

# RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

Author: **Ryota Hori**

Illustrator: **bob**





# RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

Author: **Ryota Hori**

Illustrator: **bob**







**Diana  
Hamilton**

**Charlotte  
Halcyon**

**Bettina  
Eisenbach**

Beautiful and  
brilliant, these  
three noble  
ladies were well  
accustomed to  
the political  
battles of the  
imperial court.

# RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR





“First unit,  
march!”

“What a  
sight for sore  
eyes... I feel  
like a real  
general.”



At around 10 p.m.  
inside the palace  
of Endesia in  
Myest, Ecclesia  
Marinelle was  
reading reports  
received from  
various regions  
across the land.





# CONTENTS

## PROLOGUE

### CHAPTER 1

## COLLABORATION OF SHADOWS

### CHAPTER 2

## THE CRIMSON LION ROARS

### CHAPTER 3

## A GLOOMY STORM

### CHAPTER 4

## THE TWO-HEADED SNAKE SCOWLS

## EPILOGUE

## AFTERWORD





# Prologue

The dark curtain of nightfall covered the world. A noble mansion stood in a corner of Pireas, the capital city of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, where a certain noble family was trying to escape.

All of them had hoods pulled up around their faces. They constantly looked around, fearful others would see them as they filed into the carriages they had prepared. Each family member held small lamps that didn't produce enough light to fully illuminate them, but around thirty or so shadows were moving in the darkness. Based on appearances, the group didn't seem to be composed of just men.

While the hoods hid them, the figures' range of builds showed there were also women and children among the group. Some were nursing mothers, holding small bundles to their chests. They were all climbing into carriages in the dead of night.

The scene was strange. They weren't getting into passenger carriages made for nobles. Instead, they were carriages farmers used to transport grain, usually covered by canopies.

It was indeed a rare sight in this part of the city, where so many noble residences stood. If someone were to witness the scene, they would assume the hooded figures were a group of criminals skipping town or on the run for similar reasons. Thinking the group dangerous, they would notify the guards who protected the capital. The group of hooded figures also understood that and feared getting caught as they boarded the carriages. Once the group had spread out and entered into the five carriages, they headed for the city gates in the southern part of Pireas.

The wheels turning on the carriages echoed throughout the night. Eventually, they saw the southern gate and the city's walls. Due to the lights placed around the area, they could see the large stone wall through the darkness. As they approached, the carriage drivers gulped as if feeling the weight of the



impressive, towering fortifications.

These walls were once an impenetrable iron shield protecting the city from would-be invaders. Under the current circumstances, they felt more like a hulking obstacle that prevented people from escaping the hell that was the capital city. But that depended on who was looking at them.

And so, the driver of the leading carriage tightly gripped the light in his hand as he held it overhead and traced out the number eight in the air.







In complete darkness, the orange flames resembled a will-o'-the-wisp floating in the air. They had decided on this motion before leaving, as the figure standing atop the city wall noticed it immediately. Judging from the figure's armor, they were the commanding officer of the capital's defensive garrison. His helmet and the clasps holding his cloak onto his armor indicated the man's status.

It was a little strange that a man of such standing was atop the gatehouse at night, watching over the capital. His name was Alan Wood.

He was the leader of the Sixth Battalion, which guarded the noble and artisanal quarters of the capital and the outer district, where the common people lived near the southern gate. He was usually found buried under a pile of paperwork in his office, and had no reason to be out here at this time.

As he was in charge of the division, he often patrolled the area during the day. But Alan's subordinates standing behind him couldn't help but question why he was out here at such an unusual time. At least, that much Alan could deduce from their expressions.

Alan went on with his task, fully understanding his subordinates' discomfort with the situation.

"They're here... Just as planned," said Alan. From his demeanor, he seemed somewhat nervous.

Although everything had proceeded smoothly, he wasn't very happy about the visitors. Honestly, he'd rather not aid them—that much was plain to see. But Alan was in no position to lose his nerve and back out of the plan. So, he signaled to the carriages below by waving his lantern.

"Open the gates," Alan ordered the vice commander standing by him. His voice was stern, and he now appeared like a commanding officer declaring an attack on enemy forces on the battlefield.

Vice Commander Eric furrowed his brow.

"Are you really sure? If this gets out, it'll land you in pretty hot water, Commander Wood..." replied Eric. His role was to support his superior as vice commander of the Sixth Battalion. He felt he had to confirm this action with his

commanding officer, and he admonished Alan with a sincere warning.

At the very least, Alan's subordinates, including Eric, all looked up to him. Eric's words calmed Alan. The vice commander looked genuinely concerned for his superior. If Alan was overthrown, the effects would ripple to his subordinates; as people said, "If one falls, they all fall." It was impossible to tell how serious said effect would be, making Eric naturally hesitant.

However, Alan simply shook his head in response to Eric's concerns. Seeing the look of anguish on Alan's face, Eric understood the trouble this decision would bring.

"I'm well aware of that... However, I accept the risks. Open the gates. I'll take full responsibility," added Alan.

Having been ordered by his superior, Eric could only respond in one way. There was certainly the question of just how much he could trust his superior when he said that he would take responsibility. Few superiors would assume such a burden to ensure their subordinates didn't get into any trouble. It was prudent not to place too much weight on their actual intentions in such instances.

The real problem was the decision those in power had made. In this case, it all relied on Queen Radine Rhoadserians, her assistant Helena Steiner, and Prime Minister Diggle McMaster. As the vice commander, Eric had no other option than to follow his superior's orders.

"Understood..." responded Eric, signaling the troops waiting behind him. His words sounded hesitant and conflicted. He would open the city gates at night without prior authorization, allowing a mysterious group to pass through. It was something he couldn't easily overlook, especially as a member of the royal capital garrison. The unit had been entrusted with protecting the gates and managing who entered and exited through them.

This was a dereliction of duty—or perhaps an even more serious offense. Depending on the circumstance, their defiance might be deemed an act of treason toward the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

Eric gazed at Alan as the worst-case scenario passed through his mind.



*If I'm going to stop him, now is my last chance,* thought Eric. He couldn't make Alan retract his order with a simple warning; force would be necessary. *However...*

Although Eric was proud of his swordsmanship, Alan Wood—a commoner who had risen to the level of an intermediate knight—was easily leagues more talented than him. Thus, he was aware of the outcome if they were to have a one-on-one duel. Eric then made a calm, composed decision as a knight.

*If I were to have a chance of winning, I would have to attack him from behind. Otherwise, we would have to overwhelm him with the other guards. Realistically, neither is feasible.*

Should Eric carry out a surprise attack, it would probably end in a draw—and that was being generous. It would be challenging for Eric and the soldiers to surround Alan now. If he unsheathed his sword, it would look like he was leading a revolt. Considering that, there was nothing that he could do right now.

But Eric couldn't accept that just standing there watching everything unfold was fine.

*What should I do? What can I even do?*

Doubts filled his mind. As Eric mulled over these thoughts, the situation progressed, and about a minute passed.

The gate opened with a strained groan. Then, the carriage wheels and the horses' hooves making contact with the stone pavement reverberated in the night air as they made their way through the gate.

There was no way Eric could stop the carriages. The die had been cast.

"All right... I will go remind the troops."

"Yeah... Sorry for the trouble," said Alan.

Eric nodded slightly before turning around. He hurriedly made his way down the steps inside the gatehouse wall, wondering to himself all the while. Although he couldn't stop Alan, what he could do was hide what happened tonight.

*It's fine. If the troops keep quiet about it, there'll be no problem... Or at least*

*the soldiers won't make such a foolish mistake.*

The troops on guard tonight would be automatically involved since they were present when the group passed through the gates. Although it was an order from their superior, opening the gates without confirming whether it was appropriate meant they had abandoned their duties. They were unlikely to spread word of what had happened, at least not the details.

Even if he were to silence the troops, there was no guarantee that the mysterious group went completely unnoticed by others. For example, a resident could have just happened to look out of their window and noticed the group. They could have found it strange and proceeded to notify the garrison, which would blow the whole operation wide open.

*Well, there's no real chance of that happening. If it were to go public...*

Alan, the battalion captain entrusted with guarding the city gate, would be most affected by that outcome. The minimum punishment he could receive was being dismissed from the city garrison.

*Eric losing his job would be an ideal conclusion.*

For this crime, Alan could face imprisonment or even become a slave. If he attempted to flee, he would have to run from the royal capital with his family before the soldiers had a chance to arrest him. Regardless, his reputation and achievements would all be for naught. It was a conclusion that was as plain as day.

It was natural to question the merit of risking all he had built up by allowing this group to pass through the gate.

