knew that well enough.

If he could have refused the mission, he would have—that was his thought.

Regardless, I have to get this secret letter to them.

The man instinctively reached into his breast pocket to check if the letter was still there. He held important documents that would influence the Kingdom of Xarooda's future. Although it was mere paper, it was more important than the man's life.

The documents entrusted to him by Joshua Belares contained delicate and significant information about King Julianus I's critical condition. That included the O'ltormea Empire's invasion.

Even though Earth had limited communication methods, neighboring countries were aware that unique intelligence was enough to sway the fate of the country in question. There were many spies in Xarooda's capital city, Peripheria. It wouldn't be long before the whole western continent heard the news.

But if I can get this information to this person a day or two earlier, maybe we can still have hope.

Delivering the information ahead of the surrounding countries might have

changed nothing. In reality, it wouldn't change anything. But if the man could get it to the person in mind even one minute earlier, then Xarooda's luck might change for the better.

The chances for that were like how one wouldn't know what a die had rolled until it stopped. That thought and wish kept pushing him forward.

He continued running through the forest, pushing plants out of his way, choosing his steps carefully so he didn't lose his balance and fall on a rock. His eyes were well-adjusted to the dark, but he also relied on the slivers of moonlight throughout the trees to guide him.

The man didn't know how long he had been running through the forest. Counting back from when he had first set foot in the forest yesterday morning, more than a day had passed. During that time, he hadn't taken a proper break from running. While he had a well-trained body from working as a spy and strengthened it with martial thaumaturgy, he was close to reaching his limit.



Yet it appeared the gods respected his willingness to die. The man spotted a pale light through the trees.

I made it... I have the gods to thank.

The view, once blocked by trees, began to open up. Just then, the man looked at the sky and sighed deeply at the moon's pale glow.

Also visible in the moonlight was the incredible sight of the outer castle wall of Rhoadseria's capital city, Pireas. An artist would have felt inclined to bring out their brushes, or a photographer might have taken out their camera and searched for the perfect spot to capture the scene. Moreover, a poet would have wanted to write about it.

But one needed to have room in their heart to appreciate the beauty of something. The striking appearance of Pireas from the small hill he stood on did nothing to stir the man's heart.

I've made it this far... Just a little more to go, thought the man as he continued running east. Once again, he was on his way to drive out the danger heading toward his home country.

Although late at night, four figures stirred inside a room at Count Salzberg's manor. One was a young man considered the new supreme ruler of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Beside him on both sides stood female twins with golden and silver hair who followed him around like his shadow.

Before the three of them stood an uninvited visitor, one who had suddenly appeared late into the night. Ryoma Mikoshiba turned pale as the secret envoy, who had run day and night from Xarooda, relayed his message.

"His Majesty Julianus is in critical condition? And O'Itormea has advanced on Xarooda?" asked Ryoma in an unusually panicked manner. The young man was normally calm and collected. At least, the twins standing near the wall had never seen Ryoma so shocked the whole time they had known him. In a way, that made sense.

O'Itormea invading plus the king of Xarooda becoming ill were both something that could completely change the state of affairs within the

kingdom. It was like an information bomb. If they had happened simultaneously, the prerequisites for Ryoma's strategies would also change.

Basically, Ryoma's plans to seize the Kingdom of Rhoadseria and further develop the Wortenia archduchy would be altered drastically. It made sense that the Malfist sisters, who were closest to Ryoma, wanted to cross-examine the secret envoy and learn more about the situation. As assistants to their master, they wouldn't be able to support him if they couldn't get any more information.

But the situation the secret envoy spoke of required haste. Naturally, one's human nature would make them want to gain insight about what was happening. Yet, the Malfist sisters did not attempt to question him further. They understood that if they were to say anything unnecessary, it might hinder their beloved master's train of thought. The man who had brought the devastating news understood that too.

While the man held back his fervent desire to save his country from its wretched situation, he remained kneeling, waiting for Ryoma's annoyance to subside.

Ryoma turned to his thoughts as the gazes of those around him focused elsewhere.

Laura and Sara were right to wake me after hearing he was a secret envoy sent by Mr. Joshua.

It was past two in the morning. Ryoma had already retired to bed until Lara and Sara had awoken him because they had received a report from the guards on night watch. He was a little disgruntled, but that irritation and displeasure had already faded.

A specific question now occupied his mind.

Although they're both out of my control, these things happening at once is intriguing.

Ryoma couldn't hide his surprise and panic over this news, especially as he was so close to ensuring the extinction of Viscount Romaine's house and finally tightening his control over the nobles of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Still, he

had no time to think about questions with indiscernible answers.

He let out a huge sigh as he put his feelings behind him.

“So, what else did Mr. Joshua say? Did he give you any more information?” asked Ryoma.

The man retrieved the letter from his breast pocket and handed it to Ryoma.

“I see you brought a letter. Let’s have a look at the seal. It hasn’t been tampered with...”

The wax seal bore the Belares crest—a hawk—and was in perfect condition. Someone had used endowed thaumaturgy to set the seal, meaning no one could see the contents of the letter unless they used a special device to open it. If one were to force it open, the letter would simply burst into flames and fade away.

This kind of information management matches or even exceeds that of modern society. Gotta hand it to them.

Ryoma opened a drawer in his desk and took out a single paper knife. He then swiftly peeled off the sealing wax with the knife.

I removed it with no issue, which means that this is indeed from Joshua Belares.

While the secret envoy said they were from Xarooda, a slight chance of him working for a different country existed. However, the paper knife that Ryoma had received from Joshua when he left Xarooda after being there on a previous mission as reinforcements dispelled any worry about that. As Ryoma was a strategist, he was more careful than others when dealing with such information.

Nothing is more troubling than information which you can’t grasp the truth about, thought Ryoma, looking over the letter from Joshua. *I see. It’s just as the envoy says.*

He clicked his tongue. The letter spoke about how the O’ltormea Empire had amassed troops at Xarooda’s border and that Joshua had headed to the front line in order to deal with the situation. It also mentioned that Joshua had

received urgent news from Peripheria while preparing the defenses. King Julianus I had collapsed, so Joshua had to return to the capital in a hurry.

When Joshua returned to the capital, the O'Itormea Empire announced they would one-sidedly abandon the ceasefire. Then they invaded Xarooda. Interesting.



Even Ryoma knew that the O’ltormea Empire, which had long thirsted for control of the western continent, wouldn’t honor the ceasefire for long. Their invasion had only stopped because Ryoma burned down their supply fort, cutting off the supply line. That caused Shardina, who led the invasion, to agree to a ceasefire once she had realized the situation was no longer favorable. It was always a temporary agreement and didn’t mean that the O’ltormea Empire had given up on Xarooda.

They would obviously invade again once they had gathered more supplies and soldiers.

But this is too soon. I had predicted they would postpone it by at least another two to three years.

Certainly, his prediction was simply a prediction—there was no saying it would be correct. It didn’t matter if other famous generals from the western continent shared that prediction. That included Joshua Belares, known as the Hawk; Helena Steiner, the Ivory Goddess of War; and Ecclesia Marinelle, the Whirlwind. At that moment, he had to confirm more relevant things.

Ryoma went through them one by one.

“As far as I know, His Majesty Julianus was old yet full of vigor and vitality. He didn’t seem to have any health concerns. Had he suddenly become ill?” Considering his age, it wasn’t entirely surprising for Julianus I to be in a critical condition.

But the man shook his head in response to Ryoma’s question.

“He suddenly coughed up blood during a meal, then fell unconscious. Lord Joshua confirmed with a doctor from the imperial court that there had been no concerns with His Majesty’s condition before. It seems his cough resulted from overworking. He still had his appetite,” said the man, expressing anguish and doubt.

Even this man doesn’t entirely accept that explanation. And if Julianus wasn’t suffering from a severe illness, then...

There might have been a sudden epidemic. In that kind of situation, even young people could fall ill and suddenly die. Considering the state of hygiene on

Earth, it was a natural outcome. Not to mention, it wouldn't be strange for someone of Julianus's age.

The average lifespan for Japanese males is around eighty years old. I never asked His Majesty Julianus's age, but I want to say he was around seventy. Considering the level of medical care here is nowhere near that of Japan's, it really wouldn't be strange that he suddenly got sick, mused Ryoma.

It needn't be so surprising. Humans could die at any time, after all. Julianus I was simply reaching the end of his life. Regardless, that wasn't a satisfying conclusion.

That's just how it goes. All I can say is, it's incredibly bad luck, but... Is it even possible to have such unlucky timing?

One would have to be incredibly unlucky to coincidentally have O'ltormea invade and have Julianus I fall ill at the same time.

Even if there were concerns about his health, just like Joshua had written in his letter, they weren't that serious. It matches up with what the envoy said. He really did face sickness, which is very sudden. O'ltormea making a move is almost too perfect... That leaves one conclusion...

At this point, one couldn't put those thoughts into words.

I don't have enough evidence.

That was probably the same reason the man kneeling before him was vague with his choice of words.

Well, there's not much reason for me to put a lot of thought into it now. Of course, we do not need to address the issue as soon as possible. Joshua wrote in his letter that Xarooda was already looking into it. I cannot do much and should probably focus on what comes after.

Ryoma focused on how to deal with the situation rather than look for the culprit.

The question is, do we send reinforcements to Xarooda? If we don't, can they withstand O'ltormea's attack? Probably not. Joshua's letter mentioned that the enemy had over two hundred thousand men. Should that be true...

The face of a woman appeared in Ryoma's mind.

Shardina Eisenheit.

She was the daughter of O'ltormea's emperor, Lionel Eisenheit, and the empire's pride as the princess general.

And she came prepared this time.

Ryoma had predicted O'ltormea's second invasion from the beginning. That was why Joshua Belares had taken the initiative in preparing for it, with Ryoma helping where he could. So hearing the news that the O'ltormea Empire had begun their invasion wasn't that worrying.

After all, Joshua Belares, son of Arios Belares, was spearheading Xarooda's forces as their general.

In a previous war with the O'ltormean Empire, Shardina Eisenheit led a strategy which put the Kingdom of Xarooda in a precarious situation. Only the dangerous counterattack Arios Belares and his elite troops—collectively known as Xarooda's Guardian Deities—carried out had saved the nation at the cost of their lives.

Despite having no choice, the loss of the nation's hero—their guardian deity—as well as his seasoned troops was massive. Said deaths lay heavy in the minds of Xarooda's citizens.

As a result, their feeling of hostility and hatred toward the O'ltormea Empire was incomparable.

In addition to the warriors' willingness to fight, Ryoma had revitalized the trade routes by working with Simone Christof, meaning Xarooda now had a lot of economic leeway.

We turned the devotion of the nationals into military strength.

As expected, it wasn't enough strength to face the conqueror of the western continent head-on. But they had prepared to take advantage of Xarooda's unique geography. They would use the expansive mountain regions to ensure the country would not simply perish.

To hear that Julianus I has fallen ill changes things a lot.

There was never any chance that Julianus I would take to the battlefield and lead an army. So even if he was in critical health, it wouldn't immediately have much of an effect on the front lines. But when a country was enduring a national crisis, the absence of that country's leader was fatal.

Besides, Rhoadseria doesn't have nearly enough men to send as reinforcements.

After all, the Kingdom of Rhoadseria was a country that lacked royal authority and was instead taken advantage of by nobles. It was hard to ask nobles for reinforcements to aid other countries, let alone ask them to partake in international expeditions for rewards.

Several nobles had lost most of their military might due to Lupis Rhoadserians's northern subjugation and the Siege of Pireas, making the situation even more difficult.

No nobles would send reinforcements to Xarooda with the situation as it is now. Forcing them to do it could lead to a revolt.

While the number of men on the field was one of the most significant conditions to securing a victory, simply having more would account for nothing. Having men with no will to fight was equivalent to having an army of scarecrows.

That said, scarecrows would be better in that case. They'd cost fewer resources.

Plus, a unit of soldiers with low morale could lose control when confronted with the enemy. The hearts of men not prepared for the life-and-death gamble that was war would soon corrode.

Those kinds of men would choose to save themselves rather than fight.

They wouldn't choose to fight, but they would choose to escape.

Seeing the frontline soldiers so broken down was terrifying because it could lead the units in the rear to tuck their tail and run, an event known as a formation break. If Ryoma allowed such a phenomenon, he could never rally the troops again. That was how dangerous it was having troops with no desire to fight.

We can't rely on the nobles. Considering the current situation, I'm also not keen on using royal knights, thought Ryoma.

Although Queen Lupis lacked political ability, she had experience leading the imperial guards. She was purely their leader in name, but among the lower ranked knights, who weren't quite aware of the reality of the situation, she was rather popular. They didn't think too fondly of Archduke Mikoshiba, who had ousted Lupis from the throne and supported Queen Radine.

If they fought against the powerful military of the O'ltormea Empire, that would also do nothing for morale.

Depending on the situation, reinforcements can end up becoming a burden.

There was a saying in Japanese: "to even want the help of a cat." It was a figure of speech, of course—even if a cat *were* to lend a paw, it wouldn't be much help at all. That was why sometimes having no reinforcements was better.

What will the soldiers and knights of Xarooda, who are full of desire to avenge the fallen General Belares, think when they see Rhoadseria's forces devoid of any morale?

It would only generate animosity, akin to a housewife who tirelessly did the housework while eyeing her husband as he sat on the couch watching TV and yawning. The action would incite a similar level of resentment.

If you're not going to do anything, at least do it somewhere else.

Similarly, one could compare it to having a boss at the office who does nothing but read the newspaper and picks his nose all day. While one could contain that level of anger, it would build over time until it erupted.

Ryoma couldn't deny that it could lead to bloodshed among the troops. Depending on the circumstance, that could even strain the alliance between countries.

That's not all of my concerns either. Even if Rhoadseria were to send troops, there's no general to lead them.

Helena Steiner was a fountain of wisdom regarding all things military for

Queen Radine. While Queen Lupis had Mikhail and Meltina as her right-hand men, Radine had no retainers by her side. Thus, it made the most sense for Helena to assume that role.

After all, Radine Rhoadserians knows no more about national politics than the former ruler.

While Radine needed people she could trust to support her, no one else fit the bill like Helena Steiner, the Ivory Goddess of War. Those who had served with her held responsibility for the future of Rhoadseria and were aware of this fact.

Even the notable figures in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria know that their roles are now set in stone, with Viscount McMaster helping with politics as the prime minister and Lady Helena tending to military affairs.

It would be difficult to ask Helena to lead reinforcements to Xarooda with the current situation.

Lady Helena will have no choice but to lead should it get to the point where we must do everything to win. However, everything is going so well. I want to keep things as they are.

Keeping his trump card in his hand would give Ryoma more leeway to approach the war, allowing them to make low-stake gambles.

But if there is one person I could trust to lead the entire army of Rhoadseria...

A few names appeared in Ryoma's mind before disappearing. Though he wouldn't have said any of them were unfit for the job, they all seemed to lack something, leaving no suitable candidates. Ryoma let out a deep sigh.

Thinking about it now, Meltina and Mikhail were important.

As a warrior, Helena Steiner boasted outstanding sword skills and could shoulder the defense of a whole country alone. She had around one hundred points as a general. Mikhail was around the low seventies at best, and Meltina was a little below him.

Both had exceptional strength as warriors but both were rash and unfit for the role of general or a bureaucrat.

That wasn't to say they were talentless. They had simply gotten involved with national politics, something they hadn't done before. I guess that makes them quite skilled, in a way.

They also had problems, but one couldn't deny that they supported Queen Lupis. Despite being new to it, they had carried the nation's politics on their backs for numerous years. Rhoadseria had a massive problem because they had no one to replace them.

While no one is suitable, it is the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's problem. There's no way they can't send reinforcements... If Helena cannot leave Rhoadseria, that leaves one choice.

Ryoma would have to put a hold on establishing his domain and head toward a new battlefield.

I guess that's how it will be, mused Ryoma, as he exhaled deeply. He'd tried to avoid this conclusion yet had to accept it. *But it's not like I'm Lionheart. What kind of monarch spends all their time in war like this?*

The nickname of a king from Western history, known for his talent in battle and as a hero, came into Ryoma's mind. Richard I's reign lasted ten years, though he had spent mere months in England. The remaining nine years were spent waging war in other countries or becoming a prisoner of war. It must have been tough for him. As the tales would tell, Richard I was a strong knight and an incredible military leader. But he was a king, which raised some questions. Ryoma couldn't help but think that Richard I must not have been a good politician.

After all, he had abandoned the country he was supposed to rule in favor of wars.

The situation resembled how a boss of a company might abandon their post at the office and instead spend time in sales or product development. Of course, someone would take over for them in their absence. That only applied when the situation received proper management.

No matter how much people regarded Lionheart as a hero, that didn't mean he needed to be revered as a powerful politician. Being away from his homeland for so many years had a heavy cost. Constant rebellions had

occurred. His brother, John, had even conspired with the king of France and other outside parties to have Richard I held in confinement. Those were prime examples of how he failed to maintain his country.

That said, I might end up meeting the same fate.

It was an ironic destiny.

Ryoma didn't consider himself a hero like Richard I. Even though he had been officially appointed as archduke, he was still just a noble in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

His was a different position than the King of England, Richard I, who had devoted his whole life to the Crusades. While he owned the Wortenia Peninsula since establishing his barony, he had never once thought that he was in service of a monarch.

He had made sure that he didn't deviate from his vassal duties while still having a sense of self-reliance. Overall, he had never lost his sense of independence.

In that sense, he was comparable to Richard I since he paid no attention to politics despite being the ruler of a country. Ryoma always rushed into battle, just like Richard I did when he went to recapture Jerusalem.

Ryoma was walking the same path as Richard I.

Naturally, he had his complaints. Despite it not being the best choice, it was the realistic choice.

As long as there's no one else suitable for the role we can't do anything. But I want to make some progress with developing my land. I don't really wanna leave it unattended for too long.

If the war between the Kingdom of Xarooda and the O'ltormea Empire wasn't a short skirmish, Ryoma would have to leave his territory and the newly ceded northern territory unattended for years.

He had thought of many ways to avoid that, and the most realistic option was for Ryoma to be the substitute in the battlefield.

In that case, I'd have to pick someone to be in charge of my territories. As soon

as I think I have one thing figured out, another problem pops up.

The issue wasn't as much of a bother as choosing a replacement general. At any rate, it just further narrowed down the candidates.

Well, I could leave Wortenia to my grandfather.

Koichiro Mikoshiba was also far more suited for the battlefield than he was for domestic politics. Ryoma knew that better than anyone else. Regardless, his grandfather understood modern society and how it worked. All this indicated he had more insight into politics than the politicians of this world. Koichiro's knowledge and way of thinking were vital for Ryoma's ideal nation-building.

There's not a lot the people here can really do anything about.

Ryoma looked for ideas on implementing processes and establishing things like water supply, garbage disposal, and hygiene control. Such items were something the politicians of this world wouldn't even be able to imagine.

This Earth had gutters to drain rainwater alongside its roads, but none of the lords had implemented sewer systems. In the modern society of Rearth, having sewers installed underground was incredibly normal. However, general knowledge of drainage infrastructure wasn't very typical here. The same was true of town and road planning.

While homogenizing the width of roads and paving said roads with stone guaranteed that goods could be transported more smoothly, and thus supported more economic activity, the practice wasn't very widespread on Earth. Common sense dictated that such roads would put one at a disadvantage when enemy forces attacked. Thus, some lords went against the grain when it came to urban development, offering other ideas. But that also meant that they had to lead with clear alternative solutions.

Ryoma envisioned more modern city planning and country management. For example, guilds assigning every citizen their own number in order to manage them with equipment wouldn't be such a huge deal to someone from the modern age. To those from this Earth, however, it would be close to the invention of the century.

Earth doesn't even have anything like a family register.

That was why Ryoma would write down the names of former slaves or dark elves he took in as residents and assign them numbers. It was similar to the My Number system in Japan or Social Security numbers used in America. Although the names differed, the concept was the same.

It's a sound system for keeping track of the population of the nation.

Not knowing the population meant that one couldn't fathom the martial strength of the nation or what kind of policies were needed. Obviously, this would make tax collection even more difficult as well.

Because of that, it's paramount to have an idea of the nation's total population as well as gender and age demographics to avoid such problems.

Even in modern society, some rejected the government having such control over its citizens. However, a more totalitarian approach that emphasized the general public over the individual was more effective in ensuring the strength of a country. Moreover, it was easier to manage.

When Ryoma lived in Japan, he had been a regular high school student, yet he had grasped how the world worked. Paying attention in social studies classes in middle and high school meant that such ideas weren't that hard to understand.

But it wouldn't be so simple for someone with no idea how modern society worked to reach the same conclusions. It would be difficult for Ryoma to get the people of Earth to envision and build his ideal society with only verbal and written instructions. Even if he were to mandate its development, he imagined the results would be less than satisfactory.

Still, they probably could build something. But without having an idea of what the final outcome should look like, it'd be taxing.

Ryoma had thought of one way of doing it. He could let the citizens of Earth challenge themselves through trial and error, anticipating future developments. But the scale would be simply too large, especially considering the expansion of Sirius and reconstruction of the fortress town Epirus, which he had burned to the ground during the northern subjugation.

A conversation like that will be fundamental for the future of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy.

Sirius—the city acting as the main base for the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy located in a strategic area on the Wortenia Peninsula—and Epirus were essential for controlling the northern territory of Rhoadseria.

It was only natural that Ryoma wanted a fast and reliable response to the situation. Based on everything he reflected on, he was limited in his choice of candidates.

Samejima, Zheng, Veronica... They would be skilled enough for it.

Those individuals should at least be able to help make Ryoma's territory similar to what he imagined, much more than someone from Earth with no awareness of modern society. Although Kikuna Samejima was a chef and worked as such, she was Japanese and could probably picture what Ryoma wanted. But she had never tried anything outside of her comfort zone as a chef.

Zheng and Veronica worked for Koichiro Mikoshiba, a role neither would leave, though if Koichiro asked them to do so, they would comply and leave his service.

Besides, I still don't know what any of their intentions are.

They weren't enemies, naturally. Should Ryoma have suspected they were enemies, there was no chance they would still be alive. He had no intention of keeping his enemies close.

He had the Igasaki clan monitor Samejima, Zheng, and Veronica. But there were no reports of them doing anything suspicious, giving no reason to point the finger at them. That did not mean Ryoma considered them allies either.

Zheng is hiding information related to the Organization. I know one of their key members, Liu Daijin, had sent two of them to look after my grandfather. They might have other motives, though.

Nonetheless, Ryoma did not want to interrogate them at this point.

I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to speak with them. But I could just ask my grandfather if I wanted to learn more about the Organization. Well, eventually...

Koichiro and the others had not attempted to talk about the Organization in detail, and Ryoma figured there had to be a reason. If there was, all Ryoma

could do was wait for them to decide when they should share what they knew.

Since Ryoma felt they were hiding information, it was difficult for him to declare them allies. All this was a little more complicated concerning Kikuna Samejima.

The timing of her coming to my territory was a little strange.

Kikuna Samejima, introduced to Ryoma as a chef for the evening party he held to display Wortenia's financial power to the nobles, very much lived up to his expectations. Her culinary skills had left the nobles flabbergasted, as they only expected such cuisine from an experienced chef. However, it was *almost* too good to be true.

Plus, there's just something off about her.

The encounter felt almost as if a third party had arranged the whole thing. Though it could have been pure luck, everything felt *too* lucky. Kikuna seemed even less trustworthy than Zheng and Veronica.

She's good at cooking, and her pastries are incredibly popular among the upper-class ladies. I'd like to keep her working for me, but... Hmm. Just how much can I actually trust her?

As it was, he couldn't trust Kikuna Samejima like he trusted Laura, Lione, and the others. That meant only Koichiro, who had a grasp of how to handle internal affairs, was someone he could trust.

Even though it was a little disappointing he couldn't have Koichiro with him on the front line, there was no other choice in this situation.

That just leaves the issue of dealing with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. What can we do there?

The original plan was to start by putting pressure on the Romaine family and eventually disposing of the nobles in Rhoadseria. Even so, Ryoma was unsure if he should proceed with that considering the present state of affairs.

Do we go with the original plan or think of something else?

There were many nobles within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, and they were

the reason the royal family had suffered. The queen's abilities were insignificant compared to the main problems in the kingdom. It didn't matter if the queen was Lupis or Radine—there was only one choice.