*Of course, his position as captain of the garrison isn't all that important of a position. It's just an ordinary job without the status that comes from being a knight. If he didn't take his job seriously, then I can't deny the possibility that he was bribed.*

But Eric knew that the chance of that was low. While an ordinary soldier might have taken a bribe, it was unlikely that such a temptation would sway a commanding officer and induce them to open the gate at night.

*But if this information gets out, many people will assume money was his main*



*motivation for doing so, mused Eric, letting out a sigh filled with a sense of defeat and sadness.*

When children were asked what they wanted to be in the future, a lot of them responded that they wanted to be a knight. A small number of them said they wanted to join the garrison, so it was more appropriate to say that none answered they desired to join.

If there were an outlier who desired to join the city guard, they would likely be a child whose parents or close relatives were already a part of the garrison. The garrison played an essential role in protecting the city, but it wasn't a position that would see them achieve fame for incredible feats on the battlefield. It didn't lead anywhere in terms of professional development.

*That means Commander Wood could have been swayed with money...*

Eric also couldn't say with conviction that no other members of the capital city garrison had dirtied their hands with bribes. If this corruption were to go public, it would also become clear how many people participated in it in the course of a year.

*Many in the garrison were born commoners. There aren't many who started on the same level as the knights.*

The troops who made up the city defense forces weren't skilled in martial thaumaturgy like the knights. That also meant that they were looked down upon or viewed as a few grades lower than the knights.

*In any case, all we do is guard the vast area that the royal capital Pireas spans and patrol the streets, so it makes sense we're looked down on.*

The job of the soldiers within the garrison was the same as those of a modern-day policeman. Protecting the city required a lot of soldiers, and most of the people they policed were commoners like them. These commoners did not know martial thaumaturgy, meaning a soldier who underwent daily military training could easily suppress them.

*At times, they do have to deal with mercenaries or adventurers who know martial thaumaturgy, but there are rarely any exceptionally skilled people who cause trouble. Even in cases where someone can use martial thaumaturgy, the*

*city guard's sheer numbers would overwhelm most mercenaries and adventurers. Plus, regular soldiers fighting against a strong individual could also call for a commander or a battalion commander.*

The garrison's collective strength far surpassed that of any individual soldier. It was essentially quantity over quality.

Due to the garrison's all-commoner composition, most soldiers could imagine fighting an enemy while confined within the city. In the event of a siege, the garrison would remain high on the city walls, using stones and arrows to attack the invaders. Even though the garrison served the kingdom alongside the six units of knights, their lack of martial thaumaturgy meant the knights generally held them in disdain.

However, that only applied to the regular soldiers and the platoon commander.

Eric was unsure if knights looked contemptuously on garrisons from smaller cities. In major cities like the Pireas, only nobles who had obtained the rank of knight or commoners who had risen through the ranks and became high-ranking knights could hold positions of authority. Such included company commanders and above.

A battalion commander would need both luck and talent to survive the cutthroat competition for the position against the best of the best. The battalion commander was also in charge of the garrison, which protected the gate to Pireas and the capital city itself. They had to undergo a rigorous exam that tested their loyalty to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria and their knowledge about it.

*It is a job with zero glitz or glamour...*

Eric no longer tried to fool himself regarding his job's responsibilities. It was an important role because the guard preserved the peace of the royal capital. The kingdom considered that and treated commanders accordingly. Eric thought that way because of his position as vice commander. Since Alan held an even higher rank and was treated even better, it would be unfortunate if he gave it all up just for a little extra money. Nonetheless, Alan had still taken the risk.



*He must have a good enough reason for it.*

Eric had already tried to envision who the group of people really were, especially considering it had caused Alan to make such a dangerous decision. If Eric was correct, he questioned whether Alan's punishment alone would be enough to resolve the situation.

It depended on the situation, but the vice commander and the other soldiers in the garrison were likely to be caught in the eventual cross fire. If Eric's suspicions were correct, it would make those in the garrison a group that would become the target of much ire and ridicule from the commoners in Pireas.

*Come to think of it, there's only one house in the kingdom that would need to take such measures to escape the capital.*

House Romaine had stood trial a few days before and attempted to slander the kingdom's savior. As punishment, many of the house's members had been imprisoned. While House Romaine had been around since the formation of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, it now seemed it would become extinct.

Guilt by association was standard practice on Earth, meaning that the family of the guilty would receive the same punishment. There weren't many human rights on Earth, nor was there much in the way of policing criminals. Thus, there would be no way to keep crime down if they didn't have procedures in place that made examples of lawbreakers.

But it was a little different this time.

Some of House Romaine's blood relatives had been incarcerated, but not every single member of the family. Queen Radine had become known for her mercy, so many blood relatives had avoided prison.

*Nobles believe that a new monarch shouldn't bloody their hands from the get-go, so she pardoned some relatives of House Romaine. But just because it's merciful, that doesn't necessarily mean it's a good thing.*

Queen Radine's mercy had allowed them to escape prison, but she *had* seized their personal funds. Those who hadn't been imprisoned had lost everything they needed to live. Furthermore, the only exoneration they received was in regard to their slander of Ryoma Mikoshiba.

*No doubt they've been under fire from the commoners, considering how House Romaine used to treat them.*

The soldiers of the garrison bore witness to the nobles' violence and the hurt they caused the commoners. They also heard the commoners express their ire. Eric had heard about House Romaine's heir, Mario Romaine, and what he had done. Low-ranking members of the garrison had urged their commanders to come up with countermeasures to suppress anyone who might protest Mario's punishment, which was an almost unprecedented step for the soldiers.

Moreover, these soldiers knew the divide between the nobles and the common folk, and naturally wanted to avoid the risk of standing against nobles, thereby provoking their wrath. Even so, they had dared to advocate opposing nobles who came to Mario Romaine's defense. It was a testament to how far Mario Romaine had gone with his behavior.

It went without saying that the behavior of House Romaine's members—letting Mario Romaine run free and do as he wished—was nothing short of disgraceful.

*They're all birds of a feather anyway.*

All those family members had gotten a taste of just how uncertain the world can be. They had enjoyed a lot of special treatment being relatives of House Romaine, including being able to cover up their crimes. They were foxes borrowing the authority of a tiger; they could do whatever they wished under the aegis of House Romaine's status and power.

They lived boldly under such protection and were nothing once that was gone. Obviously, they would face the ire and hatred of the commoners hunters and fall prey like the foxes they were.

*But there are also young fox cubs among them too.*

That would make it difficult for the hunters. Their consciences and empathy would undermine their resolve, making it difficult for them to truly eradicate the foxes. However, there would probably be those who wished to get revenge and would gleefully attack them.

*I heard other nobles have been trying to cut off the House Romaine nobles*



too.

No one in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria had made any effort to openly support them. This was an unusual situation in noble society, considering most were related in some manner. Queen Radine had already made her intentions quite clear, though.

Prime Minister McMaster and Helena Steiner, who controlled the military, had already begun to work toward isolating House Romaine, so it would have been difficult for the other nobles to go against the national government. Even if they wanted to help House Romaine, doing so would have been dangerous.

*If there were people who attempted to help House Romaine, they would surely be fools emerging from under a huge rock.*

Fools like that would not stay a noble family for long. Of course, nobles in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria weren't known for being exceptionally skilled at politics. Even so, they weren't *entirely* incompetent fools. If anything, they were very well-versed in keeping themselves safe and their pockets full. They were incredibly well-suited to undermine their own country.

They were exceptionally skilled at protecting their fame and lives, so they escaped at night.

*In simple terms, they use their abilities to serve themselves and nothing else.*

It wasn't a completely bad thing. It was natural for living beings to be concerned with pursuing profits and happiness. The saying "Fish will not live in water that is too clean" originally meant that people who *appeared* too clean and innocent were exactly the opposite in reality. But that wasn't something that applied to only individual people.

The saying also applied to politics and society in general. Those who ignored reality and just chased after ideals would always face ruin. Just as fish wouldn't live in fully clean water, they would also not live in water that was too dirty.

In essence, it was the last drop that would cause the cup to overflow.

*Yet, the nobles of this country rarely pay much attention to keeping that balance of clean and dirty.*

It was no doubt a result of their being a part of the most privileged class for many years. Everything had come to a head. The situation resembled asking someone to pay their ever-increasing debt all in one payment.

*Such a debt belonged not only to Viscount Romaine but also to his relatives.*

Although the repayment differed depending on if the debt were money or grudges, the destination for those who owed debt, be they noble or commoner, was all the same. They either paid with their lives or had their dignity stolen from them as they were sold off as slaves.

No matter what, it would be a rather tragic ending.

For those who didn't wish to meet such a fate, leaving everything behind and escaping from it all was the only answer. It was a natural choice for the group to make. The real question was, why did Alan let relatives of House Romaine escape?