If someone asked Ryoma about how he would implement his plan in the current climate, he could not give a confident answer.

I could destroy the Romaine family, then wait for the right time for the others.

At first glance, it appeared like the safest option. Ryoma would have to give up on the idea of heading back to his territory should trouble break out in Rhoadseria after he left for the war in Xarooda. He couldn't dismiss the possibility of that happening.

By and large, there is a lot of resentment here in the kingdom. As long as Lady Helena is here, there should be a low chance of anything panning out, thought Ryoma, understanding that would definitely be the case. This is no good. I can't get my thoughts in order.

No matter what he chose, it would change his plans. The problem was that destroying the Romaine family or taking out the nobles had their positives and negatives. Plus, he didn't have enough findings to decide the best course of action.

Ryoma exhaled, putting his elbows on the table and crossing his hands under his chin as he spoke up.

"I need some time to organize my thoughts. Time is not on our side, but please give me until tomorrow to respond to Joshua's letter."

The spy nodded silently. In all honesty, he wanted a hasty response. Aware of the situation in his home country, he recognized he had to get back there as soon as possible. But the man had no intention of questioning Ryoma.

Terrified by Ryoma's eyes, which shone like light reflecting off a blade, the man could do nothing but nod in response.

The spy and the Malfist twins had exited the room, leaving Ryoma to ponder. He crossed his arms behind his head as he looked out of the window.

What to do?

Light was already creeping over the eastern horizon. Thanks to the unexpected visitor, he had been awakened from his warm bed at around 2 a.m. He had gotten lost in thought for around three hours or more. Yet he still didn't have an answer.

I know what I should choose to do and can't throw the Kingdom of Xarooda aside. So, I must send reinforcements, thought Ryoma, recognizing the problem was who could send the reinforcements they needed. *But there's so much to worry about.*

Most notably, Ryoma's lack of information regarding the intentions of the Church of Meneos and the Organization was a major disadvantage.

Although they don't seem to be hostile on the surface, I have no idea how they really are.

Discerning who were friends and who were foes was difficult, but Ryoma could not do much without some idea of their intentions. The Church of Meneos had withdrawn their troops from Rhoadseria, which could be taken as them avoiding any hostilities with him. They were allies, or at the least, a neutral party.

The same could apply to the Organization, considering that they had a close relationship with Koichiro. Ryoma had never spoken with Liu Daijin but could infer from Zheng that he had no wish to be hostile.

I have no evidence to support any of that.

For that reason, Ryoma had prioritized ridding Rhoadseria of its nobles and forming a stable foundation. With the O'ltormean invasion alongside Julianus I suddenly falling ill, the events had completely destroyed Ryoma's expectations.

"You seem rather troubled," a man's voice echoed throughout the room. Ryoma should have been alone, so how did he get in?

Sneaking in without making a sound was rather skillful. If the intruder were an assassin, he would be one of the best. But the person who should have been the most shocked had identified the voice.

“You could at least knock next time, grandfather. Don’t you know the saying ‘Good fences make good neighbors’?” Ryoma turned his gaze toward the entrance of the room. “I guess you spoke to the twins?”

“Yes. The twins said you were worried about something, and they wanted me to address it,” stated Koichiro, sitting on a sofa near the wall. “Since it’s you, I thought it was none of my business. But you really do seem troubled. What’s on your mind? I’m assuming there’s no other option than sending reinforcements to Xarooda?”



Ryoma nodded and said, "So you think that too? That just means I have to be even more cautious about this."

Koichiro frowned slightly. "I thought you weren't as lively as usual, so you were already considering that possibility. Someone is likely behind all of this, with the timing of the king of Xarooda falling ill and the O'ltormea Empire invading. That being so..."

"Something might happen after I go to Xarooda. The most likely being a revolt by the Rhoadserian nobles or the assassination of Queen Radine," explained Ryoma. Clearly, he had already taken several measures to prevent that from happening.

The suppression of the Romaine family was in response to how harsh his son had acted, but it also connected to Ryoma's plans for strengthening control over internal affairs. However, most of those measures were still half-baked.

"Even if you go to Xarooda, there would be no need for revolts or a successful assassination."

Ryoma nodded again and responded, "If we could be sure those things would happen, that'd be enough. Thinking about it like that makes it easier for me to go. As a result, it just means I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place if it unfolds when I'm in Xarooda."

The biggest fear when going to a different country to wage war is that one would be cut off from their home country and forced to become independent. If that were to come about, even if they had plenty of supplies and war funds, the army's morale would disappear before one's eyes.

Soldiers of the Mikoshiba archduchy army were essentially slaves who had received high levels of training. Even if they were more loyal and reliable than other soldiers, there was no saying that they wouldn't be affected.

"That is certainly possible. But there is the chance it's a groundless fear. It could even be a bluff," added Koichiro.

"I see. So you're saying the enemy anticipated I would think of that, causing me to stall."

Of course, none of this was confirmed. It was purely hypothetical, though ignoring the possibility was dangerous.

“Dammit... What should I do...”

It was important to assess possible dangers ahead of time, regardless of the scale of the job. There was no difference between a small business and the management of a nation in that regard.

Preparing for every outcome was impossible. Hence, it was important to prioritize the more notable dangers. Ryoma’s problem was that he didn’t have enough information to assess which was more dangerous.

Koichiro presented the worried Ryoma with a solution. “Spending more time on this is a bad move. You have to come up with a decision in some way. So how about talking about it with someone you can get advice from? There appear to be people who want to get close to you, and they’re probably the best to ask about the nobles here in the kingdom.”

“You’re right. After all, it takes one to know one. It seems there are some very talented people in this country, so it would be best to make good use of them,” said Ryoma, laughing and simply nodding.

Chapter 1: A Poisonous Gathering

The sun was setting in the west a few minutes past five as a young woman walked along the gravel road. She stood at around 170 centimeters tall and had a slim figure yet ample bosom. A man would no doubt find his gaze directed to that area, and the woman was well aware of her allure. Her light green dress, decorated with lace details, had a noticeable opening, drawing people's attention to her main appeal.

Accessories also adorned her, each worth about a commoner's yearly income. Even high-ranking nobles could not attain them unless they came from a very well-off family. Seeing as she wore such expensive items, there was no doubt she was a young woman from such circles or royalty.

Her focused gait was that of a person with a specific location in mind. The woman eventually reached a gap in the dense forest, allowing her to see more. It was an open space in the woods, surrounded by trees with sunlight streaking through. A garden pond stood at the center of the open space, with a bridge connecting one side of the pond to a small island with a white, two-story building.

Said building was known as the Ivory Manor. The two marble pillars that supported the building had a beautiful design carved into them, adding color to the scenery. It was a crafted beauty, as if someone had made it by imagining the mentality and vision of those who would look at it.

As expected, the best gardener in the kingdom created it. I never get tired of looking at it, she thought, crossing over the bridge.

Flowers bloomed on either side of the bridge, acting as a treat for visitors' eyes. Rumors abounded that this place was made for a rather lustful king to meet secretly with another man's wife. Thus, it had an intricate design. In addition, the manor and garden were hidden away, meaning people rarely ever passed through.

Not many people even knew this secret world lay hidden within the royal

castle. That made the area around the building, which a wall of trees covered, a suitable place to conduct meetings out of the public eye. Only maids or gardeners visited, periodically tending to the garden.

After all, the garden acted as a secret rendezvous point to meet his lover. It makes sense he had it built like this.

According to rumors, the woman that the king visited in secret wasn't an ethereal beauty who could bring a whole nation to its knees. She was a refined noblewoman, but it was plain to see that she had no remarkable features.

Being a king, he literally could have had any woman he wanted. He really had no need to be willingly playing with fire.

But forcing a vassal's wife to obey his commands must have sent the king mad with feelings of taboo.

I guess he had quite perverted hobbies. Rather embarrassing for a king of a nation. Even more so for those sycophants who kept quiet about the affair...

Those who knew simply portrayed it as a case of forbidden love when the reality of it was that it was closer to coercion.

The woman suitably expressed disgust, even if the man was a king. Just because he had authority, it didn't mean that he could get away with being oppressive and violent. Other vassals within the kingdom eventually had enough of the king's wild, irrational behavior and purged him as well as his sycophant vassals.

Of course, that included their families because it was a shameful part of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's past that got erased from official history. As a result, the nobles' tyranny grew more powerful, and the royal family had a remarkable lack of authority. As the saying went, "Pride always comes before the fall."

However, there are not many people who can apply the lessons they've learned to their own lives. As hard as it is to admit, she thought, sighing deeply.

Although the level of their abuses differed, the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's current nobles were unknowingly walking a similar path to that of the foolish king. It resulted from the passage of time completely erasing the tragedy of what happened before from the minds of the nobles. But a man called Ryoma

Mikoshiba was about to redeem the legacy the nobles had tarnished over the decades.

It makes sense that he wishes to eliminate us. Should our roles be reversed, I would probably want to do the same, the woman thought, knowing it was poetic justice. Not to mention, it's the right decision to make as a politician.

Considering the weight of the crimes the nobles had committed up to now, it was a natural decision. Anyone would want to exterminate the bugs—the nobles—in their newly gained Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

Thus, striking right at the heart of the problem...

That plan had advantages and disadvantages. If Ryoma went ahead with purging nobles, some would call him merciless. As a woman who had struggled through many political disputes, she knew all too well that it was the most realistic and least damaging path to take. The only issue was that not many people would be willing to go ahead with it. The previous queen, Lupis Rhoadserians, was a good example of that.

But that man is one of the few people to make such ruthless decisions. He is the Devil of Heraklion.

The man was generous and sincere to his allies but turned merciless when he deemed someone an enemy. That also went for the families of said individuals.

He probably thinks that the children of demons are also demons.

There was a saying that went “Children are like mirrors. What they see and hear, they do.” Naturally, there were exceptions.

Generally, biologically unintelligent parents couldn't give birth to an intelligent child. But children who didn't take after their parents' talents or character could still come about. A child born from a genius wouldn't always end up as a genius themselves. Similarly, a child born from ordinary people could still be a genius. However, the possibility of that occurring wasn't particularly high.

Taking into account how much effort sorting everyone would take, the woman didn't think Ryoma Mikoshiba would put all that work in.

Although there are a lot of idiotic noble houses, that doesn't mean there aren't any useful people. Like Count Bergstone, for example. They are just anomalies, though.

Ryoma would keep a small number of useful noble houses and throw the rest to the wolves.

From a cost-effectiveness standpoint, that is the best thing to do. It would also help restore some authority to the Rhoadserian royal family.

The woman was sharp and sensed that House Eisenbach would be one of the houses to be removed.

Considering what happened with the House of Lords, I doubt that man would hurry to forgive us.

Count Eisenbach, leader of the nobles' faction and vice president of the House of Lords, had worked with Lupis. He had helped with her strategy and worked alongside Marquis Halcyon in supporting the decision to impeach Ryoma Mikoshiba. In other words, relations were hostile between House Eisenbach and the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy.

When I think about everything my father has done up to now...

Despite her blood tie with her father, she didn't think he was a good man. If anything, he was a quintessential Rhoadserian noble. Not in a good way.

Makes sense we'll be one of the targets of the purge.

That conclusion was as certain as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. Although the woman understood, she had no plans to do something about it.

But to be summoned like this... I wonder if there is still room for negotiation. At the very least, my and Charlotte's intentions have become apparent to others.

In order to show her allegiance and usefulness, the woman, as well as her friends, had worked hard to ensure Ryoma Mikoshiba could do what he needed to do. They had ensured it wouldn't be too obvious, though.

I doubt anyone would believe that someone, once seen as an enemy, would

have such a quick change of heart and ally with them.

After all, the nobles of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria had acted as they always had. If House Eisenbach had begun getting close to the enemy in plain sight, they would be known as an untrustworthy family. There was a high chance the other nobles would reject them, marking the end of that situation. But there was also a one-in-a-million chance they'd be accepted by people, not ending well for the nobles.

Based on that man's character, he would use us as a sacrificial pawn.

House Eisenbach would face demise like how they once crushed a noble house. That was why they needed to be extremely cautious. The woman knew her house hadn't reached out for negotiations because it would have tarnished their credibility. If that man considered it patronizing, it would further ruin his image.

That didn't mean there was no way out of this.

At the very least, Ryoma Mikoshiba isn't a narrow-minded man. That's easy to see from his treatment of Yulia Salzberg, Signus Galveria, and Robert Bertrand. Although we were once enemies, I'm sure he'll change his opinion when he sees how useful we are.

Of course, she had a hint of wishful thinking. But there was no doubt that Ryoma was a man of incomparable caliber, as he had employed and chosen close aides that were mercenaries with dubious backgrounds.

He might do the same for me should I show my usefulness and trustworthiness.

A faint possibility.

Although it was a one-in-a-million chance, if it meant she could survive, it was only natural that she wanted to cling to that possibility. The woman also harbored other ambitions alongside the desire to survive.

If he puts me in a key position, I might take the center stage in politics despite being a woman. I could even become a prime minister, a cabinet minister, or the queen's aide.

She would also need the trust of Queen Radine. But the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had the most influence and a mighty military. If the woman could become a supporter of Ryoma Mikoshiba, everything could quite literally change.

The women who had received insults behind their backs for being too smart, including those who never had the opportunity to use their talents, would finally have their day. It was a dream that the women of Rhoadseria, which was strongly chauvinistic, had given up on.

Besides, forming a more marital bond with the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy wouldn't be impossible.

While there was a lot of competition, she would gain influence over the noble society in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria if she won Ryoma's heart. House Eisenbach could rival even the queen, and take precedence over House Halcyon. It would no longer be just a dream.

That said, I have no plans on getting a head start on that. Charlotte and I are working together... Plus, I won't gain his affection if I mess up. He might even avoid me... He might even see right through my intentions, thought the woman before coming to a stop.

"Bettina Eisenbach, right? Welcome. Please come inside," said a young woman wearing an apron decorated with frills. For a moment, it looked as if her short hair was sparkling in the sunlight.

She's pretty...and well-mannered, thought Bettina.

The maid's bow was impeccable and was a prime example of greeting guests. Bettina nodded in response before looking at her surroundings, cocking her head slightly.

"I've been looking forward to today. By the way, I wonder where everyone else is?" asked Bettina. She had seen no one else on her way here, nor could she see any of her friends here, making her feel uneasy. *There's no way Charlotte told me the wrong time...*

Although childish, it was a tried-and-true move in noble society. People told the wrong place and time would naturally be confused and angry, thus making

them the butt of a joke in public. There were several reasons for doing so, which included harassment originating from one's personal feelings or an attempt to undermine another noble house in a power struggle. Bettina had done it before to Charlotte. While it would be an exaggeration to say that it happened every day in Rhoadserian noble society, it happened often enough.

Nevertheless, Bettina didn't suspect Charlotte of doing that.

We've been working together up to now. It would be unwise of her to pull such a trick in front of that man.

When Bettina thought about Ryoma Mikoshiba's personality, she thought that he wouldn't take too kindly to such behavior. Charlotte ought to understand that personally.

More importantly...

A specific possibility crossed Bettina's mind. It wasn't a desirable turn of events, yet the most natural. However, the maid in front of Bettina soon crushed Bettina's hopeful thoughts.

"Everyone is already gathered together."

Upon hearing that, Bettina became disorientated.

"Oh... Is that so? Does that mean the host, Charlotte, and everyone else?" asked Bettina, hiding her inner turmoil and keeping up a formal appearance.

"Yes. You are the last to arrive, Lady Bettina," responded the maid.

A dreadful sentence.

She arrived twenty minutes later than Charlotte had written in the letter. If it were an evening party, sometimes it was more acceptable to be a little late. For a casual tea party, one could say Bettina was early. But it wasn't very commendable that she had barely made it on time.

I wonder if the real host is that man...

Formally, Charlotte Halcyon was the host since her name appeared on the invitation. But Ryoma Mikoshiba could have borrowed her name, and Charlotte might not have known she was the host. Therefore, he was undoubtedly the true host of today's tea party. If he wasn't, that meant there was no reason for

Bettina to put so much work into her appearance today.

That means that everyone attending today was aware of that.

A tea party wasn't as formal as a ball or an evening banquet. When meeting with close friends or acquaintances of the same social standing, it was a time to eat delicious sweets with tea while having a fun chat. Depending on the circumstance, a friendly gathering was not *as* much fun as this tea party. As someone of a higher rank was attending, one had to be extra careful. It would be more appropriate to call it a battlefield under the guise of a tea party.

Their weapons ranged from clothes and hairstyles to even the accessories they wore. All that was left was how they used those weapons.

Would they use them as a shield to deflect enemy attacks, or would they use them as a sword to cut down the enemy? It all depended on the strength of the wielder.

Lying low and watching silently is also an option...

Similar to how the commoners of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria endured the noble's tyranny, it was also how the weak survived. Choosing to act conspicuous meant that one would receive the same treatment, regardless of whether they there.

Which would be fatal for House Eisenbach...

As it was, Ryoma Mikoshiba thought the absolute worst of all the nobles in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Such was an expected reaction based on everything that had happened so far. If left unaddressed, it would lead to trouble in the future. Bettina recognized that when faced with someone in a higher position, it was best to do nothing that would come off unpleasant rather than gain their favor.

And the best way to do that would be not to stand out. But...

Waiting for the storm that was the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy to pass by wouldn't be impossible. It was akin to simply trying to sleep through an illness and choosing not to accept any medicine or treatment. One could recover naturally, but it would purely depend on luck. Many nobles, including House Eisenbach, had all contracted the same disease. It was a deadly virus that, if left

untreated, would annihilate them.

As the head of the Eisenbach family, Bettina's true motive was to use the tea party to capture the attention of Ryoma Mikoshiba. She would try to improve the current situation, knowing what the outcome would be if she did not.

If I'm going to sit and wait for death, I will try to find a way out of this fatal situation. Trying to get his attention this way isn't the most desirable. If anything, it's going to be awkward today.

Arriving last to a high society meeting would draw a lot of attention. Sometimes, visiting before the appointed time could appear as being late.

Of course, someone was bound to be last. I'm sure everyone knows...

One wouldn't stand out as much when arriving late to a large gathering such as a ball or an evening banquet. Tea parties usually started when everyone was present if the event had at least ten people in attendance. That meant the last to arrive had kept everyone else waiting.

And so, most people would be more or less easily irritated by the wait and showed the basics of human psychology. In such situations, it was common for the host to overwhelm a guest to instill a sense of hierarchy. The chosen individual would be the one that stood out the most. Overall, the last person at today's tea party was in a rather dangerous situation.

I should have come here earlier...

Being late was still the worst thing to do, but coming an hour early wouldn't have been the honorable thing to do either. If the event had already been set up, it would be fine. But if it hadn't, one would have to find something to pass the time. It would have made no sense for Bettina to return to her room at the castle. Still, it would have been even stranger for her to sit in the shade waiting around.

I couldn't risk getting my clothes dirty before the tea party.

It would have been rather unwise to dirty her clothes on the leaves or trees, let alone on the ground. No matter how well she had dressed, one open seam or spot of dirt could result in a complete loss of interest in her. Thus, if she had arrived too early, it could have damaged the reputation and dignity of House

Eisenbach.

Though prioritizing material gain over one's moral duty and reputation was out of the question, it could become problematic later. Such problems would occur if one pursued material gain over anything else. It all depended on a very delicate balance.

So the only thing left was choosing a more appropriate time.

The matter was similar to the game Old Maid. Someone would eventually pull the old maid card. But the problem was that Bettina had pulled that card.

"I also planned on coming here a little earlier," said Bettina wryly with a troubled expression.

It was also a way of judging the reaction of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's side. Bettina could get a feel for their intentions from how they acted.

What I fear most is that His Grace Archduke Mikoshiba is already waiting. In that case...

Like the saying went, "The hero always arrives late." People with a higher rank often arrived later than their guests. However, there were times they did the exact opposite of that. For example, a company president was already seated in the conference room when a meeting occurred at an office. Simply put, it was a form of harassment used to find fault with others.

Will I be met with cynicism or disdain?

Naturally, Bettina didn't think she would get such a clear response. The quality of a noble's servants typically represented their status and intentions. If a guest that the head of the family disliked attended, the servant would try their best to be formal. But if it were a privileged guest, the servant would take extra care when tending to them.

The reality was that noble families who employed servants with more brash personalities were usually a rank or two lower. Conversely, higher-ranking families employed servants with more professional demeanors. While the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was a newly emerged noble family, their strength was already well-known. Bettina assumed that the servants working for him would be the best of the best.

No matter how much they hide it, there must be some subtle changes in their behavior that they can't hide. Bettina was confident she could find those subtle changes.

“Please do not fret... Although the master has a coldhearted side, he will not dismiss you as long as you show respect and good manners. If he were planning to destroy House Eisenbach, he would not have invited you to a tea party, Lady Bettina. The master is not fond of such futile acts,” responded the blonde maid unexpectedly with a chuckle to Bettina’s unspoken question.

Bettina’s eyes widened as she thought, *The maid wasted no time getting to the thick of it. I don't believe she meant to antagonize me.*

There was no way of knowing if the maid had spoken the truth. While it might have been mere consolation, it was not the sort of thing a maid should discuss. Few people would speak to Bettina in such a way.

Is she just loose-lipped? Or is something else going on here? thought Bettina until she worked out who the young woman in the maid outfit was.

Ah, I see. She's one of the Malfist sisters that man keeps close. They have the sun-kissed skin that many born in the central continent have. Given how they come from a family of high-ranking knights who serve the Kingdom of Quift, it's no wonder that she has such perfect manners.

Women born into families of knights often mastered martial arts. Rather than just being simple knights, it wasn't rare for them to become the bodyguard or waiting maid of a monarch or high-ranking noble. The Kingdom of Rhoadseria had a particularly chauvinistic bent, although Earth as a whole followed the same trend. It was difficult for women to live in a world like that. A woman born into a family bearing the knight's crest could not inherit said crest if she wasn't the firstborn. Being the waiting maid to a noble was an exceedingly wiser way to live, more so than being a female knight on the battlefield.

That is on the condition that one is lucky enough to be born with talent and good looks. But this maid ticks every box. I can't find any faults, thought Bettina, letting out a small sigh that contained a slight sense of self-mockery concealed within it. *I'm a fool. How did I not notice earlier? I can't expect anything less than for a person of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy to be a beauty from the central*

continent well-versed in manners.

Bettina was already aware of their names, Laura and Sara Malfist. After all, they were masterful warriors who had seen many battlefields and even helped Ryoma Mikoshiba with the previous civil war and when he was leading reinforcements for the Kingdom of Xarooda. Not looking up the names of such famous people was not an option. However, since photography and similar technologies didn't exist yet on Earth, Bettina couldn't pass judgment until she had met the sisters, even if she knew their names.

Portraits existed on Earth, but they took a long time to make and weren't a very pragmatic choice—a situation unique to Ryoma's world. Another reason for not knowing their appearance was that the Malfist twins often supported Ryoma Mikoshiba from the shadows and were more or less one step removed from the public eye. Therefore, Bettina hadn't recognized who the maid was at first.

Even though Bettina was a woman recognized for her talent and received praise from those around her, she wasn't entirely convinced of the Malfist twin's identity.

Judging from her choice of words, she's definitely close to that man.

She had received information about the Malfist twins in advance. But Ryoma Mikoshiba had entrusted the blonde young woman with an important role. This Malfist's mannerisms and behavior were too refined for her words to be laughed off as a slip of the tongue from an inconsiderate servant.

However, there must be a reason she told me that. "Is that...so?" asked Bettina, still unable to figure out their intentions.

"Yes, don't worry," said the blonde maid, laughing. Bettina stifled her inner anxieties and nodded in response.

It looks like she's telling the truth.

There seemed to be no ill will behind the maid's words, but Bettina couldn't be too sure. The blonde young woman could not even show a hint of her inner thoughts as someone working alongside the monster Ryoma Mikoshiba.

"I'll lead you to the meeting," said the maid as she began to walk. Bettina

followed her down the paved stones, white walls surrounding them.

“Oh, is the tea party outside?” Bettina cocked her head in confusion as the maid guided her past the manor entrance to a door that led to the central courtyard.

“Yes. The weather is nice today, so the master wished to hold the tea party outside today.”

“I see... He’s right. It would be nice to spend a day like this outside rather than holed up in a room.”

They passed through the hall and headed out into the central courtyard, and the paved path continued toward a small islet.

“It’s just over that way,” the maid instructed Bettina.

“Thank you,” responded Bettina, bowing her head. She went toward the islet, first crossing over the bridge. *So, this is also a part of keeping everything secret.*

The bridge was the only way of getting there. The meeting place was under an arbor built on the islet, meaning nobody could eavesdrop on the conversation. It was the perfect location for confidential business.

Archduke Mikoshiba probably has people hidden in the woods too.

Although often laughed off as plain rumors within noble circles, not a single spy that was sent to the Wortenia Peninsula had returned as far as Bettina knew. It was safe to assume that Ryoma had a highly skilled force of guards.

Unfortunately, I’m not quite skilled enough to detect where they are.

It was obvious why Ryoma had chosen to hold the tea party. Bettina mulled over the reasons as she crossed the bridge and headed to the arbor. As soon as she entered, she felt the gazes of several people; they seemed neither malicious nor friendly.

At the very least, no one seems to want to be any friendlier than necessary. Makes sense, I guess. You never know who has eyes on you.

Ahead of the tea party, Bettina and the other guests had to try to avoid doing anything that may evoke suspicion from Ryoma Mikoshiba. By enjoying light conversation and being amicable with one another, the women probably

wouldn't receive animosity or wariness from him. But it was impossible to say that was the case for sure.

In other words, it would be rather risky to take the initiative in welcoming Bettina, who had invited unwanted attention by arriving last. Being in a place where the future of one's family hung in the balance, it was paramount that they avoided any actions or words that they weren't one hundred percent about. Bettina couldn't help but think it was dishonorable for the women who had promised to work together with her to remain steadfast in not getting involved. However, she couldn't complain. She would have done the same had the shoe been on the other foot.

Besides, if Bettina dared to show her discontent and lose her composure now, it would reflect on the discussions with Archduke Mikoshiba later.

Everyone is putting their own families first...

Overall, everyone was minding and caring for their own business. As if to deny their gazes, Bettina smiled at everyone at the round table as she apologized.

"I'm sorry. Have I kept you all waiting?" said Bettina with an elegant bow.

"No, not at all. It's still a while before the agreed-upon time. Sir Mikoshiba is not here yet," replied Charlotte Halcyon as she rose from her chair, wearing a bright smile. Bettina felt relieved.

Although we're working together to support Her Majesty Radine, I thought Charlotte would use this opportunity to oust me. But those were needless worries.

Even if they were allies now, there was no saying what the future held. Yesterday's enemies could become today's friends, and vice versa. It was important to monitor that line and adjust as necessary. Bettina wasn't so naive as to lay bare her feelings to those around her. For better or worse, she was an unusually talented woman who had maintained her influence in the royal court, otherwise known as a nest of monsters.

"Is that so? What a relief."

Ten people sat at the round table, with napkins and silver cutlery already set and laid out.

Oh? I thought they'd be serving macarons today, but I wonder if it's something different instead?

Archduke Mikoshiba was known for serving macarons. Every noble within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria had that imprinted onto them. As a result, Bettina had assumed that he would serve macarons today too. She grew a little uncomfortable seeing the knives and forks on the table. But she didn't spend too much time worrying about it since everyone seated around the table was both enemies and allies.

Seeing how determined they all are, it's easy to see what they're aiming at.

Bettina sat down without showing a hint of unease or internal conflict. The women at the table were important people from their noble families—all talented, well-known young women. Everyone was a bachelorette, and that was common knowledge. The northern subjugation and the battle that followed were to blame.

To those women, Ryoma was the perfect prey.

The women's clothing made it apparent that they wanted more than just to establish cooperative relationships. Although the designs varied, each woman wore a new dress that was in fashion within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. The dresses were clearly tailored especially for today's tea party. All the accessories the women wore were noteworthy too. Their outfits could be described as the armor of warriors heading into a battle without weapons, the fate of their families on the line.

The same went for the organizer, Charlotte.

As Charlotte got lost in her thoughts, the maid with silver hair standing by the arbor's doorway suddenly spoke up.

"Though somewhat early, since everyone is here, the tea party shall begin."

As the maid with silver hair spoke, the blonde maid appeared behind her in the entryway accompanying a man. He wore black noble's clothing and had his hair neatly combed back. At first glance, he looked like a young nobleman. But everyone knew who he was from the vigor that emanated from his body.

“Master of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, Sir Ryoma Mikoshiba,” announced the two maids. All the women stood before pinching their skirts and lifting them up slightly, bending their knees slightly as they gently bowed their heads. The women greeted the Kingdom of Rhoadseria’s true leader in a very ladylike manner.

“Thank you all for coming here today, even if it was last-minute. It is a privilege to meet you all,” said Ryoma as he also gently bowed his head.

Thus, the curtain was lifted on the battlefield disguised as a simple tea party.



Just as the women took their seats again, the twin maids took teapots from a wagon they had prepared and poured a cup of tea for all the guests. Ryoma waited until each lady had tea before speaking.

“All right, let’s begin. First, Lady Charlotte. Even though this was on short notice, thank you for your support and help. It must have been difficult coordinating everyone’s schedules. After all, I am considered a heretic among the noble society in Rhoadseria, which must have caused you a lot of trouble.”

Ryoma kick-started the tea party with some words of gratitude toward Charlotte. First on the agenda was to show appreciation for the people who helped organize the event in front of all the guests. That meant nothing besides showing that Charlotte Halcyon was now one step ahead of everyone else.

But this is probably a type of test.

Showing off their achievements was a foolish act that would wreck one’s image. At the very least, it would deteriorate the impression of the smiling man who stood beside all the women. Even if Charlotte’s heart was probably jumping for joy due to Ryoma’s words, she smiled calmly.

“Thank you, but it’s really nothing. I can’t imagine anyone in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria who would say no to your invitation. They would be delighted to join. At the very least, I believe everyone who is with us today would have made the same decision,” answered Charlotte.

Ryoma quietly nodded in response.

“That’s true. Everyone here is talented, well-known...and all natural beauties, to boot. Your dresses are so refined and incredibly well-made. Are these the latest fashion trends? The women on Earth are not to be underestimated, huh,” said Ryoma, smiling as he looked around the room.

The dresses came in various styles, and they all revealed the women’s shoulders or the top of the chest area. Some dresses were similar to modern styles, made of silk and designed to show off more skin. These beautiful women had gathered here, and the only man there was Ryoma. As he was a hot-blooded male, it would have been logical that he would fall for their charms and their clothes meant to draw a man’s gaze.

But Ryoma didn't even have a hint of lust in his eyes. All he had done was candidly compliment their dresses and call it as it was—the women were all beauties.

A natural response, knowing his personality. I was a little afraid of him looking at me with a lustful glance, and I can't help but feel a bit competitive.

Charlotte nodded, although somewhat irritated by Ryoma's response.

"I've taken some tips from the styles that have made their way here from Rearth. From your response, Sir Ryoma, they must be quite accurate."

"Oh... Is that so?" inquired Ryoma.

"Indeed. Rearth's clothes and accessories are much more refined than those here."

That was an expected outcome since Earth was in constant conflict; Rearth was relatively peaceful and could maintain more diverse cultures. Developments were usually born from mixing and combining styles and colors, a theory which applied to the designs of their dresses.

"I see... That could be the case," stated Ryoma, sipping the tea the twins poured. When Charlotte and the others saw that, they picked their cups up.

"Oh? Oh..." One of the women faintly tilted her head to the side. The steam rising from the cup smelled different from how they expected.

"Oh my... It's sweet, yet there's a faint scent of orchid."

"The color is quite dark too."

Archduke Mikoshiba was known for his preference for Lisnors tea, but the women's tea differed from the usual make.

"But...what is this?"

Based on the color and smell, it was easy to grasp that this was a high-quality luxury like Lisnors tea. Although the women were all highborn and well-versed in gourmet food, none could place where the tea had come from. Ryoma cheerfully laughed as he looked at all the women's confused expressions.

"I see you've all noticed. This drink comes from the eastern part of the

eastern continent, the Tian Hua Empire, and is known as Luminous Gate tea. People regard it as one of the eight best teas in Tian Hua, so please have a taste. There haven't been many opportunities for tea to be transported here to the western continent."

The women spoke to confirm if their memories were correct.

"The Tian Hua Empire... Wait, isn't that the country that is said to be the strongest on the eastern continent?"

"You had a boat go that far?"

Ryoma gently waved his hand, denying the woman's question.

"No, no, I had it imported via the central continent. Of course, I would like to send a ship to the eastern continent. But that's a long while off yet," added Ryoma, smiling. "I would also like you to try this. While macarons are delicious, it would be boring to serve the same thing every time." He signaled the blonde maid, and she gave a slight nod as she brought the cart forward.

"Here you are... Please enjoy," said the maid.

The women were greeted by an endless number of full-sized cakes. There was an ordinary strawberry shortcake, a no-bake cheesecake, a soufflé cheesecake, a basque cheesecake, and tarts with various fruits piled on top.

"Oooh..."

"I had these made by my chef. They're authentic recipes, so let's leave the more serious talks for later and enjoy the cakes. Feel free to have whatever you like," said Ryoma.

Everyone's eyes began to sparkle.

"These are wonderful. I never once thought I'd lay eyes on such a wide variety of sweets. I would like a slice of the one with fruit on," said Diana Hamilton with a broad smile. Spurred on by Diana, the other dazzled women turned to the twins to pass on their choices.

"I would like the strawberry one."

"Could I get the one made with cheese, please?"

The tea party had a rather heavy atmosphere, but that disappeared instantly and turned into something more befitting the event's name. Ryoma smiled as he looked at the women, appearing like a father watching over his daughters.

That, or a man pleased to see his lover delighted.

A different emotion stirred in Ryoma's heart, quite unlike the warmth one would usually feel. Instead, it resembled the joy an examiner might feel.

Well, they say that women have a weakness for sweet things. If these women are as talented as they say, they should see straight through my plan. Let's see how they fare with the first hurdle, thought Ryoma.

The women then met Ryoma's expectations exactly.

"Interesting. This cake uses cheese that the territories under House Hamilton produce. The cheese from there is slightly sour yet deeply rich. It's a luxurious item, famous among the higher echelons of the kingdom. However, when used in a dessert like this, I can enjoy a whole different facet of deliciousness."

"The grapes and peaches in this fruit tart have a wonderful taste and sweetness. I suspect it's from House Eisenbach's Gondolana territory. That's the only area that can produce such taste and sweetness."

"Very much so. Yet it's still so fresh even though it came all the way from Gondolana in the southern part of the kingdom. Those who brought it must have preserved it incredibly well."

The women all beamed as they chatted. They then put their peach-colored lips on their tea cups, taking sips to cleanse their palettes.

"How marvelous. I was a little apprehensive when the maid served it. Sipping it after eating a sweet has made me realize how the tea balances the aroma and bitterness."

"You're right... Not to mention, these sweets are amazing. I had no idea famous products from our regions could be used to create such treats."

Ryoma smiled, looking satisfied, then said, "Yes. All of these were made with the local specialties from your families' regions."

"Did you do something similar when you hosted the evening party held at the

Salzberg manor and served food there?” asked Charlotte.

Ryoma grinned. It was evidence that she had correctly understood his intentions.

“Correct. I want those who shall walk the same path as me to also be well-off, so...”

The women smirked and were quick to figure out what Ryoma meant. He did not need to invite people who wouldn't be able to do just that.

“House Merdias will never forget this favor,” said Iris Merdias, daughter of the Viscount Merdias.

“Thank you. We are most grateful for your kindness.”

Following in Iris's footsteps, the rest of the women expressed their gratitude. It was tantamount to receiving immunity from the most influential man in Rhoadseria. And that immunity was their main reason for attending this tea party.

Of course, immunity was just a simple word.

But the words of this man, whose demeanor alone demonstrated his value, were considered by Queen Radine as more powerful than any contract. Had he not planned to let their families go unscathed, he would have never mentioned those who shall walk the same path. Nor would he have gone to such trouble to have sweets prepared using their region's most famous products.

Their answer was the most correct response and the development Ryoma had hoped for. If the level of the women's abilities were not what Ryoma required, they would not have understood what he had meant. That would have led them to failing to pass the first test.

They reacted as I thought. Well, the continuation of their families is more important than their own lives. Although it's only a verbal promise, it's natural that they would be overjoyed that their families can continue. But I can't have them just be delighted...

Of course, Ryoma wasn't displeased with the beautiful women sharing their heartfelt gratitude. As a realist who respected actual benefit, he felt that just

ending with simple words wasn't enough. It was similar to the master-servant relationship that Japanese samurai followed—a relationship based on gratitude and service. Or, in more modern terms, how a company compensates its workers with a salary. People received compensation for their work, but the reverse was true.

I expect them to return the favor.

It was a constant truth that the people of Earth had to live by. In the middle of all of this, Charlotte Halcyon uttered the words that Ryoma wanted to hear most.

“So, Sir Mikoshiba, what do you expect from us in return for your kindness?”

Ryoma smiled before he spoke.

“Good question... Maybe you could all advise me on a situation that I've been struggling with lately.” Ryoma then went on to explain the bad news he had received yesterday. He started with the confidential information Joshua Belares had written and sent in a secret letter. He covered the invasion of Xarooda, and the current condition of Julianus I. Then Ryoma expressed his unease regarding the two incidents. Basically, it was information that directly related to the survival of the nation. The only people who would be privy to such information were key personnel involved with managing the nation's affairs.

The information was so confidential that if someone were careless with it, it could get them killed. Nevertheless, the women remained steadfast upon hearing what Ryoma had to say.

At the very least, they're calm on the surface. They've kept their composure.

Ryoma wasn't sure if it resulted from their upbringing as noble ladies or was a result of their talents and abilities. They all qualified to be here at the tea party, though. Once Ryoma had finished talking, the women all looked around at one another and began to speak.

“I see... You're right to worry about that, Sir Mikoshiba,” said Bettina Eisenbach with a captivating smile. Following Bettina, the other women also raised their voice in agreement as they figured out the situation.

“You're right. The timing is too good.”

“I don’t think it’s coincidence that the O’ltormea Empire would invade Xarooda right around the time His Majesty Julianus falls ill.”

“I agree with Lady Iris. In that case, that would mean enemies are communicating from within His Majesty Julianus’s ranks.”

“It’s akin to the saying ‘Having a traitor within the walls.’ So, I can imagine there are people like that in every country.”

Ryoma nodded deeply to the women’s statements.

“Yes... His Majesty hadn’t been doing well for a while. Though, his illness was never that serious. I daresay someone used a weak poison to make the effects a lot slower. It cut away at his stamina, and they timed it perfectly. They must have wanted to assist the O’ltormea Empire in invading the Kingdom of Xarooda. I do not know who is behind all this, however...”

The women nodded.

“You’re correct, Sir Mikoshiba. I suspect O’ltormea had a hand in this. That, or a third country is looking to increase its power.”

“I think the O’ltormea Empire is the most suspicious. After all, they have Shardina Eisenheit over there.”

“That’s right. It’s definitely the sort of move that the so-called Princess General Shardina would make.”

The women had accurately analyzed the situation, though something was lacking. They hadn’t quite reached the level Ryoma was looking for. Even so, Charlotte, Bettina and Diana were ahead of the other women as far as talents went.

“I see. If their aim is to assist the O’ltormea Empire, those in Rhoadseria may also be at risk. At the very least, we can’t expect the kingdom to be in no danger.”

Charlotte nodded and responded, “I agree. If this were my operation, I would put a scheme together to hinder Sir Mikoshiba from doing anything.”

“That’s right, I agree with both of you. The most realistic idea would be to instigate the nobles that are unhappy with Sir Mikoshiba, causing a revolt.

Doing that would make it difficult for Sir Mikoshiba to send aid to the Kingdom of Xarooda.”

Ryoma responded with a deep nod. *That’s very true.*

There was no mistaking that the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had the strongest army within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. The nation lost military power due to the northern subjugation and the civil war. But the six knight factions under the direct control of the royal family and the private armies owned by the nobles were not to be disregarded. They made up a substantial fraction of the nation’s military power too.

Although there would be a limit to the number of soldiers they could send, if they ignored all risk factors, they could send around one hundred thousand soldiers to Xarooda as reinforcements. It was a military strength that even the large O’ltormea Empire couldn’t ignore.

But should the nobles riot, that would change the situation entirely. It would be a devilish move that would allow their enemies to deplete Rhoadseria’s military strength without losing any of their own.

“Well, that is the most simple way of doing it. It wouldn’t take them much. All they would have to do is incite the other nobles, who are also as idiotic as Viscount Romaine.”

“That’s true. Unfortunately, we have many fools like that in our country.”

“Yeah, it’s actually embarrassing as a noble. That said, it’s not like they serve any purpose.”

The three women shrieked with laughter. At a glance, their words were pessimistic. Despite that, they all had a sense of composure, and Ryoma deduced they were plotting against House Romaine.

As I thought, they have a knack for trickery. They often say beautiful flowers have thorns, but those flowers are always poisonous. I have my work cut out for me.

If Ryoma mishandled them, he could end up severely burned. Yet, he was relieved to discover talented people among the nobility of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Above all, their bewitching brilliance at hatching schemes had

captivated him.

“Striking at an enemy’s weak points is essentially the basics of the art of war,” he said.

Charlotte and the others sneered behind their folding fans.

“Do you think that too, Sir Mikoshiba?”

“Yes. If I were them, I would also lay out the groundwork. After all, if all else fails, you could still narrow down your opponent’s options as a form of harassment,” responded Ryoma.

“That’s true. Limiting what we could do would be highly effective. Even though we understand that, how do we defend ourselves?”

“It’s a difficult situation. At the very least, someone will have to keep a close eye on the situation, dealing with anything suspicious.”

“I see... Is it okay to assume that’s the role you want to entrust to us?”

“Correct. I think you’ll all be a perfect fit.”

That was what Charlotte and the others wanted to hear the most.

“Understood. Then we must do a good job of managing the nobles’ discontent and animosity toward Sir Mikoshiba.”

Bettina agreed with Charlotte, showing the women knew exactly what Ryoma required of them. He then decided to entrust them with the most important mission.

“Alongside that, I have one more task I would like you all to do.”

“Okay... Is it related to dealing with Viscount Romaine and his cronies?”

Ryoma nodded deeply in response.

“Yes. It needs a swift resolution. I want to dispose of them in a way that would minimize any backlash from the nobles. Could I ask you to do that?”

“Of course. I expected you would mention it, so we have already made preparations. But we do have something we need to discuss with you...” A cold smile appeared on Charlotte’s lips. The ladies in attendance were already aware of said business and showed no signs of doubt. Ryoma smiled, satisfied with

their confident words and expressions.

Chapter 2: Those Who Fan the Flames

Gray clouds covered the sky, obscuring the sparkling stars and the moonlight. An angry voice rang out in Viscount Romaine's manor in the noble district within the royal capital. It had been around a month since Mario Romaine died in a back alley in Pireas.

Rage still consumed his father, Viscount Romaine.

"It's all nonsense! Why did my son have to die? Why?!" yelled Viscount Romaine as he aggressively picked up a bottle of wine and drank.

Only a few drops fell into his mouth since the bottle was empty. When he realized this, he threw it as hard as he could against the wall.

"Dammit! Everyone just walks all over me! Who do they think I am?! I'm the master of House Romaine, a name that has long preceded the Kingdom of Rhoadseria!"

Sounds of destruction filled the room. The pieces of wine bottles, which all had received the same fate as the one just before, formed a pile on the floor near the wall. Viscount Romaine slammed his fists on the desk to release some frustration. His heart burned with rage toward Ryoma Mikoshiba and despair from the death of his son.

Viscount Romaine knew he would soon burn out if he did nothing about the flames inside him. And so he used alcohol as his water to quell the flames. But the viscount could not extinguish a fire that anger and despair had fueled. No matter how much alcohol he drank, it didn't change reality, and the thought tormented him.

"So he humiliated some lowly commoners. What of it?! What's wrong with us nobles, who have dignified blood running through our veins, having some fun?! Then he goes ahead and kills my son... No, the heir of House Romaine! Does he think my son's life is that of a mere street rat?!" The ranting man fixated on being superior yet was filled with resentment. If someone in modern society

overheard this, they would verbally attack Viscount Romaine. The situation resembled present-day politicians or cabinet ministers calling their nation's people livestock or slaves.



Had his tirade been recorded and leaked on the internet, it would be the end of his career as a politician. In a worst-case scenario, he might be forced to pay a huge sum as compensation, making it difficult for him to lead an ordinary life. That was the point of view a modern-day person would have, at least. In reality, Viscount Romaine didn't need to worry about commoners being angry or hating him after hearing what he had said. He didn't fear them retaliating either. Commoners were nothing but sources of tax revenue in his eyes, tools that supported his life of luxury.

While his rage consumed him, he didn't reflect or care how others judged his son. He accused others, shifting the blame off himself onto other external factors. But that wasn't to say that Viscount Romaine was a piece of trash. Many nobles within the upper echelons of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria felt sympathy for him and defended him. A few nobles had accepted that Mario Romaine was at fault and that his death was justifiable. Those views were common knowledge among the nobles.

"That lot is just mere livestock who pay taxes! Actual livestock don't complain, and that makes commoners worse! It doesn't matter if they die!"

Nobles considered Viscount Romaine's view about peasants normal. Ruling over a territory's population as their lord was not easy. No matter how good of a ruler he was, there were always complaints. Commoners would still be unhappy even if they were taxed more fairly. Territories depended on agriculture, which heavily relied on an unpredictable climate. Bad weather would lead to crops not growing, making the rabble clamor for the nobles to reduce their taxes.

But when there was an abundant harvest, most commoners would be thankful to God or the weather, sparing no gratitude for their lord. Ruling a territory was a thankless job because lords had unrealistic requests from their citizens. As a result, many lords would prioritize bleeding their peasants dry over keeping them happy. Once they began to do that, it was almost impossible not to see them as exploitable livestock. Whether that was the correct thing to do was a different question. Still...

"Was that the correct form of punishment for the offender?! Like hell, it was

not! Stupid guards. They need to read between the lines! See the real meaning behind that upstart's words!"

The stronger trampling on the weak was common in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Someone had trampled on House Romaine, though. There was no other way to describe it than "just deserts." A noble family accepting that was a different story altogether.

"My son's... My son's dead body...mercilessly assaulted. Now, his mother lies bedridden... I was so happy that my concubine bore a son...an heir..."

When Mario Romaine's body had arrived at the mansion, Viscount Romaine couldn't bear to look at him. His mother passed out when she saw the body and locked herself in her room with no intention of leaving—it had been that gruesome a sight. Mario had received so many kicks to his head that it had caved in on itself. The man's most vital part had also received such treatment until there was nothing left; it went without saying how devastating it was for his parents to see. Even someone with nerves of steel would have struggled to look directly at Mario's body. This attack had come when Viscount Romaine was lucky to have an heir, born to a concubine, to take up the mantle of succession. His previous heir, born to Viscount Romaine's wife, had died in the northern subjugation. Although his wife and her friends had harassed his concubine, the latter had finally turned the tables and gotten revenge. Her son had been her last chance of being able to do so.

That wish has now died along with Mario.

Viscount Romaine considered his wife someone he married purely for political reasons. His concubine was his true love—a partner he had chosen of his own volition. She had given birth to Mario, who meant more to Viscount Romaine than his dead eldest son ever had.

"Alcohol! Bring me more alcohol!" Viscount Romaine roared. After a while, the door opened, revealing a middle-aged maid who trembled at the shoulders.

"Master... Sorry to have kept you waiting," said the maid, bowing her head and placing a wine glass on the table before gesturing again. Her trembling shoulders were not a trick of the eye. What had happened had also been a terrible disaster for her. House Romaine was not known for being kind to their

servants, an issue with how they were as people. They were the type to take advantage of young village girls summoned to work at their mansion. Thus, the servants faced physical abuse every day.

House Romaine enjoyed protection due to their status as nobles. Commoners perceived them no better than bandits, pirates, or even simple hoodlums who prowled the streets.

Not many people would consider approaching him. But as the master of the house was calling for alcohol, the servants couldn't pretend not to hear him. He would fly into a further rage and possibly even brandish his sword. Some servants had been killed simply because Viscount Romaine thought them impolite. No one wanted to meet the same fate.