*Maybe one of the noblewomen came crying to him. There's only one reason a noblewoman would choose to appeal to the battalion commander,* thought Eric, as he considered why his senior had ordered them to open the gate.

Alan was born a commoner but was a prodigy, as shown by his passing the knighthood initiation test with flying colors. He was charismatic and skilled enough to become not only the battalion commander of the knights but commander of the royal capital garrison.

But no matter how charismatic or skilled he was, it was common knowledge that his merits weren't enough to make it in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, a strictly class-based society. Being born as a commoner was a major hindrance in one's life. This was especially true regarding the royal knights or the palace knights—one couldn't become one without a pure noble background.

*Of course, there have been exceptions to that rule...*

For example, Helena Steiner, the Ivory Goddess of War, was born a commoner yet rose to the rank of general. However, that *was* quite the exception to the rule. Only a few extraordinary people on the entire continent had ever pushed through the ranks and eventually become known as gods of war.

*Those people are monsters who have taken on human form. But we're different from them.*

If one possessed an above-average level of wisdom, they might advance regardless of their commoner background. The system was kind of merit-based. Conversely, it also revealed that one's ability wasn't enough to overcome social status, even if they were more capable than others.

Although Alan Wood was exceptionally talented, he was only as good as his status. He was fine for a commoner.

*I have no doubts that Alan is remarkable. Considering how he was raised as a commoner, he could have risen no higher than a company commander for a garrison in some other town or city.*

Even though he held the same status as a knight, others often disregarded him. He was only the battalion commander of the royal capital garrison instead of one in command of the royal knights. As a result, there was rarely any competition for Alan.

*That said, he is the battalion commander of the royal capital, protecting the castle gates of Pireas. Even a noble would see that he is worthy of some merit.*

Despite there being those with roles higher than him, he was rather valuable. His position was significant enough that even nobles often assumed the role, making it surprising that a commoner had it. If the choice between a noble and a commoner with no difference in abilities presented itself, the role would always go to a noble.

*I can't imagine any generous nobles willing to give up a coveted position to a commoner. It wouldn't be all that strange to want to prioritize the noble with a long-standing history over a commoner with a dubious background, mused Eric. In reality, Alan had risen to the role of battalion commander. There was a reason such a thing was allowed to happen.*

Alan Wood had married Baron Perman's fifth daughter, which could be the only reason for his ascension. She was an illegitimate child because the current head of the Perman barony had an affair with a commoner woman. But those from the Perman barony treated her as a pure-blooded noble, and the expectation was that she would marry another noble.



Rhoadserian nobles didn't look too kindly on marrying their daughters off to someone from another noble family. Should they marry into another family, they would have to pay a sizable dowry or become the second wife of a man old enough to be their father.

*Even though Alan was born a commoner, the Perman barony must have thought it was advantageous for her to marry a battalion commander, mused Eric as he recognized the protection Alan received from the Perman barony. If I'm not mistaken, the Perman barony is distantly related to House Romaine... In light of Baron Perman's protection and backing to receive promotion to battalion commander, Alan just couldn't ignore the noblewoman's pleas.*

All this meant the Permans were in the same situation as the Romaines. That was the weight Alan had to carry after being given a position that he usually wouldn't be able to reach. Moreover, he was betting his life and livelihood on tonight's decision.

*Not to mention, if he had rejected their pleas, it would've been a bad outcome for him anyway. I doubt tonight's happenings were instigated by Baron Perman alone.*

Several castle walls surrounded the fortress city of Pireas. Alan and his troops were tasked with protecting the districts where nobles and affluent merchants lived. Only one gate separated the commoner districts from those districts.

To leave Pireas, one would have to pass through yet another gate. No matter where that gate was, if the guards protecting it didn't permit them, the nobles would be unable to leave the capital. That meant at least one other group of guards was involved in their escape.

*There's a chance all the commanding officers and knight units have caught wind of this.*

It was plain to see that several nobles, all with power and influence, were involved. With so many people involved, there was no way the night's events would stay secret.

*The plot thickens... I imagine it'll get resolved differently depending on how it goes. The main question is, why did they have to go through this much trouble? Especially at a time like this...*

Although the nobles' authority was dwindling, for those in control of the country, it would be a small matter if the night's events went public. The timing was weird. Ryoma Mikoshiba had just been promoted as a reward for his victory in the previous war, and the country was creating a new political system under the new monarch, Radine Rhoadserians.

In addition, the O'ltormea Empire had restarted its invasion of the Kingdom of Xarooda, while the southern kingdoms had sent troops into the Kingdom of Myest. Problems were piling up everywhere. Rhoadseria was facing a life-and-death situation. One wrong move could spell the end of the nation.

*The nobles should be very aware of that.*

Such events spurred the nobles to act, since they understood the dangers. It was hard to say what their exact motivation was. Were they acting to save their families? Or was it an act of revenge toward Ryoma Mikoshiba, the leading cause of their situation?

*There is also the possibility they just want to hold him back too...*

But Eric didn't feel that was a satisfying explanation. Nobles, after all, were parasites living within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's walls. In that parasitic relationship, if the nation were to die, the nobles would die out along with it. This group of nobles had devised an elaborate plan to avoid that.

While the Perman family was fully aware of that, they still chose to prioritize their selfish wants and needs.

*I can't say I'm surprised... But I wonder if there's another reason for it.*

After all, this was just Eric's assumption, and he didn't have any concrete evidence to support it. But the thought remained in his head after he descended the stairs. Eric wouldn't be privy to an answer anytime soon. The reason for that was that the only one who knew the truth was the group of nobles, who carried the dark secrets of the kingdom with them.

"Well, there's no use thinking about it. I can only do what I can, after all," mumbled Eric as he hurried toward the assembly area near the castle gate. His mind was filled with fears, though he had hoped they were all for nothing. But Eric hadn't noticed something. That night, another group of people watched

everything unfold.

The men in the group wore all black clothing. They blended into the dark of night, loitering around like ghouls in the shadows. They were everywhere—on roofs and in alleyways. Scores were nearby; including the men hidden within the royal capital suburbs, the number was close to one hundred.

Most people weren't aware of their existence. And if someone discovered them, that unlucky person would meet a fateful end.





Only highly trained individuals could sense the mysterious figures' presence. The failure of Alan, Eric, and other high-level military personnel to notice them was a testament to their proficiency in stealth.

These mysterious men's eyes shone with predatory delight as they gazed upon their prey, starkly contrasting their undetectable presence. They were shades that lived and died in the shadows. The nobles with the most influence within Rhoadseria employed them as venomous daggers.

Additionally, they existed for one reason: to do their master's dirty work. They now lay in wait, creating a web around Pireas to complete the task their master gave them.

The nobles who had escaped by means of the shadows were at the center of their web. In a small hut on the outskirts of the capital, the chief of the dark shadows lying in wait was listening to a report from his subordinates.

"I see. So all is going according to plan so far... I have heard that Alan Wood, commander of the Sixth Battalion, is a rather virtuous man. He does have a commoner background. I was a little worried he wouldn't play along to our tune..." said the chief in a strained tone.

"According to the observers' report, Alan was rather hesitant," said one of the men.

"Hmm... Having the young lady speak to Baron Perman was the right idea," responded the chief, relieved. The chief, who was always calm and collected, was surprised to realize he had been so tense. Those who worked in the shadows had a lot of practice hiding their true emotions. But no one in the room thought anything was strange about their chief's response. It was only natural that they knew this mission's importance to their noble master.

*The fate of my very own House Halcyon hangs in the balance,* thought the chief.

At the recent meeting with Grand Duke Mikoshiba, Charlotte Halcyon, the newly elected head of her noble house, was recognized for her tactical and political abilities. While temporary, she played a significant role in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

The situation resembled someone getting a guilty verdict and receiving a suspended sentence. During that grace period, it was up to House Halcyon and the group of shadows to show their worth; otherwise, they would be immediately discarded.

There was one method of avoiding that—a method that would truly prove House Halcyon's usefulness.

*Well, the same could be said for other houses.*

Charlotte Halcyon, Diana Hamilton, and Bettina Eisenbach played central roles in their respective houses. Beautiful and brilliant, these three noble ladies were well accustomed to the political battles of the royal court.

None of them had ever picked up a sword and ridden into battle. But they excelled at intrigue and strategy. Wielding knowledge as their weapon, they were often involved in the shady happenings of the royal palace. Although they were women, they were the ones who would continue their house's lineage.

They were all hungry for the necessary results needed to ensure their families could continue living. On the whole, they were families that had been around since the founding of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

It was a struggle between life and death. There was a problem, though. This struggle featured unbreakable rules, regardless of the circumstances. Judges would be necessary to ensure adherence to the rules.