But it was an avoidable situation. Several maids worked at the mansion, and a few of the younger ones had yet to attend the Viscount Romaine. They had begun working at the mansion just a few days ago. If the older maid had prioritized her own safety, she would have sent those young women instead. Considering how Viscount Romaine behaved like a starved beast, it would have been similar to sending a lamb to slaughter.

While the middle-aged woman wanted to protect herself, she was a good person. She could not have submitted the young maids as a living sacrifice to Viscount Romaine. Moreover, she predicted her master might go easier on a senior servant. Yet she braced herself when she noticed how enraged her master seemed. She did not want to enrage him further, but her fears soon became real.

"You're late!" bellowed Viscount Romaine as he stared directly at the maid, his eyes glazed over from the alcohol. He looked like a drunken customer complaining to a part-time staff member at an izakaya. And so, the small amount of courage the maid had and her sense of duty to protect the younger maids had crumbled to pieces.

"I am truly sorry..." whimpered the maid. Her thin shoulders trembled as she secretly prayed to God, hoping Viscount Romaine would quickly dismiss her from the room. She felt like she was in a cage with a ferocious animal. All she could think about was how much she wanted to leave the room. But God often

did not listen to such prayers. Viscount Romaine glared at the bottle of wine on the table.

“You fool! Are you not even able to provide a side dish with the alcohol? Everyone is useless! Who do you all think I am?! Even livestock are more useful than you! Everyone here is simply useless!”

It was a completely nonsensical and outrageous demand. Viscount Romaine had only ordered the servants to bring him alcohol. A more talented servant might have also brought him a dried snack or cheese to have with his drink. An even more talented servant probably would have also brought a glass of water. They might have placed his alcohol on the table, then asked if he wished to have a snack or water alongside it.

That behavior would only apply to servants who felt their masters deserved such considerate treatment. Unfortunately, Viscount Romaine was not the type of master to receive such consideration. He had never thought about the mentality or wishes of the servants working in his manor. People who did wouldn't make such unreasonable demands. In fact, they would ask politely. Many who mistakenly thought they deserved respect were often not worthy. Viscount Romaine perhaps felt that only those beneath him should bow to his authority. As a result, he could not forgive those who angered him.

“I am terribly sorry... I'll go find something suitable and come right back...” responded the maid, bowing. She concluded she was better off simply apologizing than saying anything out of turn. But her ordinary comment only made him even more furious.

“There you go again! Do you think I am a fool? ‘Go find something suitable’?! Do you not even know your own master's tastes? What on earth do you plan on having me eat?!” yelled Viscount Romaine as he reached for his favorite horsewhip. It was a made-to-order punishment device crafted from the leather of a monitor lizard he'd had an adventurer hunt down. The noble wore a cruel smile as he lightly swung the whip about, testing the feel of it in his hand. His objective was plain to see. He wasn't angry at the maid; he was only using it as an excuse so he could torture her.

He wanted to dispel the sadness and frustration at being unable to exact

revenge on Ryoma Mikoshiba. Even though the maid understood that she could do nothing, attempting to run would worsen things. If she somehow escaped the room and the mansion, she would have nowhere to stay. She would lead a miserable life in a back alley somewhere in the royal capital, tugging on a man's sleeve to get his attention. Should that happen, Viscount Romaine would turn his attention to her family living within the village. He held complete control over whether she and her family lived or died. Knowing that, all the maid could do was beg for mercy. The maid acknowledged it was a pointless act that could only add more fuel to his fire.

"Please, Master. Please...I beg you...forgive me..." The maid's complexion grew pale as she heard the whip crack the air, reverberating around the room. The horsewhip was shorter than usual whips, lacking the strength of a regular whip. Normal whips were used as torture devices, whereas horsewhips' main function was hurting the horse in order to make it go faster. Getting beaten like a horse would be unbearable, but the intent was not to cause serious injury to the horse. The same was true of the made-to-order item Viscount Romaine had. His horsewhip could cause damage when used against a weak human, such as the middle-aged maid, including a chance it could cut her skin and make her bleed.

But even that was an optimistic expectation.

Depending on how hard Viscount Romaine hit her and where he did so, the possibility she could die from shock existed. Seeing the maid shake with fear did nothing to stop Viscount Romaine.

He began to whip her with no mercy.

"Aghhh!"

The sounds of the whip hitting her skin and the maid's screams echoed around the room as she cowered. On a closer look, the right shoulder of her uniform had ripped open. Blood dripped onto the floor through her fingers as she held her hand over her wound. The maid looked up through her disheveled hair, seemingly begging for mercy. Even Viscount Romaine would normally stop around now, but that wasn't the case today.

"What's that?! Do I hear complaining?!" He was displeased with the begging

gaze from the maid. The whip cracked again as he hit her.

Once became twice.

Twice became thrice.

Viscount Romaine grew more excited with each crack of the whip followed by the maid's cries. He only stopped once the blood splattered on his face as he lifted up the whip, out of breath. Sweat covered his face, and Romaine wiped the blood off his hands as if annoyed by it. He then turned toward the maid—who had passed out from the pain—proud of his work, and spat on her before grabbing the bottle from the table. Unconscious maids were like gum that had lost its flavor to Viscount Romaine. They were nothing.

He brought the bottle of alcohol to his lips and gulped it all down in one go. The wine dribbled from his lips, staining his white silk shirt red. After downing it all, he returned the bottle to the table.

“Alcohol! Bring me more alcohol! And chuck out this eyesore of a woman too!” He continued to act with no consideration for anyone else. He showed no signs of shame even after leaving a person all but dead. It was more like a reaction to a broken toy. The viscount was probably thinking, “Why did my toy break before I finished having my fun with it?!”

The apple certainly didn't fall far from the tree.

Considering how Viscount Romaine had acted, one could easily deduce what would have happened to the poor married couple from the restaurant if Ryoma Mikoshiba hadn't stopped Mario Romaine.

But there were exceptions. A black hen could lay a white egg. The reverse was also true, though the chances of it happening were incredibly low. After all, savage parents gave birth to savage children. The number of people who would willingly associate with such savages was severely limited. But for some reason, tonight someone did seek out Viscount Romaine.

“Excuse me... Master, is now a good time?” A light knock came from the door, followed by a man's voice.

“What is it?! I ordered you to bring me alcohol! If you have something to say, come in and spit it out already!” yelled Viscount Romaine.

Despite Viscount Romaine being annoyed that his butler hadn't brought any alcohol, he still allowed the man into the room. The door opened slowly. Behind it stood an older man wearing a stylish tailcoat.

"So... What is it?"

He thought that the butler was here to admonish him about the maid. Judging from the butler's expression, he wasn't here for that.

"Master... You have guests..."

Just then, Viscount Romaine instinctively tilted his head in response to the butler's hesitant words. He wasn't expecting him to say that since the clock had just turned to midnight. It was much too late for a guest to arrive without sending a messenger ahead of their arrival. From the perspective of a noble within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, it was a reckless move that appeared rude. There was even a possibility it could lead to a quarrel between noble houses. Thus, Viscount Romaine wasn't pleased with how his butler had handled it.

Rather than chasing the guests off, he announced their visit to his master. That said, Viscount Romaine didn't find fault with the butler. He knew that the butler, who oversaw all management regarding the manor, would already be aware of his opinion.

"Who is it?"

"Viscount Orglen."

Viscount Romaine's face froze in shock. He struggled to keep his composure because he had received a visit not from a messenger but Viscount Orglen himself. As the initial shock wore off, Viscount Romaine's alcohol-addled brain slowly grasped the situation.

Leonard Orglen? What on earth does that pompous asshole want with me?

Personally, Viscount Romaine hated Viscount Orglen and clicked his tongue at the mention of his name. Their houses didn't have much of a relationship but shared the same rank. While they weren't enemies, per se, they had very surface-level interactions at most, meaning there was no reason for such a late-night visit. Unless his visitor was a higher rank than him, such as a count or a duke, he could normally easily refuse them and ask that they return another

day.

Leonard was not only head of House Orglen but was also a fierce, strong knight. He was known as a cultured person within the Rhoadserian royal court, which meant that Viscount Romaine had to change his approach.

After all, Viscount Orglen had even served as Lupis Rhoadserians's arts teacher in the past.

Someone capable of teaching the royal family not only had talent and a respectable background, they had a good personality and nature. All the nobles in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria admired House Orglen, which the talented Leonard led. Because Leonard Orglen was visiting Viscount Romaine and not just sending a messenger in his place, the host couldn't disregard him—regardless of what he had been doing with his servants.

"I see. Fine, let him in," said Viscount Romaine, squeezing out a response. He then remembered the gruesome scene from moments before. "Take him through to the parlor for now and set out some alcohol. I know it's not ideal to make guests wait, but he came unannounced in the middle of the night and cannot complain if he has to wait a while. I'm going to take a bath and get changed first."

"Understood. I will prepare everything right away," replied the butler before he bowed and made to leave the room. The best thing Viscount Romaine could do was meet with Viscount Orglen. The interaction could affect the relationship between their noble houses, so he had no choice. He looked at the butler with a cold gaze as he repeated a previous order.

"Could you also...do something about this eyesore of a woman?"

The butler finally remembered the motionless maid crouched close to the floor. He silently nodded to his master's order, swiftly turning around on his heel. There was nothing else he could do, even if it went against every moral he knew.

Just how long is he going to make me wait? thought Viscount Leonard Orglen, sitting on the sofa in the parlor. *Has it been around an hour now? Although not a young lady, he seems to take around the same time to get ready. Maybe I've*

interrupted him from having fun, and he's struggling to get the smell of a young woman's white makeup powder off.

He knew his sudden visit at night was rude by noble standards, so he expected to wait for a bit. But after doing that for over an hour, he was starting to become restless. Viscount Romaine's parlor had various paintings hanging on its walls and a few statues scattered around. Viscount Orglen was well-versed in the arts, so he had killed time admiring them, although that had a limit.

It appears Viscount Romaine does not understand anything about art. Nothing in this room matches. To put it simply, it lacks character.

Famous artists and sculptors had created all the historical Rhoadserian works displayed in the parlor. While they were all incredibly expensive pieces, they weren't the sort of things bought just to showcase wealth. For example, a flower painting hanging above the fireplace was a three-hundred-year-old piece by a very famous artist. Over the years, many of this artist's works had gone missing, so collectors traded his remaining works for very high prices. The room had such historical pieces, yet it didn't feel like someone with a love for art owned this room.

To Leonard, it seemed that Viscount Romaine had simply bought many high-value, rare pieces and had them put up wherever. Thus, they could not get along. Regardless, he couldn't just simply cancel the meeting because of that.

Now those rumors are starting to make sense...

Viscount Romaine was a quintessential Rhoadserian noble. He was arrogant, lazy, and proud. Additionally, he strongly believed he was above all others and even considered commoners as lowly livestock. He wasn't afraid to be heavy-handed with those he deemed had gotten in his way. The people of his territory both hated and feared him.

Consequently, he didn't have the best reputation within the royal capital.

No one said anything as Viscount Romaine boasted some influence within the noble faction. But many nobles would frown at the mention of his name, specifically Viscount McMaster and Helena Steiner.

Suddenly, there was a light knock at the door. Before Leonard could welcome

them in, the door to the room opened, revealing Viscount Romaine. He wore a white silk shirt underneath a navy blue jacket. Gaudy rings adorned with blue and red jewels adorned his hands. He was so well-dressed, it wouldn't have been strange if he was attending an evening party after the meeting. It also worked perfectly as an outfit to welcome a guest of honor. Although the clothes were extravagant, they lost some of their brilliance due to the character of the person wearing them.

"Apologies for making you wait so long. I was fast asleep when you came, so I needed to prepare. Please forgive me," said Viscount Romaine, also sitting on the sofa without a hint of shame in his conduct. It appeared he was the type who couldn't help but antagonize or belittle the person he was speaking with at any given opportunity.

Leonard responded with a cordial smile and effortlessly avoided the greeting soaked with malice. "Ah, please do not worry... It should be me asking for forgiveness. I apologize for arriving at such a late time."

"Is that so? All right, then," responded Viscount Romaine, lightly snorting. As Leonard thought, Viscount Romaine probably didn't find his response entertaining enough.

"So? I wonder what brings you here all of a sudden? I don't believe House Romaine has ever been friendly enough with House Orglen to warrant unannounced late-night visits," sneered Viscount Romaine as he looked at Leonard. But Leonard had already long seen through his facade.

He's responding exactly like I thought he would.

Few noble families would follow up a sudden unannounced visit at night with that question. There was no sneaky reason to be having secret talks with someone in the dead of the night, regardless of etiquette. Hence, there was no way of knowing if this conversation would lead to getting involved in some scheme. In a worst-case scenario, it wasn't too far-fetched to think that it could wrap them up in a rebellion that would lead to one's entire family getting executed. If anything, it was reasonable to say that was knowledge a noble should be fully aware of. Even Viscount Romaine, who was dimwitted, understood that.

Since people often spoke behind his back, referring to him as a terrible and dimwitted lord, he was talented at sensing dangerous situations that could threaten his own safety. If not for that, House Romaine would have already perished or been usurped long ago.

Even though he understands that, he still met with me. I wonder why? Though, I guess there is only one reason for it. “I’m sure you know the reason I am here already, Viscount Romaine,” Leonard responded.

Viscount Romaine went pale. “Hm? What do you mean?”

“Do you really not know? There’s been whispers among the commoners, mostly rumors pertaining to a certain upstart and Lord Mario.”

Once Leonard finished speaking, he saw his host’s face flare with rage. The only reason Viscount Romaine didn’t suddenly start shouting was because he was speaking with an equal.

“Viscount Orglen, did you really come all this way at this time of night to discuss that with me?” asked Viscount Romaine with a hint of anger and murderous intent. If there were a sword nearby, he might have already stabbed Leonard with it. Not that Leonard could blame him.

Rumors of what happened had already spread throughout the royal capital as commoners cheered and applauded. As a noble, such a response was unthinkable. But the common folk who knew of Mario’s actions viewed what Ryoma Mikoshiba had done as the right thing to do. The House of Lords usually responded to such a situation but did nothing when considering the commoners’ reactions.

It was difficult to criticize Ryoma Mikoshiba for his actions when he was praised, especially when he was no longer a simple wanderer. He was now one of the highest-ranking nobles in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria after the queen gave him the title of archduke. The House of Lords would normally be a lot more decisive when dealing with him, but that didn’t mean Viscount Romaine was less frustrated. Leonard’s words only served to fan the flames of his anger.

“I’ll ask you again... Did you really come to my house to discuss that with me? Did you come all this way to mock my son and me?”

Leonard remained calm, feigning ignorance, and said, “I see you are quite upset.”

“Of course I am! The heir to my house was killed! So he ridiculed a few commoners, what does it even matter?! Are you going to tell me that was more than enough reason to kill the heir of House Romaine?!”

Yet Leonard shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “That’s besides House Romaine suffering plenty of damage from the Twin Blades in the last war. It must have been hard work restoring the streets of Thelmis.”

Viscount Romaine’s expression changed as the rage drained from his face.

“How... How do you know that...?”

Thelmis stood in the southern part of Rhoadseria and was part of Viscount Romaine’s territory, located halfway between the border city Galatia and the central southern city Heraklion. It played an important role as a distribution hub in Rhoadseria alongside Prolegia. House Romaine’s finances had taken a turn for the worse after Robert and Signus had laid waste to the city of Thelmis. The original reason Mario Romaine, who lived at a mansion based in Prolegia, had come to the royal capital was because the Twin Blades had attacked a vacant house in the southern part of the kingdom during the northern subjugation.

Many of the nobles who had participated in the northern subjugation had uprooted all of their soldiers and skilled commanders from their regions, leaving only second-rate commanders and a handful of soldiers in their wake. Therefore, those left behind could not fend off a surprise ambush spearheaded by the Twin Blades, Robert Bertrand and Signus Galveria. The affected noble houses stopped fighting back and fled to the royal capital with their families to preserve their lineage. Still, none of them would have admitted they feared the Twin Blades and had decided to escape. Mario had made an excuse that his father had summoned him to act as his reinforcements. While he would have added to the military strength of the capital, he had chosen to escape. Said act of cowardice resulted in Thelmis taking a lot of damage.

It makes sense that Viscount Romaine hates Ryoma Mikoshiba with all his heart. That man has taken both of his heirs, and the financial base of House Romaine, Thelmis, was all but destroyed.

The story of Thelmis brought dishonor to House Romaine. Having the heir to the house fail to protect his people, choosing instead to flee, was an incredibly detestable act. Usually, the heir to the territory led in its defense unless they were very young and unable to do so. No other heirs to various noble houses had done what Mario did. It also showed how important he was to Viscount Romaine.

His son, whom he had fought so hard to protect, meeting such a cruel fate has probably destroyed Viscount Romaine financially and mentally... Hm, I almost feel sorry for him.

That was why Leonard was about to offer him a helping hand.

“I understand the hardship House Romaine is experiencing. As a fellow noble who serves the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, I can imagine what it must be like for you. Her Majesty Radine and the House of Lords have bent before that man’s authority. Looking after our interests and honor ensures the survival of the nation. Would you like to do something about this situation we’ve found ourselves in?”

“What...?” Viscount Romaine choked on his words.

“With the House of Lords not doing anything, it’s understandable that House Romaine may feel it can’t do anything either. After all, the longevity of one’s house is more important than anything else. However, isn’t that a little unfair to Lord Mario?”

Leonard’s words were poison disguised by righteousness. Viscount Romaine’s expression froze as his fists tightened and shook slightly.

“Are you sure you’re happy with that?”

More poison. Viscount Romaine’s face contorted—not with anger, but guilt. When Leonard saw how his peer responded, his evaluation of Viscount Romaine changed a little.

He tried to be a good father to Mario. I didn’t hear him grieve for his eldest son, born to his wife, and thought he was rather indifferent about his children. It seems that’s not the case. Though seeing how he treated his son, he’s still somewhat of an unworthy parent.

In most cases, noble marriages were political, ensuring the continuation of relations between two noble families. Rarely were there any marriages out of love. Some did find love blossoming as they navigated their lives together. But many couples masqueraded as happy individuals due to differences in their personalities and characters. People in such shallow marriages often didn't opt for divorce, instead just willingly separating the family and living in different residences.

A formal divorce would reflect poorly on the families, leading to cracks in their relations. So, it's very common for both of them to have actual lovers on the side once an heir to the family is born.

Husband and wife often kept their lovers or concubines close to them, resulting in several half brothers and sisters being born. Leonard was luckily in a harmonious marriage with his wife and had never considered other partners. He had also been blessed with many children, meaning he didn't have any family members or retainers nagging him to find a concubine. But he was aware that noble families like Viscount Romaine's existed and had accepted it.

Anyway, Viscount Romaine did love Mario. Considering what became of Mario, it was also true that Viscount Romaine had a warped view of what made an ideal father figure.

Viscount Romaine had chosen the worst approach when raising his son. He let him run wild, which did nothing but teach him that no matter how unjust or inhumane he was, his father would always protect him. That did nothing for Mario's development. After all, his parents wouldn't be around to do that forever. Mario had played with fire and received a mortal punishment. If Viscount Romaine really loved his son, he should have been stricter and scolded him where needed, maybe even teaching him with physical discipline.

Mario probably could have avoided such a hideous death if Viscount Romaine had been more strict, thought Leonard.

Any decent human being would think that. Physical punishment as a means of education wasn't always the right choice, but blindly believing that one could solve everything by talking about it was nothing short of a fairy tale. What mattered was picking appropriate methods and not completely cutting out

physical discipline as something inherently bad.

For that to happen, the parents have to be decent people. They wouldn't make good parents otherwise. At least not good enough to lead a child through life.

As Rhoadserian nobles, Mario's parents weren't completely wrong in their methods. But as people, Leonard considered them nothing more than garbage.

Something is quite fascinating, albeit strange, about people who feel nothing when hurting and stepping on mere commoners but are full of remorse due to being unable to avenge their child.

As a poet, he had a heightened sensitivity to the world around him, which often opened his mind to its irregularities. Leonard didn't plan to ridicule and jest with Viscount Romaine, though. He had yet another wedge to drive into his heart.

"Judging from those bloodshot eyes of yours... It seems like you're drowning yourself in alcohol. Are you just trying to wash out all the pain with wine? All the while tormenting yourself over the fact you're powerless..." said Leonard.

"No, you're...wrong," denied Viscount Romaine. However, there wasn't any strength in his words. Even he didn't believe in what he was saying.

That seems to have worked. Now for the final push.

Leonard had been an influential figure within the royal palace for years, meaning he was talented at noticing the inner workings of other people's emotions and manipulating them as needed. He could see right through Viscount Romaine, who had a very typical noble way of thinking.

"Really? I won't say anything more if that's what you truly think. But could you say that to your son proudly?"

Leonard's question had targeted why Viscount Romaine had turned to alcohol to escape. Viscount Romaine seemed reluctant to admit it, and turned his suspicious, dark gaze toward Leonard.

"Why are you even talking to me about that?" asked Viscount Romaine.

"What? I just thought a noble living in this country would want to maintain their pride," responded Leonard composedly.

“Pride?”

“Yes. Your pride as a noble who has long supported the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.”

Viscount Romaine could not pass that off as a mere immature jest. Had he been his usual self, he would have laughed it off and ridiculed the person who dared to question his pride and self-respect. But Leonard Orglen spoke with such intensity that it stifled any of Viscount Romaine’s attempts at mockery.

“But... What can I do? The House of Lords and Her Highness just do what that man says. Even other nobles only offer words of sympathy while distancing themselves from me! What am I supposed to do in a situation like this?” said Viscount Romaine with a strained voice. His doubts were natural. “Viscount Orglen, do you know what rumors the civilians are spreading?”

“Yes, I have a rough idea.”

“So you understand, right? That man is maliciously twisting the truth. That son of a bitch... What kind of grudge does he have, cursing my family so?!”

House Romaine was a laughingstock among the civilians living with the royal capital. Mario’s deeds and those of the knights he led became rumors. Not all of them were true, but a large number of those rumors, albeit exaggerated in some parts, still had hints of truth. It did not matter to the civilians spreading the rumors, because they didn’t care about the truth.

The civilians were more concerned that the nobles had met a cruel fate at the hands of Ryoma Mikoshiba for abusing their authority. They didn’t care much for the accuracy of the rumors. Additionally, it didn’t interest them that Mario had died in a horrific manner that would make even battle-hardened soldiers turn their heads away in disgust. Many civilians weren’t even aware of the reality of his death.

Well, it’s not like anything would change if they knew what happened.

To the civilians, spreading rumors and the like was just their way of airing out their daily frustrations. This situation reminded Leonard of a fairy tale he had read many years ago. The fairy tale had been passed down through generations within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. It was about a demon king who died at the

hands of a hero. While it sounded like the usual tried-and-true plot of a fairy tale, this particular story was far from conventional.

The hero of this tale had a bizarre plan. To defeat the demon king, who boasted almighty magical power, he sneaked into the room where the enemy's wife slept and sexually assaulted her. He then used that as a pretense to have the wife steal the sword that was the source of her husband's power. When the demon king embraced his wife to comfort her for being assaulted, the hero then defeated the demon king by cutting him and his wife down with the sword. It was strange that a mere mortal, even if he was known as a hero, could attack the demon king's wife. How was he even able to get close to her? And if such a powerful sword existed, it was difficult to imagine the demon king becoming so weak after having that sword stolen.

Even though it was a magic sword, it is still a sword. It's still a tool...

Being a knight of unparalleled strength himself, Leonard understood that. Double standards like that were common in fairy tales. Once he first read the original text, rather than feeling uneasy about the setting, he felt hatred toward the cowardly hero. His feelings remained strong even now. Although the hero had acted in the name of justice, he had approached the situation inhumanely. But the story that became widespread in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria now differed from the original. The problematic scenario had been removed as if it had never been a part of the tale.

Maybe over the months and years, as people told the story, the parts of the story that didn't suit the idea of a hero were removed. People ignored inconvenient truths and only saw what they wanted to see.

The same applied to the current situation House Romaine found themselves in. Civilians saw the noble house as the ultimate evil, so no matter how unjust their hero Ryoma Mikoshiba's methods were, they would applaud his efforts. So long as those unjust methods had that negative connotation, none of it would affect them or their families.

Viscount Romaine understood that. He couldn't get revenge, even if he still festered with rage and sadness.

"I'll ask you again... What can you even do?"

At this point, Viscount Romaine had an accurate idea of his situation. For as much of an arrogant, idle excuse of a human as he was, that didn't mean he was incompetent.

"Good question. You're right that House Orglen's assistance alone won't do much to change the situation. However..." Leonard trailed off before revealing his ace.

"However? Spit it out! No need for the dramatics!" Viscount Romaine could no longer keep his cool as Leonard hinted at something, causing him to raise his voice in anger.

"If one house alone can't do anything, we must get the House of Lords to act. They all remain silent when they face an overwhelming enemy. But plenty of houses also have their qualms with Archduke Mikoshiba," replied Leonard calmly.

"How foolish of you. There's no way the House of Lords will do anything now," spat Viscount Romaine, though he was correct.

If the House of Lords had done something like Leonard suggested, they would have already had Ryoma Mikoshiba in chains upon hearing what had happened to Mario Romaine. They would have at least investigated and arrested him within a few days. Rhoadserian law stated that should a noble be a suspect of a crime, under certain conditions—and with consent from the House of Lords—they could detain that noble. In practice, it was often easy for nobles to circumvent such laws, especially if the suspect in question was someone in an influential position.

Leonard understood that and had reached out to help Viscount Romaine.

"Yes, ordinarily it would be impossible... But if we get certain people to act, they can make the impossible possible."

"Certain people?" asked Viscount Romaine.

"Charlotte Halcyon, Bettina Eisenbach...as well as Diana Hamilton and her friends," responded Leonard with a chilling smile.

"Really? Are you sure?" mused Viscount Romaine, eagerly bending forward. As a viscount within the noble faction, he had a hierarchical relationship with

the upper noble families, including House Halcyon. He was less of a vassal, having a more familial relationship with them, like a parent and child.

Since the northern subjugation, there had been a visible decline among the nobles. They had lost a lot of money due to the ever-increasing war expenditures, not to mention they had also lost many knights who acted as vassals for their families due to the war. Although their power declined, they remained a secret power in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

Sometimes, they could even manipulate the ruler of the kingdom. The nobles could turn black into white if they really put their minds to it. Given that, Viscount Romaine saw this as an opportunity to reverse his predicament.



Leonard smiled calmly in response to Viscount Romaine's question.

"Yes, I have already made the first move and spoke with Her Majesty Radine as well as Lady Charlotte. We are now just waiting on your approval."

Viscount Romaine was at a loss for words and retorted, "So, how about it? Are you still too hesitant?"

Eventually, Viscount Romaine's expression morphed into a mixture of greed and loathing.

"I see... You've already set the scene. With this, we can finally remove that eyesore of a man from this world. We can restore our previous glory to the kingdom and usher in an age where nobles can revel in their prosperity!"

"Yes, you're right. Just as it was promised," said Leonard so quietly that Viscount Romaine couldn't hear as he smiled. The proposal had delighted Viscount Romaine, causing him to fail to miss a sharp, hidden twinkle within Leonard's eye.

Chapter 3: Under the Flag

A few days had passed since Leonard Orglen had visited Viscount Romaine. The sun shined its warm rays on the land around midday. Even the public square in the royal capital was packed with people, almost as if it directly resulted from the good weather.

Knights approached the location and climbed on a platform that had been prepared and spoke up.

“Listen up! To the people of the royal capital! Seven days from now, the House of Lords will hold a hearing against the leader of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy for the death of Viscount Romaine’s son, Mario Romaine! The queen, Radine Rhoadserians, will preside over the hearing. Any outcome of the hearing is not to be challenged, and this hearing will show how our great kingdom deals with justice!”

The announcement rang throughout the streets, reaching everyone’s ears, with its range undoubtedly the work of martial thaumaturgy. Afterward, the knights put a notice on the bulletin board in the public square. The populace looked on at the knights, their eyes filled with curiosity, suspicion, and some despair. Many people stopped beside the bulletin board, looked at it for a while, and hurriedly left the area. It was clear to see how they felt about the announcement.

Ryoma Mikoshiba, the hero who stopped a noble’s tyranny, was to go to a hearing. The atmosphere in the public square had changed as if the once bright afternoon had suddenly turned to night. Viscount Romaine watched from his horse-drawn carriage in an alley that branched off the main street as the knights put the bulletin on the board. He chuckled at the civilians’ reactions to the news, smiling with the arrogant confidence of a man who had already claimed victory.

“To think this day actually came... When Viscount Orglen first approached me with this proposition, I deemed it a trap. But seeing it announced to the public

like this, I no longer have any reason to doubt him.”

At the very least, it was a done deal. The House of Lords would summon Ryoma Mikoshiba to a hearing, and no one could stop it from proceeding. After all, knights had announced it to the public and posted it on a bulletin board to make the information official. Since the House of Lords had made their suspicion public, retracting it would undermine their reputation and that of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

It would also be a serious blow to the newly appointed Queen Radine. I can't imagine Diggle McMaster or Helena Steiner doing anything stupid like stopping it from going ahead, thought Viscount Romaine.

Things would be different if there were a clear indication that Diggle or Helena would intervene. But Viscount Romaine had done his research and hadn't found any hints that they were planning something. Everything was progressing exactly like Viscount Orglen said that night when he visited Viscount Romaine, so he did not doubt that what Leonard said was the truth.

But... I had no idea Viscount Orglen had that side to him. I thought he was a small-minded, hateful man who merely pretended that his loyalty to the throne and duty as a noble were perfectly aligned.

As Viscount Romaine ordered his driver to head toward another bulletin board in the west, his conversation with Viscount Orglen passed through his mind. He wasn't very fond of the latter, although it was probably more accurate to say he hated Viscount Orglen.

Overall, Viscount Orglen was an attractive middle-aged man with clean-cut features, complemented by his well-proportioned body. He was often the object of many noble ladies' covetousness. Not only that, but he boasted incomparable ability as a warrior and was a genius in the humanities, being incredibly knowledgeable about art. If that alone was enough to be the envy of men throughout the world, Viscount Romaine might have kept his dislike of Viscount Orglen at bay.

However... Those eyes... I just can't stand the way he looks at me.

Such thoughts resulted from Viscount Romaine's paranoia; Viscount Orglen had never directly insulted him. He had few memories of them even talking.

When they bumped into one another at dinner parties, they would exchange pleasantries and end that. In those small interactions, Viscount Romaine felt as if Viscount Orglen's gaze became entwined with scorn and disgust.

Those eyes of his. His clear blue irises are as sharp as ice-cold blades.

The gaze Viscount Orglen gave said, "You're nothing but a garbage human being constantly involved in power struggles, neglecting your duties and responsibilities as a noble, and are a failure of a politician."

Of course, that was just what Viscount Romaine felt because he deeply hated the man's eyes. After hearing what Viscount Orglen had to say a few days ago, that hatred disappeared. Viscount Romaine now understood that while Orglen masqueraded as an upright, loyal man, he was just a snob like himself.

Queen Radine selected Viscount McMaster, even anointing him as prime minister. It seems it won't be long until she promotes him to count. Meanwhile, House Orglen has received no such fanfare. It makes sense that they harbor some dissatisfaction.

Viscount Romaine knew that Viscount Orglen once attended a banquet Ryoma Mikoshiba held. The banquet featured famous products from not only the Kingdom of Rhoadseria but also the western reaches of this continent and even other continents. A variety of delicacies were present, making it a rather exquisite banquet. While Viscount Romaine didn't attend as they saw him as an enemy, he'd learned about the banquet immediately. Naturally, he also knew that House Orglen, who was close to House McMaster, would attend. Now that Viscount McMaster had become the prime minister of the nation, it would be natural to assume that House Orglen would also stand next to Queen Radine.

But nothing had changed for House Orglen. Their status had neither diminished nor risen. The house wasn't in a bad situation like other noble houses on the brink of collapse, but it wasn't in an ideal state. Compared to Viscount McMaster and his surprise promotion, the treatment of House Orglen was rather lackluster.

Thus, the reason for such dissatisfaction toward the upstart who does not attempt to take himself seriously.

It would be natural to have some irritation with such treatment. As a result,

Viscount Romaine felt a sort of kinship with Viscount Orglen. Regardless, he was a man who had survived the monster's nest that was the royal palace and didn't trust Viscount Orglen. So, he focused on gathering information.

As I thought, they've announced it here too. They made such a large-scale announcement that there's no way they can stop the hearing. The House of Lords would not willingly side with that upstart. I can already picture the outcome of the hearing.

Viscount Romaine then confirmed that the guards had also placed an announcement on the bulletin board in the southern part of the city. He nodded with a satisfied look.

Ryoma Mikoshiba had a history of killing the head of the House of Lords and his subordinates before fleeing the city the last time he was under investigation. The House of Lords now perceived those events as a blunder, as they fell into a trap put together by Viscount Romaine implicating the surrounding countries. The surrounding countries had tried to frame the hero Ryoma Mikoshiba, who had more recently won during the siege of the capital. At any rate, Queen Radine had decided that Ryoma held no responsibility, meaning the House of Lords could not publicly air their discontent.

But she wasn't being considerate only to Ryoma Mikoshiba. The surrounding countries had also manipulated House Halcyon, which led them to attempt to condemn the hero Ryoma Mikoshiba. They had apparently redeemed themselves through their losses, ensuring minimal impact on their families.

By hinting at the existence of a nonexistent third party, it meant that the House of Lords did not consider Ryoma Mikoshiba a victim or an offender. It was a somewhat ambiguous decision due to Queen Radine's many considerate choices. Although both sides had taken damage politically, Charlotte Halcyon and other members of her family only grew to hate Ryoma more due to the death of her father.

She's no doubt been waiting for the right time to get revenge for her father. Getting close to Queen Radine, gaining her trust... She probably saw Mario's death as a good time to act.

It was a surprising development for Viscount Romaine. But it also felt like a

very natural development for him, who had his beloved child Mario taken away from him. Anyhow, there was nothing unnatural about how the sequence of events unfolded.

House Halcyon has always had a lot of leverage within the House of Lords. Even Charlotte Halcyon is in regular contact with the current head of the House of Lords. She may very well be holding the hearing.

That meant the House of Lords stood in solidarity with the nobles who were victims of Ryoma Mikoshiba. Noble houses who meekly accepted the situations they had found themselves in would no doubt serve House Romaine.

It makes sense. People don't easily forget the murder of their loved ones.

If given the chance, they could put more pressure on the House of Lords and have the hearing redone. Depending on the situation, it could go as far as trial rather than a hearing. With law, a saint could become a sinner, or a sinner could become a saint. It all depended on the skill of the attorney.

In that case, we'd finally be able to corner him. Even if we can't bring an end to his house, we can strip him of his influence and get back some of the northern territory he took from us.

As it stood, no one had found fault with Ryoma Mikoshiba over that matter. But once the issue ignited the flames of resentment, the voices of those he trampled on with his military rule would soon become known—voices Queen Radine could not deny.

Even if our demands are denied, the same thing will happen.

It was a choice and an aspiration of a vassal who served the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, but one that could never become true. However, Viscount Romaine was confident. The result of the hearing in seven days would usher in a new era where the nobles could once again enjoy their power and influence.

That fateful day came seven days later.

The gloomy, overcast sky and rain made the sunny day a few days prior seem like it never happened. It was the kind of day when any normal person would have stayed inside. Many people on Earth found rainy days horrible for

fieldwork, construction, and sales, making it a rare day off for them. The street vendors and stores along the main streets would remain closed as no one wanted to go outside.

Even if they opened, they would have no customers because everyone expected the stores would be closed. It was a prime example of supply and demand.

A few unfortunate people still had to go out in the rain, mainly the knights who patrolled the streets to keep the civilians safe. They would do their rounds on their predetermined routes and times, no matter if it was raining or a storm was blowing. Today, some people would have a more unfortunate job than the guards. Even on a day like this, there was a line of horse-drawn carriages waiting to be allowed entry at the gates of the House of Lords near the royal castle.

Such lengths they go to, thought Ryoma.

The Castle of Law stood in the center of the House of Lords campus. Ryoma Mikoshiba had a slight sneer as he looked down from a third-floor window at all the carriages lined up. They all were here for the same thing. Moreover, they had come in droves to see the fall of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy and celebrate the day the Kingdom of Rhoadseria began anew.

However, they had something in common.

Although they had different standpoints and goals, Ryoma Mikoshiba had manipulated all of them. His plan had fallen into place.

To be honest, it wasn't just my plan. If I didn't have help from the others, it wouldn't have gotten this far, thought Ryoma. Simply put, he was like the producer of the plan. So, people had followed his instructions and devised plans in response. *I will have to reward them handsomely for their help. Well, assuming none of them betray me.*

Ryoma wasn't seriously thinking his coconspirators would betray him. He had ordered the Igasaki clan to survey his surroundings and act as bodyguards. Thus, he could confidently say there was a ninety-nine percent chance they wouldn't betray him. But nothing was ever that certain. While an extreme example, he had no way of proving Laura or Sara wouldn't betray him, despite

having been with them since he was summoned from Rearth. If the one-in-a-million chance came to that, he wouldn't hate them for it.

Only those prepared to hold no grudge when eventually betrayed should trust others. The number of people willing to go that far was severely limited.

I trust Laura, Sara, Lione, and Lady Helena... I guess that's it.

Besides the Malfist sisters, Ryoma had other vassals and friends he could also sincerely trust, such as Count Bergstone. But he would probably hesitate should they ask him if he would hold a grudge after they betrayed him. It was that difficult to trust people.

In addition, it was a bold and daring move using his newly hired personnel to help with these schemes. If anything, it was nothing but foolish. As a ruler of many civilians and vassals, it was irresponsible behavior. On the other hand, not trusting people was also a problem. He had decided that these plans they had created together were a litmus test, like a company entrance exam for new employees.

Ryoma mused over his thoughts when there was a knock at the door.

"Excuse me. It's time."

"Got it. I'll be right out," responded Ryoma to Laura.

He then stood in front of a full-length mirror and nodded, looking content. In the mirror, he saw his noble clothing and slicked-back hair—the image of a ruler.

"All right. I best get going," whispered Ryoma before leaving the room. Once he was in the corridor and had the twins follow him toward the assembly hall, he asked the girls, "So, what about the Igasaki clan?"

"Sakuya is in position. Everything has gone to plan."

Ryoma lightly nodded, then confirmed another concern of his. "I assume everything is fine with Charlotte and the others too?"

"They've already arrived at the assembly hall," replied Sara. Since the twins knew Ryoma well enough after their long time together, they had already confirmed the information they anticipated he would ask for.

“I see. Then all that’s left are the finishing touches,” said Ryoma, smiling. He had the look of a hunter who was looking upon his prey. The twins slightly nodded to their master.

Soon, a magnificently carved door appeared before Ryoma and the twins. Each side of the door had a guard standing in full suits of armor, bowing when the three approached. Ryoma softly raised his hand, ordering the doors to be opened.

“His Grace Archduke Mikoshiba has arrived!” Two chamberlains, who stood just inside flanking the door, informed the audience hall as the doors opened. The audience hall went from bustling with sound and activity to absolute silence. Ryoma Mikoshiba slowly walked into the assembly hall as the gazes of all the nobles in attendance fell on him.

Tough crowd. Well, I did kill a lot of them. So that checks out, I guess.

Ryoma smiled wryly as he felt everyone direct their hateful, angry gazes at him. From the northern subjugation to the siege of the royal capital, Ryoma had launched countless severe attacks on the nobles. It was an unavoidable course of action, especially since it meant life or death for him and his companions. But they had left a lot of nobles’ corpses in their wake.

Parents, children, cousins, friends—everyone here had lost someone dear to them. It was natural that they despised the cause of their deaths—Ryoma Mikoshiba—even if it didn’t make much sense for them to hate *him*. But they all eagerly waited to see him condemned for his crimes by Radine.

Unfortunately for them, that won’t be happening.

Ryoma felt genuinely sorry that he couldn’t satisfy the audience’s expectations. But for a producer, there was no fun in having everything go exactly according to what people wanted.

I don’t think I’ve ever gone along with their expectations, though.

Opposite him sat Viscount Romaine and the members of his family, who had applied to the House of Lords to be a part of this hearing. Viscount Romaine shot a murderous gaze at Ryoma as he calmly crossed his legs. The man had no intention of interacting with Ryoma before the hearing began. Judging from the

ever so slight twitching of Viscount Romaine's hands as they rested upon the table, rage consumed him.

It looks like he's about to spout steam from his ears. Hope he doesn't burst a blood vessel.

Obviously, Ryoma wasn't bold enough to say that to Viscount Romaine. The viscount glared at the archduke, who shrugged it off. That alone left an impression on the nobles who watched the scene unfold, which resembled a dog barking and a lion calmly ignoring it. Their fruitless standoff soon ended as the chamberlains announced the arrival of Queen Radine Rhoadserians.

Following Radine was Prime Minister Diggle McMaster and Helena Steiner—a display declaring that the powers who ruled the nation would support the decision made at the hearing.

“Please be seated, everyone.” Radine told the nobles.

All the nobles in the assembly hall stood and bowed as the queen entered the room.

Finally, the hearing Viscount Romaine had been earnestly waiting for had begun. But it would not unfold as he had hoped.

“Before we begin the hearing, I have a concern that I wish to share with you all. Said news should have been shared at the royal palace, but as we have little time, I am taking the liberty of doing so here.”

Everyone tilted their heads in confusion. Even Viscount Romaine, who expected the hearing to start, looked confused. Radine disregarded their doubtful looks and carried on with her announcement.

“Last night, an envoy arrived from the Kingdom of Xarooda with an urgent message. They informed me that the O'ltormea Empire has begun yet another invasion of their kingdom. Their army is over two hundred thousand soldiers strong.”

The assembly hall remained silent. Then, shrieks and shouts filled the room as the nobles collectively processed the queen's announcement.

“That's impossible... Two hundred thousand?”

“What? O’ltormea is invading Xarooda?”

“Wait a second... Aren’t Xarooda and O’ltormea observing a ceasefire? Does that mean O’ltormea broke it?”

“In that case, we need to send out reinforcements at once, right?”

“Are you stupid? Just how many troops do you think our kingdom has?”

“But we can’t remain passive toward such tyrannical acts by O’ltormea. If we do nothing, we could be the next ones to get invaded!”

The nobles continued to air their worries and unrest.

Seems the nobles are dancing exactly to our beat. That’s understandable, considering Queen Radine has started with this kind of topic, mused Ryoma.

Not everything Queen Radine had said was the truth. The messenger from Xarooda had reported the situation to Ryoma Mikoshiba around ten days prior. Those who knew the truth remained silent. To the nobles who were unaware, Queen Radine’s sudden announcement was a bolt out of the blue, justifying their confusion. They were no longer interested in the hearing with the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy and instead were full of questions on how the kingdom would deal with the O’ltormean invasion in Xarooda. It was exactly as Ryoma and the others had planned.

Suddenly, Helena broke her silence.

“Please be silent!” Her voice echoed around the audience hall. It was a voice that only a general who had commanded an army could produce—a voice filled with severity. The nobles all went silent in response to such an intimidating voice.

Radine continued to speak. “We have no plan to turn a blind eye to the situation in the Kingdom of Xarooda. If we were to do so, it might not be long before O’ltormea sets their evil sights on us!”

The nobles all nodded deeply in response. As long as they weren’t all idiots, most nobles should have understood the real meaning behind Radine’s words. Viscount Romaine wore a look of bewilderment, different from the reactions of those around him. Ryoma turned to face Viscount Romaine as he sneered.

There we go. Now he's started to think something is off. Well, there's no way he can stop it now.

Viscount Romaine believed Ryoma Mikoshiba should face justice for his crimes. Before he even realized it, the purpose of the hearing had changed from that to the topic of sending reinforcements to Xarooda. As a vassal of his country, Viscount Romaine could not go against his queen's words. Radine took no notice of his reaction.

"Our country has suffered many losses due to the failures of the previous queen, Lupis Rhoadserians. Although I have assumed her position, I am still lacking experience as a ruler. Without the support of Helena Steiner and Viscount McMaster, I could not manage this country."

It was an understandable point to bring up.

Only because of their help was Radine able to act as an adequate queen, even if she was not perfect. The nobles were more open to the idea of sending reinforcements to Xarooda if it had come from Helena, who played a major part in managing the nation.

However, that raised a specific question. A few nobles had worked out the true meaning behind Radine's announcement as the rest looked on with bated breath.

"Thus, I have decided to put Archduke Mikoshiba in charge of the reinforcements sent to Xarooda. I am giving him full authorization to do everything required to aid the Kingdom of Xarooda! So we may protect our proud Rhoadseria from the clutches of the O'ltormea Empire!"

This was yet another unexpected statement. The nobles had anticipated Radine would make a surprising statement but had not foreseen this. If Ryoma hadn't heard about it beforehand, he would have been as amazed as the rest of the nobles.

As the queen had declared it, the nobles could not protest. While they might have had their complaints and arguments against it, they had no choice but to remain quiet.

It's like she's handed me a blank check, with the only restriction being that it's

strictly to be used to aid Xarooda.

It was a decision that Lupis Rhoadserians could never have made. Indeed, no other monarch on the western continent could make such a decision as this.

“Archduke Mikoshiba! Come forward!”

Ryoma nodded lightly in response to Viscount McMaster’s command. As they had previously discussed, he walked over and faced Radine, getting down on one knee. She smiled at him as she spoke.

“Archduke Mikoshiba... Though I do not doubt it will be a tiresome task, do you vow to devote your life to it?”

“Yes. I vow to put my life on the line and will definitely live up to your expectations.”

When Ryoma finished talking, the assembly hall filled with the voices of soldiers cheering. Then, the guards banged their spears on the stone floor as they cheered, “Hail to Archduke Mikoshiba! Victory to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria!”

The whirlpool of enthusiasm eventually engulfed the nobles, who also began to cheer.



“Hail to Archduke Mikoshiba! Victory to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria!”

Viscount Romaine and his family were the only ones not caught up in the enthusiasm. They were unsure how to act in such a situation as Ryoma chuckled and looked over at them.

Makes sense they're like that. They're not stupid enough to think I will get prosecuted in such a situation. On the other hand, there's no way they would start cheering for me like the nobles around them.

One could say that Viscount Romaine could not go against the flow of those around him. But Ryoma had no intention of burying the past.

At Ryoma's signal, Viscount McMaster said, “All right, let's begin the hearing! The plaintiff today is Viscount Romaine! Come forward!”

Silence filled the assembly hall again, with everyone adopting troubled expressions, and with good reason. Archduke Mikoshiba was to head to Xarooda as the general of their reinforcements and had full authority to do so. There was no reason to hold a hearing against someone like that. Queen Radine had just given Ryoma Mikoshiba total immunity, effectively declaring he was justified in his actions and had done no wrong. Viscount Romaine understood that, and his face turned red with anger and hate. He also knew that he had fallen into a trap, going from the top of the world to back down in the dirt. Perhaps that was what Viscount Gelhart felt when the position of prime minister was taken from him by Viscount McMaster.

Judging from how Viscount Romaine glanced at Leonard, who sat in the visitor gallery, it was plain to see that was the case. He was undoubtedly thinking about how he wanted to kill Leonard. The viscount might have already attacked Leonard if soldiers didn't surround him. But his face continued to change color as the anger coursed through him, and he looked around the room.

I wonder if he's looking for someone to help him out of this situation.

Yet, no one had stepped forward for him. The relatives and house vassals he had brought with him said nothing. No one wanted to take the risk. Still, no individual could ignore the words of Prime Minister McMaster. Viscount Romaine had realized that no one would come to his aid.

Radine turned to Viscount Romaine and spoke to him in a relaxed tone.

“Now, Viscount Romaine... Let us hear your side of the story. It seems there have been some accusations made toward Archduke Mikoshiba regarding the death of your son?”

Although her tone was feminine and kind, a strong sense of irony lurked behind it. Viscount Romaine was at a loss for words despite being the plaintiff. If he confirmed the accusations, then the hearing would begin as both parties would have to explain the details to the queen. But Radine, who was playing the role of referee, had already declared her support of Ryoma Mikoshiba.

The outcome of this hearing was clear, with the only remaining issue for Viscount Romaine being how to get out of this situation scot-free. He had many possible solutions floating in and out of his mind, no doubt fighting an internal conflict over what to do. Eventually, he spoke while his body shook.

“I am truly sorry. I believe I have made a mistake...”