*Indeed, there was never an official declaration that there were judges. Still, I can't imagine there not being any at all...*

Not only that, the chief felt as if people were also watching his group—a sort of sixth sense. He had served House Halcyon for many years, but he was uneasy and couldn't quite put his finger on why.

*I don't think I'm just nervous or imagining things.*

This only left one explanation for his gut feeling.

*Grand Duke Mikoshiba has his own spies...*

While the chief didn't know their names or numbers, he had heard they had been around ever since Ryoma Mikoshiba headed for the Wortenia Peninsula.



Among the other operatives and agents working within the shadows in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, Ryoma's spies had become feared as demons and monsters. Every step of the way, they watched over the group of shadows.

*Just imagining something going wrong while they're watching is enough to give me nightmares...*

If such a thing were to happen, Radine and the others' efforts would be for naught.

"Has everything else been rearranged?" asked the chief.

"Yes... Exactly as commanded..."

"Good. They were strict orders from the lady herself. We cannot make even one mistake. You would do well to remember that," added the chief, highlighting what was at stake. "Though I'm sure you're well aware, that includes ensuring careful communication between the other houses. There is no room for error. We must primarily ensure that nothing gets misconstrued."

"I understand. I have emphasized that point among my subordinates, so do not worry."

"Good," responded the chief, wearing a stern expression as he nodded.

Given the need for results, it was only natural for one to want to maximize all potential achievements from their task. With the survival of their houses at stake, human instinct made one defensive, even if it meant destroying other houses in the process.

*Especially now that we have joined forces with House Hamilton and House Eisenbach...*

Even if House Halcyon belonged to the same noble faction as them, they were by no means allies. They weren't enemies either. Instead, these nobles were simply rivals to compete against as House Halcyon sought to expand its power.

At least before the northern subjugation, it would have been unthinkable for Charlotte and the others to form alliances. Joining forces with one another was an unexpected development that became a necessity.

*If we disturb the peace, it may incur Ryoma's displeasure. Not only would it*

*incur his displeasure, but he would probably deem the nobles impossible to manage. That would mean the end of House Halcyon.*

Ryoma Mikoshiba viewed the nobles of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria as literal garbage. That said, garbage did nothing but decay. It never intentionally tyrannized the kingdom's citizens or ruined its politics. When one considered that, the nobles of the kingdom were even worse than garbage.

*These famous houses have existed since the kingdom's conception, and they've managed fine up to now. But Ryoma is different. I doubt he will be merciful.*

The chief had never spoken to him directly, but the shadows dealt in information. They had gathered as much information about Ryoma Mikoshiba as they could. He had drawn only one conclusion from that information.

*If Ryoma Mikoshiba feels you're useless, he does not hesitate to get rid of you.*

Because of Charlotte's negotiations at the previous meeting, that disposal had been put on hold for now. But it was simply on hold. The chief, Charlotte, and the others all thought that Ryoma Mikoshiba wouldn't change his policy.

Due to the surprising attacks on the Kingdom of Xarooda and the Kingdom of Myest, the nobles only had a grace period. It was paramount that Charlotte and the others proved their worth to Ryoma Mikoshiba.

*Squabbling over leadership in such a situation is the height of stupidity. It was more or less a way of declaring that they had no control over the kingdom's nobility,* thought the chief.

Self-control and self-restraint were vital traits. On the basis of that mutual understanding, House Halcyon and other houses' spies were to carry out the current scheme.

*Right now, everything is going to plan. But if this were a play, we would have just reached the halfway mark of the first act. It's too soon to relax.*

The chief was confident in his subordinates and trusted Charlotte, the mastermind behind the scheme. As Charlotte was a woman, she often worked outside the public eye. She was more talented at it than her father, Marquis Halcyon. However, the chief understood to a painful degree that there were

few absolutes in this dirty work.

“I hope everything proceeds without issue,” said the chief. The words were unfitting for a man who had earned his livelihood by getting his hands dirty. It was also his sincere wish. Moreover, the chief knew too well that all good plans could go to waste if there were one tiny discrepancy from the original plan. He had given himself up to fate. Suddenly, a shooting star flew across the night sky as if it were a sign the gods had answered his wishes.



# Chapter 1: Collaboration of Shadows

A horse-drawn carriage transported a group of nobles along a side road in the farming region of Heraklion, in the southern part of Rhoadseria. They were near a forest south of the fortress city and were three to four days away from Galatia, which sat on the border to Myest. House Romaine owned some villages and cities around this area.

Thick clouds covered the sky, leaving hardly any moonlight. The stars were barely visible, and the party's surroundings were coated in black. Lanterns—a rather modern convenience—didn't exist on Earth; one could barely see two steps ahead of them in the dark.

The night was a completely different world from the daytime, protected by the rays of sunshine. Even experienced fighters like mercenaries and knights wouldn't dare to travel at nighttime without urgent reason, and they were fully prepared for the dangers ahead.

Nobles, nursing mothers among them, had only small lamps to rely on. It was essentially a suicide mission. But they were all aware of that fact and had chosen to traverse the night on Earth.

A baby's cry cut through the silent night.

"It's okay... Don't cry... Please..."

The baby was either hungry or had soiled its diaper, and the woman tried her best to soothe the child. All babies cried, but doing so now was incredibly dangerous for them. Barriers stopped monsters from getting onto covered roads. However, that didn't stop bandits and other ruffians from accessing the roads. Even the barriers meant to keep monsters out weren't perfect.

While it was a one-in-a-million chance, monsters that stampede toward human settlements could easily break through both the barriers and their endowed thaumaturgy cast on it. Besides, the nobles were traveling on a side road that branched off from the main road.

Although the roads were protected, the magic emanating from the barrier was weak. It bordered the monsters' territory, making it highly dangerous. There was no way a baby's cry would trigger a stampede, but they still had to be incredibly cautious.

They were escaping from the country; it was human nature they wanted to avoid detection. That said, shouting at a crying baby who couldn't understand their words would only worsen the situation. So, the chief of their group, who sat at the front, holding the reins of the horses, looked behind into the carriage and spoke to the woman.

"Is everything all right? It's just a little further to go..." The chief knew that his words just functioned as temporary peace of mind, yet there was not much else he could say. The woman looked toward her husband and nodded.

"Yeah... I know." Her voice was frail. She was very aware of the situation they had put themselves in and knew that this was no time to ask for a small respite, even though she was reaching the limit of her energy.

The woman seemed to be in her late teens, not yet reaching her twenties. She was the daughter of Baron Mondou and her husband worked for House Romaine as a secretary. Even though she was still young and should have been full of life, she wore a distinctly exhausted expression.

*It's no wonder... We haven't been able to take a proper break yet.*

About ten days had passed since the group escaped Pireas. They had no opportunity to rest for long and had been traveling as fast as they could, day and night. The roads were made of cobblestones, and their carriages lacked suspension. Also, the constant jostling from the roads they were on had depleted their energy. They had taken small breaks where they could, but that took the form of simply lying in the shade of a tree.

None of them could stay at an inn in one of the villages or cities, so they had no opportunity to truly recover from their exhaustion. After all, they were traveling alongside roads where they wouldn't be seen by anyone else. The lack of paved roads made the journey incredibly exhausting.

*Even though we're just riding along, this isn't a carriage made to hold people... If I knew it was going to be like this, I'd have advised my uncle to pass*

*along paved roads.*

The woman had responded so as to not worry her husband, but it was plain to see that they were all at their limit. They had brought cushions and other items to make the trip easier, though it was still just a horse-drawn carriage used for transporting goods.

Carriages for nobles were pure luxury, while wagons were not to be expected to be equipped with such features like proper suspension. The carriage carried not only the husband and his wife but also two other families. They had used a piece of cloth in place of a curtain to partition the space they had in the carriage. It was better than nothing at all.

*There were no other options than them looking away when it came to feeding the baby...*

Commoners rarely worried about showing skin when feeding their babies. They might not have liked doing it publicly, but they didn't seem to mind it much. However, as a noblewoman raised like a princess, she was heavily against anyone aside from her husband seeing her exposed skin, making feeding the baby in front of others a huge problem.

Even though they were in rather urgent circumstances, she still found it difficult to be pragmatic about it—and that wasn't just regarding feeding the baby. While short durations were fine, having no privacy all day and all night had been really tough on her mental state.

*She was not used to seeing to her baby's needs; the wet nurses and maids usually did that. Yet she found it challenging to have privacy within the carriage, even if they shared it with fellow members of House Romaine. Plus, the carriage continuously shook for ten days straight.*

For a noblewoman, she had done well putting up with it for so long, but she had begun to reach her limit. All the man could do was nod in response.

*I understand that she's reaching her limit both physically and mentally, but we can't afford to lose any time.*

The man knew he should at least say some gentle words, though. Even just saying, "We can rest in a little while," would be enough to raise her spirits.

Based on their situations, it would be nothing but a lie. It wouldn't even be a kind lie. Resting here would be nothing short of suicide—the woman was also aware of that, so there was not much meaning to lying to her.

*Just as long as we get through here unscathed...*

Being members of House Romaine, they had already had people talking behind their backs. But now that they had escaped from Pireas using illegal means, they were criminals. Wanted posters were already in circulation in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. If captured, they would be sent straight back to the royal capital.

*Should it come to that, anyway...*

The people of Rhoadseria would expect them to receive severe punishment. No one would ignore the wishes of the populace and try to defend House Romaine.

*Then there is that demon. He wouldn't hesitate to execute us.*

The outcome was as natural as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. This man and his family viewed Ryoma Mikoshiba as a demon who existed only to bring them pain and suffering.

*Compared to that, I'm willing to take a few risks.*

It was consensus among House Romaine that small sacrifices would not be avoided to escape such evil. But it seemed there were still a few people who questioned that. Even if they had reached that conclusion as a group, it was normal that some of them were wary about it, or had their doubts. The problem was, would they then show those doubts and worries in their words and actions?

The woman, having finally soothed the crying baby, said, "Are we really going to head to Tarja like this, dear...?"

She had hesitated to ask the question, constantly looking up and down, opening her mouth as if she was about to speak while she cradled the baby. Her body language indicated she had built up courage to ask about it. Her voice was weak, a result of the long journey. There was a sense of guilt and fear in her speech. She was logically questioning the group's consensus.

They had abandoned their country, Rhoadseria, and were headed to Tarja, hoping to take refuge with relatives while planning their recovery. This act would label their offspring and their offspring's descendants as traitors. It wasn't just a matter of the family dying out entirely; the family would forever bear the title of cowards and traitors.

The man and his family had left the royal capital so quickly that they had no time to discuss anything. Reality had caught up to the woman as they approached the border. However, the man holding the reins shook his head slowly.

"Do you think there's another way?" The man directed his strong will and criticism toward his wife's question. He wondered why she suddenly started questioning everything. They had already escaped the capital and couldn't simply return all high and mighty.

"You're right... We have relatives in the Kingdom of Tarja and ties with my family, the Mondou Barony. It is a lot better than going to another country. But we'll be labeled as traitors. Will they really accept us?"

Several noble houses in Rhoadseria were blood-related with families in Tarja, including the upper-level knight families. House Romaine was one of them, and it was a remnant of a time where both kingdoms put down their swords and observed a time of peace. Those blood relations were formed to honor the peace, even if it had been several decades ago.

Nowadays, the two kingdoms barely interacted. While they weren't openly enemies, they viewed one another as rivals, but that didn't matter to nobles. They prioritized blood relationships above all else. Even if there were no longer any other international interactions, those with family kept in touch. As a result, the nobles of House Romaine believed they could rely on those family connections within the Kingdom of Tarja. But that was a one-sided assumption.

*If they take us in, they'll end up making enemies of Ryoma Mikoshiba, an influential man who climbed his way to the top. Will they accept such risks and let us in?* thought the woman.

The nobles of House Romaine had anticipated this happening when Viscount Romaine was arrested and had sent a letter to their relatives in the Kingdom of



Tarja. Those relatives had responded, saying they would happily take them in. But those were just words in a letter—and words were wind. They had no way of knowing if their relatives really would keep true to their word.

Once again, the woman hesitated before posing another question to her husband.

“Couldn’t we have just accepted Ryoma Mikoshiba’s proposal? I know it is shameful to admit as a person related to House Romaine... But I still wonder, can’t we just rely on his mercy?”

From the wife’s perspective, this was a reasonable proposition. After all, Ryoma Mikoshiba had asked them to abandon House Romaine, live as ordinary commoners in town, and surrender all their possessions as reparations to the national treasury. It was a rather hefty price for them to pay. However, there was a possibility they would receive some of their fortunes back if they found jobs within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy.

*Considering what the viscount did, I feel he was merciful toward us. He even arranged for us to continue to lead lives within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.*

That didn’t mean that the people of the country would suddenly hate them any less, even if they received pardon from Queen Radine. Commoners would think the Romaine nobles were living a carefree life without any sacrifice, further inciting the people’s anger toward them.

The nobles of House Romaine had lost their chance at atonement, which in turn dealt a hard blow to their prospects. If they had given up their fortunes to the kingdom, it would have greatly altered the situation. Of course, that wouldn’t free them of all their crimes, but it would still have meant that they had sacrificed something, even if it wasn’t exactly the appropriate amount of money. People would give them an easier time than if they made no concessions.

Despite legal declarations, their crimes couldn’t be erased, and they’d still be morally responsible for them.

*At the very least, we could still live within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. It would be hard to escape all responsibility for our past.*

People would bring that up at any opportunity and gossip behind their backs. There were two very different ways of avoiding that.

One method required using authority and force to silence any criticism. The other would have involved surrendering everything and becoming punching bags who willingly accepted everything demanded of them as they waited for the storm to blow over. However, the man and his wife could not choose either in their current situation.

House Romaine had lost its status, so they no longer had any authority, nor was it very realistic for them to use violence to silence the hostile voices. If they readily accepted all the criticism around them, there was no future for them that way either.

*I guess we just have to find some common ground.*

That meant they would have to return their illegally accumulated funds, making amends for that crime, at least. They would then live on as commoners.

*As someone used to living as a noble, submitting all my funds to the country and living as a commoner is a cruel fate... To make it worse, I'd no doubt face criticism from those around me... But even then...*

She couldn't help but think it was still better than being punished as a traitor.

*Will the Kingdom of Tarja really take us in?*

The woman couldn't get that one thought off her head. She had reviewed all of their options but still felt that Ryoma Mikoshiba's offer didn't sound bad. If anything, it was worth considering, at least. But it seemed her question had angered her husband as his face turned crimson.

"You want to bend the knee to *that* upstart?! He mercilessly murdered my cousin Lord Mario, cornered my uncle to blame him for it, and even went as far as chasing our family out so that we would become extinct! Yet you want to beg for mercy?!"

The husband's sudden frenzy caused the baby to burst into tears again.

"Ah... Please stop crying, son..." The woman tried to soothe her son while dealing with her husband's anger. Though, that wasn't her only problem. On

the other side of the blanket partition, the other House Romaine members were resting. They were also a young couple traveling with a young child, so while they could sympathize, it probably wouldn't be long before they began complaining.

*Why today of all days is he crying so much? If only I had a wet nurse.*

The face of the wet nurse who always helped the woman appeared in her mind, followed by the face of the wet nurse's husband, whom they had to fire without giving them any compensation money. Looking back, the young noblewoman had no right to complain. Even so, she tried her best to soothe her child, but it was for naught.

Soon, war cries from both sides of the forest drowned out the baby's whimpering. A light abruptly pierced the darkness. Their numbers were astounding, with at least one hundred lanterns, perhaps even more. The man pulled tight on the horse's reins, bringing the carriage to a sudden stop, which jolted the passengers in the back. But the man's sudden stop turned out to be the right decision to make.

Among the sea of torches, dark figures hid in the shadows.

"Huh... Huh?! Bandits?!"

It was the second worst thing the man expected to happen as they escaped. Although, he was unsure if being caught by soldiers from the capital was really worse than being caught by bandits.

*However, this isn't that bad... If they are bandits, I can at least negotiate with them,* thought the man.

Should the bandits be ruthless, they would simply kill the men and sell the women and children into slavery, not accepting monetary negotiations. But some bandits often let people pass through if they simply paid a road toll. That all depended on whether they had claimed an area as their base and established roots there or were simply wanderers who used thievery to make money. They wouldn't know in advance which type the group they faced.

Yet it was not what the man expected; instead, it was far worse.

A rock the size of a clenched fist struck the man. Red blood poured from his

cheek, dripping onto the earth below.

“Oh, no!” cried the woman, laying her baby on the carriage floor as she hurried to attend to her husband with a cloth. The man felt dizzy, yet he could clearly understand all the shouting around him.

“They’re from House Romaine! Kill them all!”

“They’re behind everything! Let me do it! Viscount Romaine had his way with my daughter, then killed her! I’m going to murder them all!”

“My family starved to death! All a result of their stupidly high taxes!”

“My son passed in front of a House Romaine carriage once, and they cut him down where he stood! Today’s the day I get my revenge!”

“Kill them! Kill them all! Completely wipe them out!”

Their words were filled to the brim with hatred and anger, teeming with murderous intent.

*Shit... Have the locals come to attack us?*

The man knew this would happen if the locals in this area found out about their group. It was a reasonable possibility for the locals who lived within the House Romaine fiefdom and had suffered under their rule to take revenge. Because of that, the man had chosen to travel on the backroads to avoid them.