They were the words of a noble throwing away their pride. Viscount Romaine had raised the white flag before Ryoma. He had nothing else left to say. In a situation like this, Viscount Romaine could not say that he wanted to take responsibility for blaming the archduke, even if his life were on the line. Should he do it, nobody would approve of it anyway. Viscount Romaine had already worked out that if he apologized here, Ryoma and the others would put their swords down and put the situation behind them. The viscount’s words also came from a place of arrogance; as a noble family with a long-standing relationship with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, he believed they would not dissolve House Romaine.

Unfortunately for Viscount Romaine, Prime Minister McMaster had no intentions on stopping the questions there.

“Hold on... We cannot pass this off as a mere mistake. This is a hearing held by none other than Her Majesty. It is not a matter that will end with you admitting that it was a mere mistake.”

Prime Minister McMaster had a solid, fair argument. If the queen hadn’t held the hearing, Viscount Romaine might have managed to worm his way out of it. That was not to be the case.

Helena delivered the final blow to the confused Viscount Romaine. “I wonder. Did you purposely put together a scheme in order to cause His Grace Mikoshiba’s downfall?”

All the nobles, who had been attentively following the hearing until now, exchanged looks. They were all very aware of the situation at hand. That included knowing what Radine and the others wanted from the nobles—to take Viscount Romaine’s side or believe Helena’s claim and side with Ryoma Mikoshiba.

The nobles chose to throw Viscount Romaine to the wolves to protect themselves.

“I overestimated you, Viscount Romaine! To think you tried to humiliate the savior of our kingdom, His Grace Archduke Mikoshiba! Have you no shame?” Someone shouted from the crowd. The comment stirred the hearts of all the other nobles who had been watching everything unfold.

I guess that’s the fake audience members Charlotte paid for, thought Ryoma, turning his glance toward Charlotte and the others. When she noticed his gaze, she nodded. I see plans like this are her forte. She’s scarily good.

Without this intervention, the situation would have stagnated. Once a second person joined, more people did the same. It was just like how most people would struggle to litter in a clean area, because they would feel guilty. Conversely, not many people would worry about littering somewhere already full of garbage.

Other nobles raised their voices, hurling a barrage of words at Viscount Romaine.

“Traitor!”

“Are you working for the empire?!”

“It’s your fault your son died! You should have never tried to bring His Grace Archduke Mikoshiba down!”

The tables had turned as the nobles continued their onslaught of jeers and abuse. Ryoma wore a cold gaze as the assembly hall filled with accusations toward Viscount Romaine. Although the man was foolish, feeble-minded, and

just all around a wicked person, it was difficult to watch all the nobles—who had nothing to do with it—hurl accusations at him.

Though, it was simply a result of human nature.

That's just how humans are. Some people haven't got caught up and have enough of a backbone to remain silent, thought Ryoma. While they might have thoughts about Viscount Romaine and what happened, they remain quiet, unlike their fellow nobles. I'll ask Charlotte about who they are later.

Ryoma felt the silent nobles were more trustworthy than those caught up in the atmosphere and accusing Viscount Romaine. They could read the room and were more confident of who they were as people and kept to their standards. Ryoma wondered just how many other nobles like that were in the crowd.

They truly are a mixed bag. A combination of precious stones among common rocks.

There was no better way to describe the nobles within the assembly hall. Viscount Romaine had proved his worth to Ryoma by letting him know who the good nobles among the crowd were. As Ryoma thought about this, he turned to Viscount Romaine and waved at him.

After all, this is the end for you. Thank you for your work.

Eventually, Viscount Romaine fell to the ground, as if his legs had crumpled beneath him. Remorse and anguish covered his face. He was coming to terms with the price of his arrogance and foolishness, realizing that this was the end of him, and his house.

After the guards picked up Viscount Romaine from the floor and escorted him out, Ryoma bid farewell to Radine and the others. He left the assembly hall and headed to his room on the third floor in the House of Lords.



He sat on the sofa and crossed his legs, wearing a winning smile. The Malfist twins were busy preparing tea for their master, now that he had finished his work.

“Master Ryoma, here you are,” said Laura.

“Thanks,” replied Ryoma, enjoying the aroma from the tea Laura had poured. He took a sip of the moderately sweet tea. It was smooth and satisfying to drink. “Lady Kikuna seems to have improved.”

“Lady Simone has stocked up on items from other continents, so it seems like Lady Kikuna has been experimenting.”

“I see... She’s Japanese, all right. We only have a nose for delicious things,” whispered Ryoma as he reached for his teacup again. He looked as if he was about to celebrate his win with a toast. If he didn’t have some work left to do, he probably would have knocked an alcoholic drink back—which made sense, considering the circumstances. After the hearing, Queen Radine dissolved House Romaine on the basis of spreading lies about the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. Viscount Romaine was stripped of all his rights and sent to jail.

It went exactly as Ryoma planned. He smiled as he thought how he had finally removed some of the garbage nestled within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. But Ryoma had the consideration to not let others know what he felt, recognizing his standards. That was no doubt why he had returned to the privacy of his room.

So he was thrown in jail. I guess he’ll die of illness soon.

Ryoma had a small amount of sympathy for him, but considering the weight of Viscount Romaine’s crimes, this was the natural result. The corruption and conventions in the noble ranks of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria had made him that way. That said, there was no use for Viscount Romaine.

Even if we made some use of him, there would always be the possibility he would plan his revenge in some form, which would be an awful move.

As long as he was alive, there was still the chance that he could undergo rehabilitation. Even in modern Japan, those against the death penalty believed in human nature and that lawbreakers could be reformed. However, that was

always based on possibility. If someone were murdered, there would be no chance for them to reform. A person could change who they are only as long as they lived.

Viscount Romaine's possibility of reform wasn't zero, yet Ryoma felt like there was absolutely no chance that his adversary could change. Ryoma did not intend to push that on to anyone as the truth, though. When betting, people often chose the bet that they believed would win. Not many would place a bet on something they thought would lose. Although humans and horses were different, they had similarities in betting over them.

After all, betting was based on two things: what to believe in and what to pick. Ryoma saw Viscount Romaine as a high-risk, high-reward bet. Considering the various possibilities, it would be better if Viscount Romaine was no longer of this world. It would ensure no future trouble. However, having him die of illness while incarcerated was a better conclusion.

His dying of illness works better as a device for scaring the other nobles.

Law and justice were important. But there was a danger of people using those concepts against others. Such was similar to criminals shielding themselves behind their human rights.

Well, if we go too far, that is an issue, mused Ryoma, knowing balance was necessary. Then, a knock came at the door.

"You got a moment, boy?"

"I've been waiting for you. Come on in."

The door opened, revealing Ryoma's most trusted ally, who once formally earned great fame for her skills as a mercenary—the Crimson Lioness, Lione. If the Twin Blades—Robert Bertrand and Signus Galveria—were Ryoma's swords, Lione was his shield. Like Laura and Sara, Lione had shared many highs and lows with him.

Ryoma smiled at Lione gently as he expressed his thanks. "Good to see you. You must have been busy, right? Take a break and enjoy some tea."

Lione nodded and threw herself onto the sofa in front of Ryoma. She let out a deep sigh after sipping the tea that Laura poured.

“Thanks. As always, the tea you make is delicious. Calms me right down,” said Lione, laughing as Laura bowed her head.

“Sometimes I just want a nice drink of beer.”

“Yeah, I get that... But you’ve still got a lotta work to do. Leave the drink ‘til the evenin’. The higher we climb, the less freedom we get. Makes me miss our mercenary days.”

“Yeah. Well, it’s not like I wanted to become archduke. I can’t really just throw it all away.”

“Don’t even go there, boy. If you throw it all away, we’ll all be on the street!”

Ryoma and Lione laughed. Though they had climbed to a position most people envied, they still had their thoughts and feelings about it. Regardless, there was no way that they could just throw it all away. Not only did Ryoma have the fate of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria on his shoulders, he also had to worry about Xarooda.

“Well, we’ve reached a point where we can take a breather. I think we need to hurry up and work on organizing reinforcements to send to Xarooda, right?”

“That’s right. There’s a lotta issues yet to deal with, but I think it’s still goin’ smoothly regardless,” responded Lione, wearing a meek expression.

“I must admit, when I heard that O’ltormea had invaded Xarooda and His Majesty Julianus had fallen ill, I didn’t know what to do,” stated Ryoma as he sighed.

Lione shot him a sharp look. “It’s all the same. But I figured you’d have something up ya sleeve, boy.”

I wonder if she thinks I’m just going to throw it all on her. She is a jack-of-all-trades, after all. I am supposed to be her lord.

Even so, Ryoma would not object to what Lione said. He always pushed Lione and the others too hard at any opportunity. Most of the time, they were just the right people in the right place.

“Gotta say, I really thought Viscount Romaine would’ve put up more of a fight, but he was surprisingly obedient. I expected it to turn to absolute

bloodshed, so I had a few knights hiding among the nobles. Good thing I didn't need 'em anyway. I guess people who think like you are rather rare, huh?"

Ryoma smiled and added, "I'll take that as a compliment."

By and large, he had once escaped from the House of Lords using force. When it came to being bad, none were as bad as Ryoma. Based on that, one could say that Viscount Romaine was honorable.

"Still, Viscount Romaine caused me a lot of trouble. I had to keep the other nobles in mind. It wouldn't have been an issue if I was able to dispose of all the nobles in one fell swoop, but I'm glad things have shaped up."

"Yeah... Asking Her Majesty for help was the right move to make. And what's that lady's name again, Charlotte? Acceptin' her plan was a good idea, wasn't it?"

Lione was one-hundred-percent right in her judgments. The addition of Charlotte and her friends was every bit as valuable as having Leonard Orglen on their side.

It'll probably be ridiculously hard to get even more control.

Nevertheless, that didn't change the fact that they were a resource he could use in the future. Just knowing that made the plan worthwhile.

"Right. Keeping the nobles in check was the best choice. Leaving nobles to other nobles is the best approach. I'm still wet behind the ears as a noble," stated Ryoma, shrugging his shoulders.

"That's right. Plus, I was super surprised by Her Majesty Radine. I've been watchin' everythin' unfold from behind the scenes. She's got the decisiveness that Lupis lacked." Lione smiled as she nodded.

Ryoma gestured in response, acknowledging her.

The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was the highest-ranking noble house with the strongest army within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. His power almost surpassed that of the ruler of the country, Radine. She had given Ryoma boundless authority to help Xarooda with reinforcements. It was equivalent to stating that Radine Rhoadserians and Ryoma Mikoshiba were around the same level of

social stature. That was the kind of resolve that Lupis Rhoadserians lacked, fearing Ryoma Mikoshiba and continuing to try to oust him from the kingdom.

Radine Rhoadserians believed in Ryoma Mikoshiba and had given him full authority. It was a striking contrast.

That's where they differ in caliber, I suppose. It's almost ironic seeing that Radine, who was born as an illegitimate child, has more distinction than Lupis.

The environment in which a person grew up also played a major part. Radine didn't undertake any training as a noble and had lived alongside the common folk, enduring their struggles. Said experiences helped Radine mature as a person.

They say hard work pays off, and Radine is a perfect example.

Because Radine was of such a high caliber, she paved the way for Ryoma to obtain victory against the O'ltormea Empire.

"Next up is ensuring we get reinforcements to Xarooda quickly."

"That's right, but that won't be the end of the matter."

"You're right, especially with an army two hundred thousand strong, not to mention the condition His Majesty Julianus is in right now. Man, my head hurts just thinking about it," remarked Ryoma as he looked at the ceiling and scratched his still immaculate hair.

"But, you'll do somethin', won't ya?"

"Of course... I don't plan on dying anytime soon, so I'll do my best."

Once again, Ryoma and Lione laughed. Everyone had already set their sights on the Kingdom of Xarooda. The eastern nations understood that if they could not stop the O'ltormea Empire from invading the Kingdom of Xarooda, there would be no future for them.

Now that Ryoma had a firm grasp of affairs within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, he could focus on the fierce battle that would unfold. Lione and Ryoma might have been a little too hasty with their planning though. No one could be sure of the possibility of anything unless they were a divine being. Unpredictable outcomes were unavoidable. Ryoma's battle plans would have to change

greatly again. About half a month after this, even more bad news made its way to Rhoadseria.

However, that news did not come from Xarooda.

Chapter 4: The Bearer of Bad News

The Kingdom of Myest was a nation that built its wealth and had the backing from others due to said wealth through trade with other continents and their navy, known as the best in the continent. The other countries that made up the eastern region—Xarooda and Rhoadseria—were not that different in size from Myest. But Myest could make the most geopolitical use of the eastern coast, making it stand out more than the other kingdoms.

Ecclesia Marinelle, also known as the Whirlwind, examined a letter she had received from the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. She was in her office in the royal castle at Myest's capital city, Endesia.

"Hm... I see Shardina Eisenheit has finally made her move. That was sooner than expected. To add to that, His Majesty Julianus I is in critical condition. I wonder if Joshua is all right? Lord Mikoshiba has gained control of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, using one of its idiotic nobles as a sacrifice. That's a relief..." Ecclesia knitted her well-groomed eyebrows as she read the letter.

She knew that Joshua Belares had been readying the Kingdom of Xarooda for another invasion from O'ltormea long before it began. She also knew that Joshua, who had taken command of the kingdom's defense, was one of the most talented generals on the western continent. After all, he was the son of Arios Belares, a man who had protected Xarooda for many years. Although he lacked experience due to his young age as well as a sense of thoroughness, there was no better general than Joshua in the Kingdom of Xarooda.

Although he's still young, he's not as young as Lord Mikoshiba.

Ecclesia was approximately thirty. She had led armies from a young age and had extensive experience in battle. But she was still a young woman, still developing. Ecclesia dealt with criticism and concern that she was too young, but she had often silenced those detractors with her victories and results. She sensed this same brilliance and talent in Joshua Belares and Ryoma Mikoshiba. Both were young heroes carrying the defense of their kingdoms on their

shoulders.

While O'ltormea was a major power, they wouldn't be able to take over the Kingdom of Xarooda so easily.

Besides, a few units that the late Arios Belares led remain.

Some soldiers were eager to avenge Arios Belares, even if Xarooda didn't have enough men. It wasn't a bad thing having soldiers with high morale, but Ecclesia knew well that wasn't enough to win wars. That was especially the case when their enemy was the O'ltormea Empire.

It's probably more realistic to assume that morale has absolutely no effect.

Hence, the O'ltormean had no choice but to build a bridgehead within the Kingdom of Xarooda. Leaving aside how skilled Joshua was as a general or how much Xarooda had prepared, Ecclesia didn't think they could hold back the O'ltormean invasion at the border. That said, it was also unlikely that Endesia would fall so soon after the start of the war, like the royal capital Peripheria had. The Kingdom of Xarooda should be able to hold its front line until reinforcements from Rhoadseria and Myest arrived. News of the invasion and Julianus I falling ill stirred an indescribable unease within Ecclesia.

There's not much I can do. I need to urgently organize reinforcements to send to the Kingdom of Xarooda.

The O'ltormea Empire ruled the central part of the western continent, making it one of the three superpowers across the whole continent. It would be a Herculean task for the Kingdom of Xarooda, one of the eastern kingdoms, to survive against such a powerful nation.

Moreover, the Kingdom of Xarooda had fended off the invaders thanks to their knights fighting bravely. The Kingdom of Helnesgoula also led an alliance along with the three eastern kingdoms. If the four countries were to organize again, they might stop the O'ltormea Empire's invasion. But Ecclesia understood the four-nation alliance was far from being a solid, unified bloc.

I can rest easy knowing that the Kingdom of Rhoadseria has Lady Helena and that man. However, the problem is the Vixen of the North. It's hard to read her... If she simply sends reinforcements, that won't be much of a concern.

The Kingdom of Helnesgoula was a superpower alongside the O’ltormea Empire and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire. The ruler of their country was Grindiana Helnescharles, who was known as the Vixen of the North. As far as strategists went, she was extraordinary. She was a calm, yet ruthless ruler who had seemingly politically purged her own parents. Even though the desert covered a large part of their country, leaving it infertile, the people of her nation held tremendous respect and love for her. She was a wise and magnificent leader.

It was a little hard to imagine that Grindiana would participate in a war in the Kingdom of Xarooda without naming a price, even if she were the leader of the four-nation alliance.

If the O’ltormea Empire took over the Kingdom of Xarooda, it would hurt Helnesgoula, which suggests that she’ll urgently send reinforcements.

Ecclesia also feared the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, which controlled the western part of the continent. Their reach made it difficult to determine what they would do.

Although the Holy Qwiltantia Empire and the O’ltormea Empire are on bad terms, that also goes for the Kingdom of Helnesgoula. Even so, O’ltormea has made its move. Why have they prepared for a drawn-out war and not a quick skirmish like last time? Why has Shardina Eisenheit even been able to go for that option?

Should the Holy Qwiltantia Empire take issue with the O’ltormea Empire expanding its borders, they might counterattack. One could imagine the O’ltormea Empire had anticipated that and already reinforced their western borders. They would take the Kingdom of Xarooda by storm with their great numbers, while keeping a solid defense in case of attack from the Holy Qwiltantia Empire.

However, Ecclesia felt as if there was a high possibility of something else happening.

Supposing Shardina Eisenheit has perfectly calculated the timing for this invasion against the Kingdom of Xarooda, there’s no way she hasn’t made her first move against the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, mused Ecclesia. Does that mean

the Holy Qwiltantia Empire accepted that O'ltormea is expanding its borders? Or did she buy their silence?

That was the worst situation imaginable.

Thinking about their relations until now, the chances of that are low, but...

War had yet to die out on the western continent because the three major countries struggled to be the dominant power. The O'ltormea Empire, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, and the Kingdom of Helnesgoula held similar power, remaining in a finely balanced three-way deadlock. All those countries were well aware of the situation.

A successful invasion of Xarooda and attaining a bridgehead to conquer the eastern part of the continent would allow the O'ltormea Empire to become the strongest out of the three major continents.

I can't imagine the Holy Qwiltantia Empire allowing the O'ltormea Empire to invade the Kingdom of Xarooda, knowing that would be the outcome.

But that event wasn't entirely impossible.

Ecclesia had brainstormed a few cases where the Holy Qwiltantia Empire would let the current invasion happen.

Even if both countries had temporarily agreed, I wonder if it means that the O'ltormea Empire would cede their territories they had carved out of the southern part of the continent. Or would their royal families intermarry?

Of course, Ecclesia's ideas relied on the assumption that the Holy Qwiltantia Empire had permitted the O'ltormea Empire's expansion, which was possible. If Ecclesia were the ruler of the Kingdom of Myest and had to suggest a plan to defend the country, she would have mentioned these possibilities. In terms of feasibility, both were armchair theories.

There's simply too many things for the Holy Qwiltantia Empire to consider when making such a choice...

Such territorial concessions were indeed a part of their silent agreement, and the O'ltormea's overwhelming force might lead to the crushing end of the Holy Qwiltantia Empire's long history. While the citizens of the country could

celebrate being at peace, it would be a temporary respite. Within ten to thirty years, those cheers could possibly turn into groans of resentment.

A marriage between the two royal families might avoid that tragic ending if it was a condition of their agreement. At the very least, it wouldn't be in the interests of the O'ltormea Empire to attack the country whose royal family they shared a marital bond with to establish authority over the western continent. Who in their right minds would be comfortable following a cold-blooded man who didn't hesitate to eliminate his wife's country, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire?

The civilians and not even the vassals of that country, couldn't live safely in a country under such rule. Their growing anxiety would soon turn into a rebellion against the state. When considering that possibility—a marriage between royal family members of both countries—the overthrow of the Holy Qwiltantia Empire seemed low.

However, that didn't mean the relationship between the two countries would remain without trouble.

While it would bring peace temporarily, it would be a bad decision in the long term, as it would only help the O'ltormea Empire conquer the continent. And so, as the gap between the two countries widens, there's only one way it will end.

In that case, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire would end up as a vassal state of the O'ltormea Empire. Upon losing their independence, their economic and military power would decline, reducing them to a mere territory. If they were lucky, they would govern a few tenths of what the empire previously was. Or worse, they would only have as little as one percent of their previous land.

Though... Even if it came to that, the good thing is that they could keep their name as the Holy Qwiltantia Empire.

A worst-case scenario would be the Holy Empire no longer having its name and being entirely annexed by the O'ltormea Empire. The invaders would colonize and exploit it unilaterally for its resources.

Surely, the people of the Holy Qwiltantia Empire understand that... That's why I assume there's no way both countries made such a deal.

The chances of the Holy Qwiltantia Empire and the O'ltormea Empire

agreeing were close to none. Even though Ecclesia was an outside party, she had considered a plethora of problems with this idea. The upper echelons of the Holy Qwiltantia Empire had surely considered the same things. Yet, she couldn't completely disregard the possibility that the two empires had made a deal.

What if there was a third party involved?

Ecclesia couldn't forget about the Organization that she had heard about from Julianus I.

There's no way they're involved, though. I wish I could just laugh it off.

The existence of a group that had planted itself across the entire western continent, working to cause conflict between countries for their own gain, was an unthinkable notion. Ecclesia felt it sounded like a children's fairy tale.

But even Lord Mikoshiba said that it might exist.

At that time, it was just one of many possibilities. It was simply a matter of those who had heard something similar for Julianus I sharing their thoughts on it. But as time passed and various factors accumulated, it became increasingly difficult to dismiss it as a rash remark from the king.

Whether the Organization truly exists, there's no way the Church of Meneos is just a religious group.

The Church of Meneos influenced the entire western continent, so much so that the Holy Qwiltantia Empire couldn't ignore them. Although they claimed worldly influences did not affect them, one couldn't deny there were inner squabbles for power within their organization. They were neither pure nor poor. They lived like nobles from the taxes they collected as charitable offerings to their cause from all over the continent.

They also used their vast finances to form the Temple Knights. On the surface, the Temple Knights passed themselves off as a military group under ownership of the Church of Meneos that protected the human race by fighting demi-humans. In reality, they were nothing more than militia. National religion did not bind them, the Temple Knights instead existed outside the state.

Not only is it difficult to discern their intentions, I also can't dismiss the

possibility that they might be the manipulators. That said, there's also nothing we can do at this stage.

It didn't matter how much the Kingdom of Myest boasted of being the most powerful eastern kingdom. The Church of Meneos, wielding power over the entire western continent, rendered the Kingdom of Myest insignificant. If Myest were to cross swords with the Church, the three eastern kingdoms would have to work together. Including the O'ltormea Empire, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, and the Kingdom of Helnesgoula in the alliance would be essential too.

Though, that was wishful thinking.

Still, if they really wished to succeed against the Church, they would have to form a continent-wide alliance, including the various southern kingdoms. For such a thing to happen would be near impossible. It would only be possible if a supreme ruler rose and united all the individual countries by force.

If there were other possibilities, I think the Guild would be the most capable of doing so. They could mobilize both adventurers and mercenaries to exert influence over the continent in a way that even exceeds that of the Church of Meneos. That would only be if they could throw away their neutral position. Or the Organization His Majesty Julianus spoke of. They would be capable, thought Ecclesia, looking up out of the window.

"That said, I only just returned here the other day. Yet my work just keeps piling up. Nothing I can do about it, I guess..."

White clouds filled the blue sky. Ecclesia recalled when she used the two brave generals, the Twin Blades, to lay waste to several nobles' estates in the southern parts of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Perhaps it was a sense of fulfillment derived from the hegemonic ruler Ryoma Mikoshiba.

Well... The day may return where I can ride side by side with Lord Mikoshiba.

While that was the hunch of the battle-worn veteran Ecclesia, little did she know she would be riding with him much sooner than she thought.

A few days went by since Ecclesia looked over the letter she had received from Ryoma Mikoshiba. Tragedy had begun in the southern area of the

Kingdom of Myest, in the fortress city of Jermuk. The city sat on the border facing the small Kingdom of Brittania and was a key defensive stronghold. Morning in Jermuk began like any other...until its routine came crashing down.

“Hah... Man, I’m beat... Even though I was born and raised in Pherzaad, they dispatched me here to this countryside border garrison. I wanted to join the navy...”