*How? How...did they know we were coming through here? Why were they waiting to ambush us?*

Moreover, the man had specifically chosen roads out of the public eye that few people used. It was also nighttime when monsters were even more common. These attackers had not taken this decision lightly. Even if they were strong in numbers, it was still a risky decision.

Fire arrows began to rain down on the carriage. The neigh of the horses and the screams of his wife filled the man’s ears.

*I have to protect them...*

His wife clung to their crying son. He knew he was the only one who could protect them. But his thoughts were interrupted as he slipped into an eternal

darkness he would never return from. Then, the light of the pale moon peeked through the clouds, illuminating the earth below.





It was like a kind light sent from the gods to soothe the dying. The man had but one small fortune at the end of his life; he would go to hell without having to see the demise of his beloved family.

About half a month had passed since the remnants of House Romaine had left the royal capital, Pireas. Stars sparkled in the sky alongside the pale white full moon that hung in the night sky. It was around 9 p.m., a time when most people would finish dinner before enjoying a long soak in the bath, ridding themselves of the day's exhaustion. For the people of Earth, living in a culture without modern-day commodities such as electricity, it wouldn't be strange for them to crawl into bed after their baths.

Regardless, the young supreme ruler had no time for such luxury. Ryoma Mikoshiba scanned various documents, signed them, and stored them in a payment box. Endowed thaumaturgy illuminated his office in the Salzberg mansion. It didn't seem like the mountain of documents on his desk was getting any smaller. But he was fast at his work and had made good progress. The only problem was that more would be brought in and added to the pile whenever he finished a few documents. He was in a strange, unrewarding limbo.

He had little choice and couldn't simply abandon it. Doing so would mean abandoning Xarooda and Myest, which were ravaged by war. Ryoma understood that he could only do one thing—check the documents and sign them if there were no errors. Not that he was particularly pleased with the task.

*To think I'd come to another world and be stuck doing paperwork... How did I even end up here?* mused Ryoma.

He stopped writing with his quill pen and fell into thought. He already knew the answer to his question and could only imagine the face of Gaius Valkland, the O'ltormea Empire's court thaumaturgist. The man was the very same who summoned him to Earth.

*It's all his fault,* thought Ryoma as he busied his hands again with paperwork. Every minute felt like an hour. As he worked, he could only sigh and get on with it. *I feel like a salaryman working through the height of Japan's economic boom. I've had one hell of a time since coming here... And to think I used to be a*

*normal high school student.*

He arrived in this hellish world as a high schooler. A few years had passed since then. If he were still in Japan, he would probably be around the age of a university student or a fresh graduate exploring the job market.

Nevertheless, he had somehow found himself at the helm of a country's future. He couldn't deny that he had garnered the affection of Lady Luck. After all, he had the fortune of meeting the Malfist twins, who were like his shadow; Lione, known as the Crimson Lioness; and the Igasaki clan. It was also true that Ryoma Mikoshiba had both the ability and qualities to be a politician. Had that not been the case, he wouldn't have been promoted to the second highest rank in the kingdom, below only the monarch.

But not everyone with the ability and qualities for such a role personally wanted to do it. Even in modern society, younger people preferred working in ordinary positions where they could focus on their private lives more than being promoted into roles with more responsibility. In other words, they liked a better work-life balance.

*If that asshole hadn't summoned me here, I'd have no doubt made my way through tons of new movies and anime by now.*

Enjoying movies, anime, good food, and alcohol was a modest life that wasn't so difficult for people living in modern Japan to achieve. Some people might not live such a life, but hard work and a little luck might give them one they could enjoy. It wasn't a life only reserved for influencers on social media with tons of followers or famous actors.

Ryoma's family had enough funds, and he had the appropriate academic experience and ability. If he hadn't been summoned to this world by Gaius, he would have been leading his ideal, ordinary life in Japan.

*That all feels like a distant dream now, after everything...*

A dream had become a reality, and reality had become a dream.

*As a man, I won't say I've never dreamed of being summoned to another world. To actually have been summoned to one... Let's just say I have a few choice words to say to Lady Luck.*

If only it had remained a dream. Ryoma, unfortunately, would never wake up from this nightmare.

*Thinking about what my grandfather told me, I'm not so sure I can blame it all on Gaius.*

Gaius was behind the summoning circle that brought Ryoma here, though. That much couldn't be denied. As his grandfather Koichiro would say, Ryoma being summoned to Earth wasn't a simple twist of fate.

*After all, my father was summoned here as well...*

That summoning had occurred around the time the population of Rearth would hit around eight billion. When summoned, Ryoma didn't know how large the population was on Earth, but his summoning was probably a one-in-a-billion chance.

Koichiro and Asuka Kiryuu were also summoned to this world shortly after Ryoma. The Mikoshiba family had achieved astronomical odds of everyone being summoned to the same world.

*No matter how it happened, it wasn't mere coincidence.*

The cause behind all of it made no difference to Ryoma and his situation. Being able to enjoy dramas and movies on Earth was just a dream within a dream. It was difficult to produce food here that would match the same quality as a three-star Michelin restaurant. Ryoma had pure luck when he recruited the skilled chef Kikuna Sameshima, and there was a limit to the freshness and quality of the food on Earth.

It wasn't like Ryoma was simply a bystander during all of this. He planned to breed more livestock, such as cows and pigs, and produce more agricultural goods, like wheat and apples. Simply put, he wanted to introduce so-called branded items.

However, it would take years before he could realize such a goal as well as a lot of trial and error. Ryoma aimed for a certain level of produce that would take him around five or ten years to achieve. Even if he invested half a century in it, it was still possible that it would remain unrealized.

*The world is at war too. It will be difficult to achieve.*

Essentially, a world wrecked by war would focus on developing weapons more than advancing civilization with efficient cultivation methods. People often asserted that a civilization could only progress if it possessed sufficient food and clothing. Without them, advancement would prove difficult.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. It didn't stop Ryoma from working his way through the documents, though.

"Come in," said Ryoma without looking up from his work. Usually, the soldiers guarding the doors on either side of the office would confirm who the visitor was and their business, but this time was different. Bureaucrats trailed back and forth with bundles of documents, and Ryoma had a lot of visits from soldiers and nobles. Having been promoted to the prestigious title of archduke, he knew that he should present himself accordingly and have methods to achieve this. Keeping it simple worked best in this situation.

In addition to the Igasaki clan, he had his guards spread around the perimeter of Count Salzberg's mansion protecting it. Very few people could enter undetected, make it to the office, and knock on the door. But it seemed to be a guest that Ryoma wasn't expecting.

"Gennou..." A slight wrinkle formed on Ryoma's brow. His voice sounded somewhat unhappy—that wasn't just Gennou's imagination. While this response was a little strange for the young ruler, Gennou carried on the conversation.

"Yes, my lord. I apologize for interrupting you while you are busy, but do you have a moment?"

At that moment Ryoma could be considered one of the busiest people in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. He was fighting two wars, sending reinforcements to Myest and Xarooda.





Anointed Supreme Commander Ryoma Mikoshiba faced a variety of important decisions. He was so busy he would have appreciated any help he could get. Only an important report would stop Ryoma from continuing his work. Since it was the leader of the Igasaki clan, who were known for their intelligence gathering and espionage, Gennou could only have been here about a limited amount of topics.

“Is it what we talked about before...?” asked Ryoma, sighing. It was a report he didn’t want to hear, even though it was Ryoma who had ordered Gennou to see the task through to the end. Since he gave the order, Ryoma was responsible for listening to the report, no matter how hard it was to do so.

“Yes, it’s a report from my subordinate...” Gennou responded.

“I see... Judging from your expression, I assume it went as planned?” Ryoma asked.

“Yes... The secret agents sent out by Charlotte Halcyon stirred up the commoners living on the outskirts of Prolegia and Thelmis. They went on to attack the group of House Romaine nobles.”

Ryoma could envision the fate of the nobles based on Gennou’s report alone.

“Wiped them all out, I see...”

Gennou nodded silently in response.

“Hmm... I knew they would head to a different country since they refused my offer, but they were going to the Kingdom of Tarja... Well, it’s not like they could escape to Myest or Xarooda; my territory is in the north too. That means the only direction they could go was south. They knew it was a dangerous risk to take, but they had no other option,” mumbled Ryoma as he leaned against the back of his chair, looking at the ceiling. He knew that the chance of them fleeing was so high that he had given them one last chance and offered them an opportunity to live as ordinary citizens, working to make their money.