Tony, a recruit at the border garrison, stood on guard from a watchtower above the gates of Jermuk. He faced toward the border, where he could see the dense forests of the Kingdom of Brittania in the distance. However, he was feeling sluggish that day. Despite being on watch duty, he couldn’t stop from yawning, giving him a rather laid-back appearance. For a soldier, he lacked any readiness to go into battle—not a very suitable attitude. In a way, it was somewhat unavoidable.

The Kingdom of Myest and the Kingdom of Brittania used to engage in countless bloody skirmishes multiple times a year. Ever since the change of government in the Kingdom of Brittania, they rarely ever tried to invade Myest. An official ceasefire agreement between the two countries didn’t exist, so technically they were still at war.

It was the calm before the storm.

But the war remained in such a half-baked state that it had become the norm for the citizens as the years passed. Although Tony was assigned to border security, he knew the enemy would likely not show up, so he couldn’t help but be laid-back. Jobs where you had to stay on watch or guard something were usually boring until something happened.

The soldier standing next to Tony couldn’t remain silent regarding his feelings. He clicked his tongue and headed toward Tony before hitting him on the head with his fist concealed in a steel bracer. Dull metal colliding filled the watchtower.

“Tony... You’re slacking off a bit too much! I don’t expect you to remain focused until changeover time, but at least cut back on the whining and try to focus somewhat!” the soldier shouted at Tony, who was crouched in pain. Tony was around twenty years old, and the other soldier seemed to be in his forties.

Scars covered his face, revealing a battle-worn past. He looked like an elite soldier who had endured many hellish situations. After the scolding, Tony was on the verge of tears and spoke up in protest.

“That hurt... You hit me right on the top of my helmet...”

The senior officer scoffed in response.

“Idiot. Be happy it only hurts. If anything goes wrong, a Brittantian piece of shit could kill you, y’know?” It was a warning from a man who knew war. Though he was coarse with his words, the senior soldier sincerely worried about Tony. If he had poked Tony in the face, those in modern society would regard it as an abuse of power. Moreover, the senior soldier would have had to pay a fair amount of money as consolation. On Earth, there was no such thing as abuse of power.

Even if such things existed on Earth, the senior soldier still wouldn’t have hesitated to prod Tony in the face. Some people needed to take a hit to understand a situation better. Ideally, it would not be necessary to resort to such violence. The same was true of Earth. But it was paramount to remember that some things would not change without violence. Failure to do so would have far-reaching consequences, leaving a border worker like Tony unprepared. The lives of the soldiers stationed at Jermuk, and the lives and property of those living in the Kingdom of Myest, would also be affected.

A senior officer had to realize that possibility and educate the recruits. One could say the lesson was tough love. People on the receiving end, such as Tony, could rarely realize that.

“You worry too much, man. There’s no way Brittantia is gonna attack us anyway. Think about the size of their country compared to ours! As long as they’re not idiots, they won’t invade,” said Tony, laughing. His was a rather annoying attitude. Despite his commoner background, he had some degree of education. He must have been born to a merchant or a wealthy farmer. At the very least, he had to have some knowledge to understand the difference in power between Myest and Brittantia. Said fact was something that uneducated, illiterate commoners would not know.

Regardless, the senior officer directed neither praise nor approval toward

Tony. He shot a cold gaze and said, “What does it matter if one country is bigger than the other? While you’re lazing off saying that, monsters could attack and kill you!”

Out of the countries that made up the southern kingdoms, Brittania was small enough that Myest could probably blow them away. A country’s size was directly linked to its power. There was a noticeable gap in power between the Kingdom of Myest and its neighboring kingdom, Brittania. But the victor of war wasn’t decided by a nation’s strength alone. The senior officer understood that victory also depended on the experience and instinct of its soldiers. If what Tony said was true, Myest would have been able to conquer Brittania a long time ago. The reality was different, though.

The Kingdom of Myest had yet to conquer the Kingdom of Brittania, and they had to station many soldiers on the border in case of an emergency. Myest, which had built its fortunes from sea trade, carried this burden. Naturally the upper echelons of Myest would want to reduce such a burden.

Still, they continued to station numerous soldiers at the border as a show of vigilance.

“What? Monsters? Now you mention it, I recall my grandpa said something about that when I was younger,” said Tony.

The senior officer sighed.

“I guess you wouldn’t know about them at your age...” A longing for the past clashed with the senior soldier’s words. He then shared the hidden horrors of the Kingdom of Brittania with Tony. He felt it was duty to do so, even if he could not do it forever.

An arrow came out of nowhere, piercing the senior officer’s head. His body collapsed to the floor like a puppet with broken strings. The senior soldier had been wearing a leather helmet of the kind distributed among general soldiers by the Kingdom of Myest. However, it wasn’t strong enough to block the incoming arrow.

“What...?” was the only word that came out of Tony’s mouth. A foolish thing to say. It was very apparent that the middle-aged soldier who had been guiding him up to now lay dead before his eyes.



Tony stood in a daze, unable to even run over to the senior soldier or even comprehend what had just occurred. It was something that often happened to soldiers with no experience on a battlefield. He lacked the readiness and mental attitude of an adept soldier, as battlefields were different from everyday life. While Tony remained dumbfounded, standing still, the god of death swung his sickle again. A shower of arrows fell from the sky, blocking the sunlight as they mercilessly descended on the soldiers protecting the fortress city of Jermuk.

One of the arrows pierced Tony through the shoddy armor that protected his chest.

“What...is happening...?”

The arrow had pierced his lungs. Tony’s mouth filled with the taste of rusted iron, followed by a sense of unease in his stomach. His mouth had a thick liquid, so thick he could not swallow. He eventually grew weak, feeling as if he had consumed too much alcohol. Seeing he could not support himself any longer, he collapsed to the ground.

Am I...going to die?

The floor of the watchtower felt cold. Another shower of arrows followed, one of which lightly grazed Tony’s cheek as he lay on the floor. But he no longer cared for the small amount of blood flowing from his cheek.

“It’s the Kingdom of Brittania! They’re attacking!”

“Close the gate! Hurry!”

Tony heard several shouts from different directions.

Brit...ttania... Is Brittania really attacking?

Then, Tony thought of the warning from the irritating, dead senior soldier; it seemed to have awakened a sense of duty to his country. But his heartbeat weakened, almost coming to a stop. There was no way he could stand up and fulfill his duty.

Shit... If only... If only I’d taken guard duty more seriously.

Naturally, Tony wasn’t at fault that everything turned out like this, even if his job was to stand watch in the tower. Jermuk boasted a large land area and

numerous watchtowers around the castle walls. That meant the attack couldn't all be attributed to Tony slacking off. Based on how the warning bells didn't ring until the rain of arrows, it seemed the surprise attack had happened instantly and caught everyone else off guard.

That did little to alleviate Tony's feelings, though. As he realized he was about to die, he focused on one thing.

This is awful... Dying here like a fool...

His thoughts were a sign of devotion to his beloved country, or a manifestation of his sense of responsibility as a soldier serving his country. He desperately tried to pick his battered body back up. It was futile, however, and the effort only satisfied his ego. Even if he could stand up, he could not do anything.

But that didn't matter to Tony. He unsheathed his sword and used it as a cane to help himself stand up. The approaching soldiers held up a flag embroidered with a crest, which he noticed.

"Two griffins facing one another... It really is Brittania."

It was the coat of arms of the neighboring Kingdom of Brittania's knights, hinting toward them being the attackers. Tony then noticed another unit of soldiers stationed farther away. Unease crept up on him when he saw the coat of arms on the flag fluttering above them.

Is that...? What unit is that? Soldiers from Brittania, maybe?

Because he was on the verge of death, he could not see clearly. His eyes had clouded over, not letting him view the flag. But this unit of knights differed from the Brittantian knights. As if it were a prank from the gods, Tony could not see the crest either, filling him with fear. His remaining life force began to flicker. As the energy faded from him, he glanced at the crest and couldn't believe what he was seeing.

No way... That's... That's the... he thought. The crest Tony saw was that of a wolf that belonged to the Kingdom of Tarja. Why the hell are Tarjan knights here? Did they travel through the Kingdom of Brittania to get here? There's... There's no way...

But from what Tony could see, that was the only conclusion he could consider. It was a sign that the ongoing war within the western continent had begun to move in a different direction. Realizing that, Tony tried to shout.

I need to tell someone.

Yet, he had little energy left. His body felt heavy as stone, unable to move. He prayed with all his might as he felt his consciousness continue to fade away. He prayed that someone would notice the wolf coat of arms. That was all he could do in the end.

Ten days had passed since the forces of the Kingdom of Brittania attacked Jermuk. A soldier ran to an office in the royal palace that Ryoma was currently occupying.

“War has broken out on the Kingdom of Myest’s southern border?” Ryoma was busy with preparations to send reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda. When he heard the report from the soldier, he shot him a cold, sharp look. A sense of doubt filled his gaze, questioning if the information was correct. Mistaken information wouldn’t be acceptable. Ryoma’s question probably came off as a little intimidating, though he expected it to be. The soldier continued to speak, unbothered by Ryoma’s manner.

“Yes. A messenger arrived from the Kingdom of Myest just now. He seeks an immediate audience with you,” responded the soldier confidently, corroborating the messenger’s report. At the very least, it didn’t seem like the soldier had misheard the information.

Ryoma threw the documents in his hands onto the desk.

“Got it... Bring the messenger here, I’ll speak with him now,” Ryoma ordered the soldier.

The soldier nodded before leaving the room immediately. A few minutes later, the soldier knocked again at the office door with a man beside him.

“Spare me the formalities. Let’s cut to the chase. Has war broken out on the Kingdom of Myest’s southern border?”

The messenger, sent by Ecclesia Marinelle, winced in response to Ryoma’s

sharp glare as he pulled out a letter from his inside breast pocket.

“The details are in this letter...” said the messenger as he handed over the letter.

Ryoma snatched it from the man’s hands and looked over the contents. Recorded in the letter was something Ryoma would have never imagined.

What on earth is this? The O’ltormea Empire began their invasion into the Kingdom of Xarooda, and the southern countries have taken action too?

It wasn’t just coincidence; it was all too inconvenient and at the worst possible timing.



Ryoma wanted to curse the gods. However, he soon thought differently. *Now's not the time to be fretting about why this is happening. I should prioritize how we'll respond to this situation before all else.*

Of course, Ryoma was also human. He knew he had to remain calm, but human feelings weren't like light switches that one could turn on and off. That was especially the case when faced with a predicament like this. In all honesty, Ryoma wanted to punch the desk in rage and lament the unreasonable situation he found himself in. But Ryoma knew that such behavior was not fitting for a man holding the prestigious position of archduke in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

The situation was akin to a ship encountering a storm at sea, where it would sink and leave the captain lamenting their misfortune and unable to do anything. Ryoma had to give it his all, regardless of the lack of logic to the situation.

Fortunately, the border defense garrison in the fortress city of Jermuk has defended itself against the attack. However, it would have taken the messenger ten days to arrive in Pireas from the Kingdom of Myest. In the worst-case scenario, the border could have fallen, and the enemy soldiers are now rushing into Myest.

There was no hope of having real-time information transference here on Earth, but what they already had was severely limited.

"We can't disregard the possibility that the enemy forces might have already made their way to the inner parts of the kingdom."

The situation threatened the very life of the Kingdom of Myest. That said, Ryoma was aware that the chances of the enemy forces invading that far were small. With the Whirlwind, Ecclesia Marinelle, at the helm, the Kingdom of Myest had a lot of military commanders who were brave and skilled in strategy. There was no way they wouldn't already have a plan, but Ryoma also couldn't be too confident.

The messenger overheard Ryoma's mutterings, causing his face to pale and as he panicked. Others were in the room and had the same reaction. Even the soldiers stationed there as guards went pale as they watched the unfolding

situation. While these guards hadn't undergone any special training, they realized that this wasn't a simple issue. Even if they weren't very good at thinking logically, they had picked up on the sense of danger, as if by animalistic instinct.

Well, it's only natural they feel that way.

In the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, those born in a low social class were categorized as weak. Thus, individuals deemed weak had to utilize their crisis management abilities to ensure their survival. They were similar to mice and rabbits who would sense an incoming storm and hide away. That said, Ryoma didn't have time to accompany them in their unease forever.

Ryoma, wore an expression that looked as if he were chewing on a bitter-tasting bug and ordered the messenger dispatched from the Kingdom of Myest to continue their report. But it seemed it was the same as the contents of the letter from Ecclesia.

I see... So, their report is correct.

To get all the facts, Ryoma had the messenger repeat the report verbally, but it matched the information in the letter, indicating it was accurate. Even so, he couldn't dismiss the possibility that the messenger could be a secret agent sent from a different country.

Ecclesia should have used some thaumaturgy to guarantee the privacy of the letter's contents.

But it was too late for that.

I've confirmed what I can for now and can see the letter matches the report, so the chance of the messenger being a spy from a different country is low. Though, it would be a big problem if he was.

Once Ryoma had finished listening to the messenger's report, he suddenly said, "Are you certain that the troops massing at the Kingdom of Myest's border are from Brittania and Tarja?"

The letter already contained that information.

"Yes, the scouts from my country have confirmed the enemy unit's flags. Last

I heard, they had barricaded themselves within Jermuk and were awaiting reinforcements,” responded the messenger.

Ryoma clicked his tongue at the unthinkable situation. No matter the futility, there was no way they couldn’t respond to it. He ordered everyone in the room to leave so he could think about what to do from here on out. Once everyone had left the room, he looked up.

He thought, *Just as we’re about to send reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda, this attack happened. A few days ago, I had a report from Simone about activity at the borders of the Kingdom of Helnesgoula and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire.*

The Kingdom of Helnesgoula was at war with the Holy Qwiltantia Empire and the O’ltormea Empire. Based on that, it wouldn’t be too strange if troops from Qwiltantia were stationed on the Kingdom of Helnesgoula’s western border. In the past, when the O’ltormea Empire invaded Xarooda, Qwiltantia had mobilized its troops to pressure the other parties involved.

Neither of the armies were large enough for all-out war, restricting the military movement of both countries. As a result, the reinforcements sent to Xarooda from Helnesgoula had only come about after the Holy Qwiltantia Empire had confirmed said restrictions.

And now here we are.

Various problems had all erupted at once, making the situation difficult to control. Ryoma primarily focused on the unexpected involvement of the Kingdom of Tarja in the war.

I could understand if it were only the Kingdom of Brittania.

However, the Kingdom of Tarja and the Kingdom of Myest didn’t even share a border. That could only mean that the Kingdom of Brittania and the Kingdom of Tarja had formed an alliance.

Is that even possible? Is it just a coincidence? Are we just that unlucky? mused Ryoma, lamenting ideas he knew were incorrect while staying calm. *I’m being foolish... There’s no way it’s just a coincidence. The question is, who orchestrated all of this?*

Several potential candidates ran through Ryoma's mind but soon disappeared.

Maybe Shardina and the O'ltormea Empire? No, there's no way they could be behind all of this. Their contact with the southern kingdoms is just constant skirmishes at the borders. I can't imagine them banding together so easily. On top of that, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire stationing their troops along the border with the Kingdom of Helnesgoula is also bad timing for us. But O'ltormea and Qwiltantia are bitter rivals, fighting for supremacy over the continent. It would be difficult for them to cooperate with the southern kingdoms. So, is it really a coincidence? No, it can't be that! There's no way.

Ryoma considered various possibilities. It was the same question that Ecclesia Marinelle was asking in the faraway Kingdom of Myest. But he could not find the answer to the question at this stage.

In that case, I just have to do what I can. But I wonder if that's really the only way out of this?

He had already thought up a countermeasure. Nevertheless, it wasn't the most desirable option. In fact, it was a rather callous option to take: postponing sending the reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda.

We should prioritize helping the Kingdom of Myest rather than sending reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda, which has already faced invasion from the O'ltormea Empire.

The three kingdoms based in the eastern part of the western continent—Rhoadseria, Xarooda, and Myest—had a similar long and narrow shape. However, the Kingdom of Xarooda shared its borders with its enemies, such as the southern kingdoms and the O'ltormea Empire. Rhoadseria and Myest also shared borders with the southern kingdoms, but they were only a small part of their countries. The eastern side of the Kingdom of Myest faced the ocean.

Attacks from the coast of Myest were like those outside the board in chess or shogi. There was a small chance they would suffer an attack from the ocean. But it differed from chess in that the chance was never zero. A country could use boats to invade the Kingdom of Myest with soldiers from anywhere on its shores. Therefore, they were known for having the strongest navy on the

western continent.

If their navy is as strong as it's rumored to be, there should be nothing to worry about.

Meanwhile, Ryoma realized the attack on Myest by Brittantia and Tarja would only be from the southern part of the country. Compared to that, Xarooda's front line was more extensive.

With the Kingdom of Xarooda, we don't know if it's only the O'ltormea Empire attacking. There is always the possibility an army is on its way north from the southern kingdoms.

Of course, that wasn't confirmed. Focusing on shortening the front line made the most sense when Ryoma thought about it.

But if we send reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda, it'll be hard to shorten the front line.

Even the Kingdom of Myest would hesitate to send reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda while attacked by the Brittantian and Tarjan alliance. Even if they sent reinforcements, it would be on a smaller scale.

Looking at the situation, it would probably be around the same number of soldiers that Helena and I would send to Xarooda as reinforcements.

One group would be around twenty-five hundred knights. At most, with two groups of knights, there would be around five thousand men. Compared to the two hundred thousand men that the O'ltormea Empire's army had brought, it would be impossible to match them in battle. Basically, it would make zero difference if they were there. Although Xarooda had won last time, that victory came from Ryoma's outlandish plot, where he had cut the enemy's supply line. Expecting the general from the Kingdom of Myest to send reinforcements similarly would be incredibly unrealistic.

In that case, we really need Helnesgoula to send reinforcements.

Ryoma understood that if the reinforcements from Helnesgoula arrived quickly, they could gain an advantage in the war. But with him not being sure about the Holy Qwiltantia Empire's movements, there was no telling when the reinforcements would arrive.

If the reinforcements from the Kingdom of Helnesgoula don't arrive, then... At worst, it'll mean only the Kingdom of Xarooda and I can stand up against O'Itormea, which is a drop in the bucket in this situation.

He had considered sending around thirty thousand men to the Kingdom of Xarooda as reinforcements. As a noble house, it was an incredibly vast number of soldiers to send to another country.

Even though my soldiers are powerful, claiming victory would still be difficult.

Naturally Ryoma was confident in his soldiers' abilities due to their training as part of House Mikoshiba. All of them had learned thaumaturgy, and Lione had trained them to survive on a battlefield similar to mercenaries. While he didn't know for sure, Ryoma felt that one of his soldiers was equivalent to four or five men from another house's army. Said strength, combined with the military power from Xarooda and the reinforcements from Myest, gave them a better chance against the two hundred thousand man army the O'Itormea Empire had assembled.

But that is based on the O'Itormea Empire not having any reinforcements.

One could not say the O'Itormea Empire wouldn't receive reinforcements from a different country. Ryoma would not object if this battle occurred within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's territory. Even if O'Itormea had reinforcements, it would do little to change the tide in the current situation.

Instead of creating a winning strategy, he had to put everything on the line. If the war took place in Xarooda, that would change things. If they had a plan that would mean victory, then it was only natural that Ryoma would prioritize sending reinforcements to the Kingdom of Myest.

Still, the only problem is how the Kingdom of Xarooda would respond if I did that.

The four-nation alliance, which the Kingdom of Helnesgoula headed, was based on a trade treaty with an aspect of a defense treaty. Thus, the collapsing Kingdom of Xarooda would request reinforcements to protect its country. That meant that the other three countries had a duty to respond to that request.

If they don't fulfill that request...

Depending on the situation, the Kingdom of Xarooda would have the opportunity to surrender to the O'ltormea Empire. Even if they became a vassal state, the country known as the Kingdom of Xarooda wouldn't completely disappear. It wouldn't be strange if there were people who would prefer that.

We have to show how prepared we are to prevent that from happening, mused Ryoma, knowing that meant providing soldiers, supplies, and military funds. *Fortunately, the money Simone earned should be more than enough funds. As for equipment, Meltina and the others had gathered equipment from all over Rhoadseria and brought it to Pireas, meaning we have more than enough to donate.*

The best choice would be to send enough reinforcements so that the Kingdom of Xarooda could stand toe to toe with the O'ltormea Empire. If that were impossible, the next best thing would be to send them supplies and military funds to buy Ryoma more time. He could eliminate the Brittantian and Tarjan alliance before heading to the Kingdom of Xarooda to take on the O'ltormea Empire.

However, it was a gamble with disadvantageous odds. Even if there was a straight path to victory, much of it depended on everything going perfectly.

We might have to send Sir Joshua and the others into hiding.

Was there anyone with a good enough eye to discern when to take such a disadvantageous gamble at the right time while working with the Kingdom of Xarooda?

Ryoma immediately knew of someone. *I guess all we can do is ask.*

It was an ask that was equivalent to asking them to go to their deaths. But if there was a way to come out unscathed, they could find it.

That's right... I need the Crimson Lioness, Lione.

Ryoma rang the bell on top of his desk. It was time to head toward a new battlefield with his trusted friends.

Epilogue

Ryoma had received the report about the Kingdom of Myest several days earlier. It was around afternoon, and he was in a room in the mansion of the former Count Salzberg in a corner of Pireas.

Asuka had just finished a light exercise in the courtyard before refreshing herself in the marble-decorated bathhouse. She then returned to her room and began preparations to welcome her guests.

I should really have my own mansion right now. Oh, well. People might criticize me for leeching off Ryoma, but it's not like I can do anything about that, thought Asuka.

Even though Ryoma Mikoshiba had risen to the highest rank within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria—archduke—he was still renting out Count Salzberg's mansion. Such information could damage his reputation.

For cutting costs, it wasn't necessarily a bad thing. But it didn't provide the best optics for an archduke.

In Rearth terms, it's equivalent to a CEO who earns billions of yen a year living with his parents in a cheap apartment.

She wasn't sure if that was the best comparison, since she still lacked common knowledge about how Earth worked. She often just made assumptions based on her impressions of it, which she knew wasn't the most ideal approach.

If Ryoma did have his own mansion, I wonder if I could take a bath by myself whenever I wanted.

When she bathed at Count Salzberg's mansion, the servants would painstakingly clean every inch of her body, even drowning her in perfume. It was top-quality treatment for Asuka, who had lived most of her life in a modern society. She had her every need met, quite literally.

Her treatment resembled visiting a high-class beauty salon or staying at a three-star hotel with a concierge. Or it was like someone who only ate home-

cooked meals every day suddenly having high-class French food for three meals daily.

Asuka was aware of the excellent care she received from those around her. She had treatment that was limited to only a few people here on Earth. But she still felt uncomfortable.

They treat me so well that it feels weird.

In a general sense, Asuka's family—the Kiryuus—were well-off. But that assumption was based on Japan's understanding of "well-off." Compared to the levels of wealth on social media back in Rearth, her family was modest. And so, she found herself in an environment similar to the extraordinary wealth she'd see on social media.

When I was living in Japan, I was just a regular high school student, so I guess it's normal I feel like this.

Asuka had never felt like this before. She had felt lucky knowing she would live a long life and dream of having such nice things. But when those good dreams became reality, it changed a lot.

It seems this kind of treatment for the elite is not just limited to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Nobles living on Earth with bathtubs never wash themselves with their own hands. Even Lady Yulia mentioned that.

Whether Asuka Kiryuu liked it or not, she now belonged to the noble category and could do nothing about it. It was stressful when it all suddenly became your day-to-day.

It could have been a difference in how men and women think, or it could have depended on Asuka's personality.

From what I've heard, Ryoma goes in the bath by himself. So why can't I?

Ryoma had told her, so she was sure of it. Even if Asuka said she wanted to go in alone, everyone would refuse her for some reason.

Though I understand, I would kind of be taking away the maid's jobs.

That would raise the question, is it okay for Ryoma to bathe alone? But then that would just get pushed away, saying it was a difference between sexes.

Well, it's not like I hate it. Everyone is doing their best to look after me, so I can't really disregard it.

Asuka's personality made it difficult for her to say no.

That said, it would be better if Ryoma got his own mansion. But it would be hard to buy or build one right now with the current situation.

She knew well enough that Ryoma had no time to adjust his public image. After all, he had to deal with the O'ltormean invasion into the Kingdom of Xarooda and had received urgent news from the neighboring country to the east, the Kingdom of Myest.