*However, they willingly declined the offer.*

At that point, Ryoma had expected them to flee the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

*They could have lived as ordinary citizens with their money from working. But I*

*can't imagine they would have been prepared to face all the criticism and insults from those around them.*

Even if they had the resolve to withstand it, it still wouldn't have ended well. People who had lost their noble status could not remain silent and live as ordinary commoners. The group of nobles understood that and decided to flee the country instead of accept Ryoma's offer.

*They probably didn't trust me, but that wasn't the only reason.*

Ryoma had brought down House Romaine, so Ryoma suddenly changing his direction and offering them help would have been unbelievable. But the real reason they had declined his offer wasn't because they didn't trust him. The actual reason was that they were opposed to working for such an upstart with dubious origins who simply got lucky.

*Nobles and their pride... I don't get it. If they were wiped out, it would have all been for nothing.*

A tragic ending for them.

"Even so, what were they thinking, passing through House Romaine's old territory? Did they think the peasants there needed them or something?" stated Ryoma.

"They may have thought traveling through land they were familiar with would make it easier to shake off any pursuers. It is also the shortest route to the south," responded Gennou.

"I see... Makes sense. It is a huge boon having a lay of the land if trying to get to Tarja quickly..."

Criminals often chose areas they knew well or large cities when planning their escape.

*Escaping through a territory they don't know well would be mentally taxing, so I understand their decision. When I killed Gaius and fled O'ltormea, my situation was completely different.*

In his escape from the O'ltormea Empire, Ryoma chose the quickest path to the country's border. But he had to decide based on very little knowledge of

where he was. He had just been summoned to Earth and had no prior knowledge about this world. The distance on the map was essential to his decision, even though choosing the shortest route wasn't always correct.

At a minimum, Ryoma believed the House Romaine nobles' actions were reckless. Even if they had no choice but to escape by heading south, they could have entirely bypassed their old territory.

*They could have passed through nearby noble lands if they were familiar with the region.*

Not all noble lords would quietly let them travel through their lands, but at least they would have avoided the ire of the commoners. In the event of an attack, they could have negotiated with the nearby noble lords to ensure their safety. If it were commoners from the old Romaine territory instead, they could do nothing.

*It's only natural that the commoners have so much hate and anger toward House Romaine.*

According to reports from the Igasaki clan and Count Zeleph, Ryoma already knew that the Romaines ruled with an iron fist—they were harsh and unforgiving. The Romaines heavily taxed the peasants, and if they couldn't pay, they would be sold off to slave merchants. Even if a famine hit them due to a failed harvest, they still had to pay taxes.

Judging from how Mario Romaine conducted himself within the royal capital, it went without saying how he acted within his territory. The citizens who lived under the Romaines' tyranny for many years saw the noble family as their enemy.

*Years and years of ancestral hate...*

The only reason there had never been any riots in the Romaine's territory was due to the strength of their knights and their status as a viscount family. Without those two things, the commoners would mercilessly turn on them and exact their revenge.

*There's no way they would do nothing with their enemies before their eyes. It's very easy for those not involved to say that revenge is wrong. But for those*

*affected, getting revenge is as natural as breathing.*

When given the chance to take revenge, commoners armed themselves with weapons and attacked.

*The locals didn't mind if a third party puppeteered the entire situation,* mused Ryoma. If anything, they were just grateful they were given the opportunity for revenge.

“Disposing of obstacles without dirtying your hands... Good move. I was considering doing the same thing...” Gennou complimented Ryoma.

“Yes... I believe it's a rather natural decision to make,” Ryoma responded.

Had Ryoma gone easy on the nobles, it may have caused some damage to the image the commoners held of him as a revolutionary and a hero. Being personally involved in eradicating House Romaine would have done the same. At the very least, it would have been a bad move to make at this time.

The best option was choosing the method that would mend the situation entirely to avoid that.

“However... There's not really any methods I would want to use... I don't really enjoy doing stuff like this...”

Gennou nodded solemnly. Plots and tricks weren't inherently bad or crude. They were a respectable, efficient method of ensuring the safety of oneself and their companions. From a more ethical point of view, they weren't deeds that one would take pride in. But from the perspective of a politician, it was often the only means to an end.

During the Warring States period in Japan, Amago Tsunehisa—a mastermind of strategy—rose from the position of *ronin* to ruler of the ten states in the *San'in* region.

*Mouri Motonari, who killed Amago, was also renowned as a military commander well-versed in strategy.*

It was rather natural for weaker people to rely on strategies and plots in order to overcome stronger people, making up for their difference in strength. Using such strategies led to the contents of such methods becoming darker and more



morbid over time.

Like Amago Tsunehisa and Mouri Motonari, Ukita Naoie was another renowned skilled strategy leader, who was known as one of the main figures of the Warring States period. He was said to have been feared by his half-siblings and even his retainers.

His half brother, Ukita Tadaie, used to wear chain mail when appearing before his elder brother, Naoie, out of fear of assassination. Although it was a turbulent time, where even families feuded, it spoke to Ukita Naoie's reputation that even his blood-related younger brother had to practice such caution when with him.

At minimum, it was easy to assume that the military commander, Ukita Naoie, would do anything to win.

*If you get overly accustomed to deceiving others with schemes, it can negatively impact your personality.*

It wasn't as if Ryoma had no recollection of what he had ordered Gennou to do. Those skilled in strategy and scheming had to be incredibly aware of themselves and the thoughts of those around them too.

*Well, no use crying over spilled milk.*

Although Ryoma's attitude was rather cold, he couldn't sit and think about the order he gave, which spelled the end of the Romaine nobles' lives. He had friends and subordinates who all believed in and followed him. Then, he asked Gennou about the results of another order he had given.

The question was even more important than finding out the fate of House Romaine. It would affect the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy and the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's espionage activities going forward.

"Gennou, from your point of view, how skilled are the nobles' spies here? According to Charlotte and the others, they gathered quite a talented bunch."

"In terms of combat, they couldn't lay a finger on the Igasaki clan. But they seem fairly skilled in everything else. There are a few highly skilled spies, but they do not seem very well-versed in the art of ninjutsu. In all honesty, there are many facets they would all benefit from improving on. Even with all that

considered, I think you will be able to make good use of them, my lord,” responded Gennou, nodding slightly.

Ryoma picked up on what Gennou meant immediately. “I see... Meaning they’ll do well gathering information and rumors?”

“Yes... Not that the Igasaki clan wouldn’t be able to do that as well. However, those spies know their way around these parts far better than us, so it would be easier for them to avoid detection.”

“In that case, is it safe to assume they did well sharing the information between noble houses?”

“Yes, I didn’t see anyone trying to get ahead of another. They were under strict instruction. Considering it was a rather improvised alliance, I would say it went incredibly well.”

Gennou wouldn’t say that it was perfect. But that much was inevitable, as each spy was from a different noble house and thus acted individually. Not only was the method of information sharing hastily decided, but also which house would play a role.

Not to mention, the spies were originally an independent group. Their masters’ houses were formerly separate entities with conflicting interests, even though they were now all in an alliance. While they weren’t enemies, neither were they friends. Although a little awkward, they had done well to play a part in the act Charlotte and the others had drafted together.

This was the work of those accustomed to working behind the scenes. Upon hearing Gennou’s glowing review, Ryoma nodded in satisfaction.

*I see... In that case, I can then leave internal espionage work to Charlotte and the others. Although the Igasaki clan are incredibly talented, I can’t keep asking them to do everything.*

Besides the Wortenia Peninsula, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had acquired the Salzburg manor and the ten noble houses of the north. Its scope had long surpassed that of a mere regional ruler and was now around the level of being its own country. One could say the Igasaki clan was close to their limit, gathering intelligence in other regions and working on covert operations in

other countries.

If anything, the land that Ryoma controlled was bigger than the countries that made up the southern kingdoms. In addition, he had decided to help Queen Radine and became involved with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's secret intelligence too. Ryoma would have liked to leave all of it to capable individuals but struggled to find them.

Viscount McMaster supported Queen Radine as prime minister and handled national politics, while Helena Steiner managed the military.

Of course, the nobles who had pledged allegiance were still going strong and looking for any opportunity to help. That said, Ryoma couldn't leave secret intelligence work to untalented, unknown people. He was also aware that the best way to find suitable people for the job was to look for them. Despite that, the situation had changed a great deal now that he had to send reinforcements.

*Gennou and the others would be able to do something, but they already have enough on their plate. If something were to go awry, the Igasaki clan might not be able to handle it on their own.*

While the Igasaki clan was outstanding in what they did, even they had their limits. The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was involved in sending reinforcements to the neighboring countries of Xarooda and Myest, which were at war. It also managed the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's secret intelligence.

The Igasaki clan had dealt with most things during times of peace, so it was uncertain how they would fare in times of emergency.