Realistically speaking, Ryoma had no time to even think about acquiring a mansion for House Mikoshiba. If he had the resources to build a mansion fit for an archduke, he'd much rather spend those resources on military preparations instead. In times of peace, a luxurious mansion was effective as a display of authority and wealth. But in times of war, it was nothing more than a useless object. Everyone living in Count Salzberg's manor more or less understood that fact.

People were investigating the news from the Kingdom of Myest in one corner of the manor. Naturally, the atmosphere in the whole manor was tense. Yet, that contrasted with the cheerfulness in Asuka's room, thanks to her state of mind. She was doing her best to look after herself. Her intrinsic good spirits came about because her benefactors, who had spent a long time with her since she was summoned to this world, were visiting today. Thus, Asuka asked for a favor of borrowing the kitchen in the Count Salzberg mansion and having Kikuna Samejima cook for her.

However, her good spirits were all just for show. Hidden within the cheerful atmosphere was a faint dark shadow hovering over the room. It was a subtle feeling that only Ryoma and Koichiro, both of whom she had spent a long time with, could sense.

"All right... I look good," said Asuka, nodding as she checked her appearance in the mirror. She had donned the same school uniform from when she arrived in this world. Agewise, she should have graduated from high school by now, but that didn't change the fact that her school uniform was one of her most prized

possessions. She tied her hair with her favorite silk ribbon, glowing as always in that look.

Asuka was all prepared after her bath, but that didn't mean there weren't any problems.

"I guess Ryoma can't help it with the position he's in right now. But..."

She knew the archduke found it important to investigate what the Church of Meneos was up to. Moreover, she recognized she was the best fit for the job. Even if she disagreed, it was like a small thorn that stabbed at her heart.

Well, it's not like it's been decided that they're our enemies yet.

There was a knock at the door.

"Lady Asuka. Your guests have arrived."

"Oh, thank you. I'll be right there," responded Asuka through the closed door before rechecking her appearance in the window and heading toward the door. It was time to do her job.

"So, we've officially received permission from the Church to stay in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria," Rodney Mackenna told Asuka, who was sitting on the sofa in the reception room.

Asuka couldn't help but squeal with delight when she heard that Rodney and Menea would be stationed in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Even Rodney sounded quite happy based on his excited tone.

Well, the royal capital and the Wortenia Peninsula are not close. I'll have opportunities to see him before he returns to the holy city of Menestia, thought Asuka.

Rodney smirked when he saw Asuka's reaction. His stepsister, Menea Norberg, sat beside him and showed a peaceful smile.

"It's an honor seeing you so happy," remarked Rodney.

"It really is," replied Menea.

Both of them laughed, enjoying Asuka's reaction. It made sense why Asuka

was so overjoyed to hear the news. Menestia was in the southern part of the western continent, and Asuka was due to move to Ryoma's main base in the city of Sirius, based in the northern region. That meant Menestia and Sirius were almost on opposite sides of the continent.

Getting around wasn't that easy on Earth, making long distances huge obstacles when trying to meet with people.

It took him months to get here from the holy city.

Even for Rodney, who had undergone strict training as part of the Temple Knights of the Church of Meneos, the trip would be dangerous. At least Asuka was well aware of the extra precautions taken to ensure their safety on the road.

While special skills like thaumaturgy existed, compared to Rearth, Earth was a fairly delayed civilization. Means of transport were limited to walking, horseback, or boat. Although, the roads between cities were not well established.

Traveling by road involved several possible hazards, such as storms, or even war. Considering all those factors, Rodney would not head toward the northern part of the continent again if he and the others were to return to the holy city.

Depending on how it went, I could have said goodbye to him forever.

With Rodney and the others now staying in the royal capital of Pireas, Asuka no longer needed to worry about that. It would be difficult for them to meet with one another every day, but at least they could meet occasionally.

Rodney smiled at Asuka, who could not contain her happiness, before nodding slowly.

"A few days ago, Cardinal Roland discussed it with the pope, and they decided on it. Well, it's not set in stone until I get an official notification from the Church. But it's more or less confirmed anyway," said Rodney.

Asuka nodded slightly in response, a question mark almost forming above her head. Communication was also limited here on Earth, so she couldn't picture how Cardinal Roland had contacted the pope so quickly.

“Cardinal Roland and the pope? Did they send letters by bird or something? I know birds are faster than horses, but I thought it wasn’t that easy to make contact so quickly with the pope.”

The distance between the holy city of Menestia and the Kingdom of Rhoadseria was several thousand kilometers. That wouldn’t be an issue if phones and emails were used widely on Earth like on Rearth.

“Well, they have their ways, I guess.”

“I see!” responded Asuka, smiling. Even though there were some things she didn’t understand, she felt overjoyed at the news that both her older brother and sister would stay in Rhoadseria. They had taken care of her since her initial summoning to Earth.

Though her grandfather and cousin protected her now, she was still quite grateful to Rodney and Menea. If anything, she finally could return the favor. Though only temporarily, Ryoma Mikoshiba and the Church of Meneos were once enemies.

They had a more friendly relationship now, but it wouldn’t take much for them to be enemies again. With their friendship so delicate, it was essential they often communicated. Asuka Kiryuu was the only person within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy with that kind of personal relationship with anyone in the Church.

At a minimum, it was far easier for Rodney and Menea to work with Asuka than to build up a new relationship entirely from scratch with a random point of contact they hardly knew. Asuka felt her heart fill with a sense of duty.

“Anyway, I’m just happy you two and Ryoma get along well.”

“Yeah, I guess... At least the Church has ordered me to build good relations with Sir Mikoshiba. Since there have been unfortunate misunderstandings in the past, I think it will be difficult to dispel the feeling of vigilance within their friendship. But I guess we needn’t worry about that right now.”

“Oh I see. So, are you like a resident ambassador for the Church now?”

Days ago, Asuka heard from Ryoma that Rodney’s position in Rhoadseria was close to a diplomat. But he wasn’t sure about the facts. Asuka had to confirm

those details in person. But Rodney's response caused Asuka's expression to cloud over.

"A resident ambassador... Not really, I think? Resident ambassador makes it seem like I hold a lot of authority, which isn't quite it. I'm more of a fixer." Rodney smiled while shrugging his shoulders, not appearing discouraged, judging from his words and demeanor. The Church of Meneos wasn't an actual state, meaning such a role wouldn't exist.

If anything, an archbishop or high priest would be the one expected to handle all things diplomatic. But that wasn't an official role of theirs. In that sense, Rodney's official status within the Church was still that of a knight, even though he was formerly the leader of the Temple Knights. Hence, it made sense that Asuka's use of "ambassador" wasn't quite the right word for his activities. Rodney had discretionary power regarding the Grand Mikoshiba Duchy and the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, so seeing himself as a sort of fixer for the Church of Meneos was a proper way to describe his position.

Although, the Church of Meneos was aware of Rodney Mackenna's ability and how it came in handy for them. Undeniably, Rodney and Menea knew that too. The word "fixer" didn't present the best image and wouldn't have sounded like a good title for someone overhearing the conversation.

"A fixer... Isn't that just a demotion, though?" asked Asuka, worried. She owed a lot to Rodney, so it would have been a big deal if they had suddenly demoted him.

Is it because I managed to escape?

Asuka's existence had been hidden from everyone thanks to Rodney and Menea's efforts. To others, Asuka Kiryuu was just a young woman summoned to Earth from Rearth and was under the protection of the siblings. They were also the only people who knew about her blood relation to Ryoma Mikoshiba. Even Cardinal Roland didn't know about it. Therefore, Asuka Kiryuu's disappearance from the encampment would have been a case of a mere otherworlder going missing during battle.

There were always many people going missing on battlefields. The Church of Meneos wouldn't have found it that much of an issue if Asuka and Tachibana

suffered the same fate.

But you can never say never, I guess. I wonder if me and Mr. Tachibana disappearing caused some problems.

It was only natural that Asuka felt uneasy about it. However, Rodney simply laughed in response to her question.

“No, no, nothing like that... I just meant that since it’s not an official role, it wouldn’t be right calling me an ambassador. None of my duties have changed. My role as a fixer is more important and requires more from me than if I were an ambassador. Alongside managing the church in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, they entrusted me with being a point of contact for the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, which is incredibly well-known across the land. I collect information about the eastern part of the continent.”

“Got it. That’s fine, but... Didn’t you say you wanted to be a captain again?”

“I guess, but the Church doesn’t have many people it can use all the way over here in the eastern part of the continent. I can’t really avoid getting all these jobs pushed on to me.”

Asuka nodded, sensing dissatisfaction in Rodney’s tone, and thought, *I wonder what the case is. It doesn’t seem like he’s lying, but I don’t think he’s being entirely honest.*

It wasn’t necessarily bad that the two people who had once served as captain and vice-captain of the Temple Knights were now liaisons between the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy and the Church of Meneos. At the very least, the duchy couldn’t complain. Since they had welcomed Rodney and the others, that was evidence that supported Ryoma’s interest in the Church of Meneos.

Plus, the manner that the Church of Meneos stationed personnel with the ability to be captains appealed to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. This demonstrated how they worked and showed they had closely monitored the Mikoshiba Duchy.

If the Church of Meneos weren’t interested, they wouldn’t have gone as far to assign such skilled personnel to this job. But that also meant the logic of the Church of Meneos’s assessment skills didn’t reflect on Rodney Mackenna and

Menea Norberg. Given that this was an unprecedented appointment, it was hard to say the promotion was good. Although Rodney had hinted to Asuka that it was a promotion, Rodney and Menea actually weren't sure what to make of it.

In modern terms, maybe it's more like a military officer having a role at an embassy as an attaché?

Both had significant roles as diplomats. As far as Asuka knew, it was a relatively high-ranking role. They were sprinting toward success in their career. But it was also an unknown role for the two who had climbed to this point; they weren't without their concerns.

I always knew that Rodney was in a strange position but I can't see it being worse now. But he's probably also doing spy work, being a military officer on a diplomatic assignment.

Of course, Asuka's knowledge of spies and so on had limits, and she didn't know if military officers here on Earth were the same as those on Rearth. She could imagine it not being an easy job, though.

Rodney shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it depends on how you look at it. It's not like my pay is getting docked or anything, so that's fine with me," said Rodney, laughing. Asuka looked at him with a worried expression.

It doesn't seem like he's lying, but I think he wanted to return to being a captain.

Rodney didn't look sad or anything. It also wasn't like he was just laughing to keep up appearances. But Asuka couldn't help but think it was her fault, even though she knew it was nothing more than sentimentality.

Well, if we're gonna point the finger, Ryoma is behind all of it.

Anyhow, it was hard to determine the truth. Everyone made their best attempt, and nobody should be ashamed of their actions and choices. Ryoma had done everything he could to protect his friends and Asuka. Because of this, the result reflected poorly on Rodney.

Surely, he could understand why it was in Ryoma's political interests to eliminate the influence of a religious organization.

Ryoma didn't see Rodney and Menea as enemies and was rather grateful to them. When Asuka was first summoned to this world, they found her unconscious in the forest. What they had done was so noble that no sum could ever make up for it.

Regardless, that didn't mean Ryoma Mikoshiba could form a strong friendship with the Church of Meneos because of that. He wasn't naive enough to have his political decisions changed due to them doing him a favor.

Plus, I have my thoughts about the Church of Meneos.

Asuka's upbringing in Japan likely contributed to this. Like Ryoma, she was rather skeptical about religious organizations. She had a reasonable understanding of Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity and Islam. But she also thought everyone should have the freedom to follow their beliefs, a view she retained from her upbringing. She didn't think that one religion was better than another.

When it came to newly founded religions, she didn't have the best impression of them.

While I don't believe that we should get rid of or speak ill of people who are believers in newly founded religions, I also don't think they're the kind of people I want to get to know.

Moreover, Asuka wasn't a complete atheist and even believed in gods and Buddha. She would leave a monetary offering if she passed a small Jizo shrine and even donated to monks. But if someone asked her if it is worth believing in something to the point you joined an organization, she would demonstrate skepticism.

She probably wouldn't have been alone in thinking that something was shady when such organizations started to ask for donations and offerings. After all, religious figures were supposed to share common traits—being virtuous and honorably poor.

Of course, questioning the requirements of their religious doctrines, many believers sought virtuous figures who were honorably poor. Asuka didn't think

believers wanted to hear stories about their revered figures living a life of luxury. Such included huge houses, expensive jewelry adorned with precious gems, luxury clothes, expensive cuisines and wines, and the company of women.

There were a lot of religions that didn't allow clergy to marry, let alone surrounded themselves with mistresses. A clergyman's job was to listen to God, to correct believers' conduct, and to undergo great hardships leading their lost believers. Doing your best to ensure the happiness of others above your own had a noble quality.

Yet, that was an incredibly difficult path. People respected clergy for their ability to navigate such a treacherous path with their own will and belief.

I couldn't do that.

Asuka wasn't alone in that. Billions of people on the planet would have found this impossible. The reason was that it was hard to be a believer. No matter how respectable a clergyman was, they soon became tainted with worldly desires when the topic of money arose. It was difficult not to feel a sense of disgust toward them. Their holiness soon disappeared once they caught the scent of a new lifestyle and the reality that came with it.

These views were similar to teachings from historically revered people like Jesus Christ or Buddha.

People say that money talks, and I understand that running an organization requires money.

Religious organizations needed money, meaning they couldn't be completely independent from the secular world. Should they earn their daily bread, they would need housing to shield them from the elements and a temple to pass on their teachings. If it were a religion where idol worship wasn't prohibited, they would need money to build statues. They needed money for all of that.

Unless they were immortals who could live off oxygen alone, they couldn't live independently from money. She understood that, but the argument didn't convince her.

I guess it's just best to keep a neutral stance on all of it.

Asuka would celebrate Christmas on the 24th and the 25th of December, then attend a Shinto shrine or a Buddhist temple to pray at the beginning of the New Year. Japanese wedding ceremonies were held in a church, while funerals took place in a temple. Nothing was more absurd than that—at least, many Christians or Muslims found it hard to understand.

If Asuka were to ask religious fundamentalists about these things, they might perceive such inconsistency as an insult and get annoyed. However, Japanese people—for better or worse—held such a relaxed outlook on religion. They kept that sort of distance from it and didn't speak badly of it, regardless of their beliefs.

No one could deny that the Mikoshiba and Kiryuu family had the same outlook on religion.

Here on Earth, it seems like that is heresy.

Fanatics had established themselves throughout the western continent to spread the teachings of the Church of Meneos as absolute and supreme. They saw their religion as definitive and blindly followed it. There was no room for questions, negotiation, or concessions. If one person strayed from their beliefs slightly, they would encounter violence as fellow believers would try to correct their behavior. They believed that to be the wish of their god.

I guess they're kind of fundamentalist?

Those living in modern-day Japan rarely became involved with anyone who blindly believed in a certain religion. The same went for Asuka. However, she had lived in a time where she could hear the news about something that had happened on the other side of the world in real time. She had heard about terrorist attacks or wars that had begun due to religious conflicts. Most of her information about religion came from the internet and television.

She had never spoken with a zealous believer, nor had she met anyone like that, so her knowledge was limited. But she couldn't say the negative impression she formed from such news was without cause; it was reasonable of her to be wary of religion.

Not to mention what I've heard about the holy city of Menestia too...

In this context, Ryoma Mikoshiba asking the Church of Meneos to retreat from the Kingdom of Rhoadseria wasn't irrational. Asuka agreed with his decision. However, Rodney and Menea had gotten the short end of the stick as a result. The issue boiled down to whether Asuka could deal with that outcome.

"I'm sorry... I caused you both so much trouble...since you saved me... I'm so sorry," said Asuka.

"Asuka, you needn't worry at all. It's what we wanted to do," replied Menea, laughing as she observed from Rodney's side. "But..."

"It was worth it, anyway. You really needn't worry."

"Worth it? Will you get promoted when you return?"

"Hehehe... Not exactly that. I don't really want to be a captain of the Temple Knights anyway. And I don't think Rodney is interested in being a captain again, right? I'd be fine not returning to the holy city, especially with the ongoing feud with Cardinal Vargas and his cronies... Not that I can go into that," related Menea, playfully winking.

Rodney nodded and added, "That's right... Honestly, I feel great knowing I won't have to see that son of a bitch and his mindless followers."

Asuka smiled wryly at Rodney's bold choice of words. After all, Rodney was a good-natured person and would give everything in his wallet to a beggar on the streets. If he wasn't like that, she didn't think he would have looked after her so carefully after finding her unconscious in the woods. It was unusual for Rodney to speak so badly about someone like that.

But Rodney and Menea had hidden motives, and at this stage, it was hard to say that their intentions were purely altruistic. They had discovered the existence of Asuka's relative, Koichiro Mikoshiba, and the sword he had given her that contained thaumaturgy, after they had rescued her and taken her in. It also led to them suspecting that Koichiro had a connection to the Organization. Still, at first, they looked after her with good intentions, although that was rare on Earth.

Many people on Earth who found a healthy young woman with a good build like Asuka lying unconscious in the forest would consider selling her as a slave

or keeping them for their desires. Others would not feed, clothe, shelter, or even stand up against their seniors to protect her.

Gaining Rodney Mackenna's ire was quite a feat because he was so incredibly good-natured. Since Rodney was like that, he often faced troublesome situations. His sense of justice was so strong that he would point out and correct any mistakes seniors or anyone above him made. This trait was commendable, especially for weaker people who often felt intimidated by those in authority, who saw him as a hero or a god of salvation.

On the other hand, plenty of people in the higher ranks of the Church of Meneos had distanced themselves from Rodney. They did nothing to hide their hostility toward him either.

Ah I see. He's mentioned him before.

The face of the person Rodney was talking about appeared in Asuka's mind. It was a man that she had seen now and then when she was living in the holy city of Menestia. He was an older man who was much too thin and wore luxurious priest's clothing. Thinking back to her time there, she remembered his gaze toward her being somewhat sleazy, clinging to her. He wasn't the kind of person she wanted to approach.

"You really dislike him, huh," commented Asuka.

"Yeah. I don't even want to look at him," said Rodney, nodding with a disgusted expression.

"Honestly... You're like a kid," said Menea, shrugging her shoulders to show she meant no ill will. Rodney wasn't acting like an adult, even if he was right. Asuka felt a sense of warmth in Menea's words as if she were an older sister teasing her cheeky younger brother. She showed she was proud of him. Still, it didn't seem like Rodney picked up on that.

"You say that, but he had his sights on Asuka, remember?! Even though he's old enough to be her grandfather, let alone her father!" rebuked Rodney with an upset look.

"I know. That bothered me, but he is a cardinal, remember? Shouldn't you be looking after your reputation more? The whole reason you were demoted from

captain of the knights was because you dared to challenge him.”

“And? There’s no way I was gonna keep silent and follow that son of a bitch’s orders!”

“I’m not saying that. I’m saying there’s better ways to go about it!”

Menea and Rodney engaged in their war of words. But it didn’t bother Asuka in the slightest.

How nice... I guess this is what it’s like for siblings. I wonder if Ryoma and I look like this to other people? thought Asuka, enjoying the argument between Rodney and Menea unfold before her.

After the meeting with Asuka, Rodney and Menea were in a horse-drawn carriage that swayed back and forth as they headed to the Church of Meneos’s temple within the royal capital. It was dark outside as night swept in. The pale moon sat high in the sky, surrounded by colorful, sparkling stars.

“We ended up staying quite a while,” said Rodney.

“We did, but it’s fine. Asuka seemed to have a lot of fun, and it was nice to talk with her after so long,” replied Menea.

“That’s true... I had fun too. Plus, it was worth meeting her since we now know that Ryoma is pretty curious about us.”

“She’s such a kind, loyal girl.”

“She is. That’s why I want to protect her.”

“I get that...”

Those were Rodney and Menea’s honest feelings. Although they were both once captain and vice-captain of the Temple Knights, neither wanted their old positions nor did they want to be promoted. What was important to them was finding any clues about the Organization. Compared to that, being promoted within the Church of Meneos was a trivial matter. But they couldn’t tell Asuka about that, since one of their clues to the Organization was none other than Koichiro Mikoshiba and his grandson, Ryoma Mikoshiba.

There is a possibility that Koichiro Mikoshiba is a lot more involved.

While they weren't sure, Rodney instinctively guessed Koichiro was the attacker who had cut off his arm that night.

The attacker's swordsmanship was incredibly similar to Ryoma Mikoshiba, so... I highly suspect it was him.

Still, there were limited reasons Koichiro Mikoshiba would attack Rodney and Menea when they were Asuka's guardians on Earth. Not only that, Koichiro knew about guns—something that didn't exist on Earth—and he was determined to bring that threat under his control.

That kind of thinking only belongs to an otherworlder.

Rodney wasn't afraid of guns because he could use martial thaumaturgy.

A weapon that shot bullets by pulling a trigger was more useful than swords and bows. Anyone could kill with a gun. All they had to do was point it at someone and shoot. Even though it required a decent amount of training for the person shooting to hit their target, it was still an incredible weapon. But there were also downsides to it.

A gun could only shoot in the direction it was facing. The power of a bullet depended on its material and the amount of gunpowder in the weapon. Its power didn't change depending on the strength of the user. A weak child and a muscular adult could fire the same gun, and it would hold the same power either way.

From what I know, there's less chance of your shot being accurate if you don't control the recoil after you shoot. It helps if the person shooting has some amount of muscle, thought Rodney.

Guns weren't children's toys. But they weren't that scary to knights and mercenaries who could strengthen their bodies with martial thaumaturgy. Having one or two guns wouldn't be that big of a deal.

I guess it could become a threat if controlled and there's an increase in numbers.

When considering the threat guns posed, along with the ability to gather information about nobles who bought them in secret, the conclusion became clear.

Koichiro Mikoshiba has a connection to the Organization. It all makes sense.

Rodney had no proof, though he was almost one hundred percent sure. He did not even want to ask Koichiro and would feign ignorance if he ever did so. Should Ryoma decide that Rodney had picked a fight with his grandfather, the archduke would have him deported from the country. That would mean his one clue about the Organization would all be for nothing.

“It might be good to monitor the situation for now and see how everything goes,” said Menea.

“Yeah, you’re right,” answered Rodney. “No doubt Ryoma will be busy responding to the situation in the Kingdom of Myest.”

“He also has to deal with the invasion in the Kingdom of Xarooda. Even talented people have their limits.”

Rodney nodded. “I feel like that’s when Koichiro Mikoshiba will make his move. That’s if he is a member of the Organization like we think.”

“Yeah, I don’t think it’s long until we can grant our greatest wish,” stated Menea, smiling.

“Who knows... That said, a thread is still a thread, no matter how thin. We have no other leads, so we should tread very carefully,” said Rodney as he looked outside the carriage window.

He looked up toward the moon, shining its pale light down on Earth, his expression showing determination.

Afterword

If you're new to the series—though I doubt there will be many who are—it's nice to meet you. For those who have been here since the first volume, long time no see. It's been around four months. I'm the author, Ryota Hori. It's been a while since the New Year. I've been able to keep up with releasing a new volume every four months, which is a relief. After all, this month was rough.

I work as an IT engineer as well as a novelist, and I had a very busy New Year because of my job. Even on my days off, I had to answer emails and calls. Though I should be grateful that I have a stable job in times like this.

Anyway, I'll stop complaining and move on to the customary highlights.

In this volume, our protagonist, Ryoma, had to change many plans he had made in the previous volume and head in a different direction. He's had it a bit too easy as a main character. No matter how lucky he is as a main character, the Goddess of Fate isn't always so kind.

Nothing has been decided yet, so let's hope the main character continues to fight against fate and do his best. Due to Ryoma changing his plans, the nobles in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria have received a little more time. Although, there were some less fortunate individuals and their families who faced the brunt of it. I believe the more observant readers will know who I am referring to with that.

This series focuses a lot on poetic justice.

The focus has also shifted toward Ecclesia Marinelle and the Kingdom of Myest, which until now hasn't appeared much in the series. From here on out, the mysteries of the Church of Meneos, the Organization, and the southern kingdoms—which I also haven't written much about—will all become clear, so please look forward to it.

I would like to give a huge thanks to everyone who works hard to ensure this book could be released and to the readers for picking this up. I'll continue to do

my best writing the future volumes, so I hope you keep enjoying *Record of Wortenia War*.









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Record of Wortenia War: Volume 24

by Ryota Hori

Translated by Jade Willis Edited by Mario Mendez

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