*It would be no laughing matter if the Igasaki clan suddenly couldn't respond in a time of emergency because I had spread them too thin.*

If there were to happen, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy would suffer a huge blow. Or rather, they would be lucky if it were just that. Such a thing happening far from the headquarters in Sirius could spell the end of the grand duchy entirely.

*I can't take such risks...*

Thus, the best way to handle the situation was to increase the number of personnel. That did not only apply to espionage work. It was a fundamental way

of thinking one could use to manage a company in the modern age or a country on Earth. The critical part was understanding the importance of increasing the number of personnel and ensuring efficiency.

*Bringing on more staff than one needs can also cause problems, so it's not as simple as just increasing numbers.*

Not having enough workers would exhaust those already working there, but too many would lead to issues with organization and management. There was no meaning behind bringing on more people who didn't have the required skills or abilities. No guarantee existed that one could find suitable people, no matter how selective they were.

There were two options if it came to that: taking on people who weren't suitable and training them, or rearranging the structure of the organization as a whole and dealing with the staffing shortage that way. Striking a balance was key when managing an organization, and was where the president or the head could show their ability.

And so, it seemed the spies employed by Charlotte and the others were skilled enough to have passed Gennou's strict inspection.

*In that case, I can leave the espionage work to them,* thought Ryoma. It would mean less work for the Igasaki clan, somewhat lightening their burden. *I'll have the Igasaki clan keep a close eye on their movements. That should be all right for now.*

He was unsure if he could fully trust Charlotte and the others. They had pledged their allegiance to Ryoma Mikoshiba and offered to help. Undoubtedly, that decision was in their best interests, ensuring the longevity of their families.

They all understood that truth, which was why they worked with some of the best spies, a testament to their ability and usefulness. As the person with the most authority within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, Ryoma had taken the reality of the situation into account. If he were to fall into a dilemma, there was no proof that Charlotte or the others *wouldn't* betray him.

At the very least, it was hard to assume where both parties stood in the current situation. However, Ryoma knew that he had to delegate tasks and trust them to some extent.

“Gennou... I apologize how sudden this is, but please dispatch some men to Xarooda and Myest as soon as possible. I want them to closely monitor the situation in the Kingdom of Myest. We lack adequate information about what we’re getting ourselves into.”

Gennou nodded as he had already guessed what his master wanted. He replied, “Of course... We will also keep a watchful eye on the young lady.”

“Thanks. I know it’ll be a lot of work for you, but I appreciate it.”

“Leave it to me, my lord... I wish to pass on the Kingdom of Rhoadseria’s internal espionage to Lady Charlotte, so I will take my leave now,” said Gennou, bowing and turning to leave the room.

Ryoma watched him depart and sighed deeply. He picked up his feathered pen and continued his document work. As boring as it was, he believed this paperwork would play an essential role in the coming war.

A voice that resembled the cry of a woman reverberated around Ryoma’s office. The sound had come from his sword, Kikoku, leaning against the chair he was sitting on. It was as if his sword cried for blood. Ryoma gave a wry smile as he looked over his sword.

*I don’t have much opportunity to use you these days.*

The last time he had used his bewitched sword was during the siege when he invaded the royal capital and fought with Helena and Mikhail. His bout with Helena Steiner, who was the perfect prey for Kikoku, which sucked prana out of his enemies and strengthened Ryoma, was interrupted by Mikhail Vanash’s intrusion. Fortunately, Mikhail had fallen by Ryoma’s hand, allowing Kikoku to absorb his prana.

Mikhail was a soldier who had won fame in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria as one of its most skilled swordsmen. Although he wasn’t blessed with much talent as a commanding officer or a politician, he possessed extraordinary talent with a blade. As a result, his prana was of both good quality and quantity.

Mikhail’s prana was inferior to that of Helena, the Ivory Goddess of War. Kikoku felt so dissatisfied that it couldn’t absorb her prana.

*For Kikoku, it was as if the main dish was skipped entirely, and it was served a*

*dessert that wasn't all that delicious.*

Now, the bewitched sword created by the first generation of the Igasaki clan had sniffed out the scent of a new war beginning and demanded to taste blood. Kikoku's feelings were akin to a dog instructed to wait in front of its prime prey.

Ryoma stroked the sheath of his sword, soothing it with whispers like a man to his lover.

"Kikoku, just a little longer... It won't be long before we will require your power again..." Hearing its owner's words, Kikoku stopped its lamenting.





Five days after Ryoma heard about the Romaine nobles, five thousand troops marched from Pireas to protect the Kingdom of Xarooda from an invasion from the O'Itormea Empire.

## Chapter 2: The Crimson Lion Roars

“First unit, march!”

Robert Bertrand had bellowed the order as he lifted his beloved axe high above his head. Black armor covered his huge figure. As a famed war hero, he was the personification of the god of war himself. The soldiers cried out in response to Robert’s order.

“Uooooooooh! Yes, Lord Robert!”

“Victory to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy!”

“Let’s slaughter those O’ltormean dogs!”

Angry roars and cheers reverberated across the land as the troops headed toward Xarooda as backup marched out of Pireas’s suburbs.

As midday approached, horns and drums filled the air. Robert led the advance guard, a unit made up of around one thousand cavalymen. Signus Galveria, the other Twin Blade, followed as he led the second unit with one thousand cavalymen of his own.

After them came around three thousand foot soldiers, all clad in armor made from monster scales and hides that only existed within the Wortenia Peninsula. Two thousand cavalymen and three thousand foot soldiers provided a balanced formation.

The troops, all skilled in martial thaumaturgy, began their march west toward Xarooda as reinforcements. They had all received training under the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. Above their heads flew a flag with their crest: a double-headed snake wrapped around a sword. The snake had one head of silver and one of gold. Its eyes were red and gave off a rather intimidating feel, though that could have been people’s imagination.

That feeling could have also resulted from the fighting spirit and vigor of the soldiers who made up the reinforcements. They came across as intimidating to those who saw them. Each soldier knew how to use martial thaumaturgy and

had undergone extensive training. All were also skilled at working together in a unit.

In addition, they all wore special leather armor crafted by the dark elves of the Wortenia Peninsula, using endowed thaumaturgy to strengthen it. The dark elves boasted mastery over that kind of endowed thaumaturgy. As such, each soldier's combat power was several times that of an ordinary knight.

The Crimson Lioness, Lione, watched the extraordinary soldiers with a satisfied expression. She was the supreme commander of the reinforcements and led the foot soldiers. She was also beautiful and wore a ferocious grin suitable for her nickname.

"What a sight for sore eyes... I feel like I've become a general." Lione had previously been a leader of mercenaries, but her destiny had changed for the better ever since she met Ryoma Mikoshiba.

After all, she was once a chief who commanded around a dozen mercenaries, but now she led a troop of over five thousand soldiers. This moment was rather sentimental for her as someone who had made her living from war.

That said, Lione couldn't spend long basking in the moment. Her commands would decide the lives of her soldiers as they assisted Xarooda as reinforcements.

*I'm surprised they let a gal like me lead a whole troop of soldiers,* thought Lione.

Lione was confident in her ability, naturally. As leader of her mercenary group, the Crimson Lions, she had achieved victory for her employers with her outstanding leadership skills. Many noble families had paid for her services, even asking her to work for them. She was also ranked A-tier by the mercenary guild and was often showered with compliments by those around her.

Regardless of her talent, that wasn't enough to become known on Earth. After all, she was now commander of five thousand men. Considering that a unit of knights was usually around two thousand five hundred men strong, the force she led was more numerous. This meant she had more authority than the commander of a unit of knights.

Giving Lione, once a regular civilian, such an important role was a bold decision.

*Those two are here as well...*

This time, Robert Bertrand and Signus Galveria were under Lione's command. Many regarded them as the most powerful warriors within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. Considering their status and ability, it wouldn't have been strange if either of them were supreme commander instead of Lione. In fact, it would have been very natural if they were given such a role. Even so, Lione had received the role of supreme commander.

*Well, I gotta say that I do have more experience as a commander than those meatheads.*

Of course, Robert Bertrand and Signus Galveria weren't simply meatheads like Lione called them. She didn't really look down on them, having experienced many battles with them ever since the Twin Blades began to serve Ryoma Mikoshiba. Lione knew well enough that they were exceptional fighters and sufficiently skilled to make worthy commanders.

*I'm a better leader in defensive battles, but when it comes to attackin'... They're both great at runnin' straight into enemy camps. But what's even scarier is how good they are at identifyin' the enemy's weak spots.*

They also possessed a strong sense of smell, which made them natural hunters. This talent had allowed them to win several battles. At the very least, they differed from Mikhail Vanash. He had abandoned his scouting duty to run right at Kael Irunia when he saw him on the battlefield because he had betrayed Queen Lupis. Mikhail's recklessness caused him to end up as a prisoner of war.

*Plus, Robert and Signus are both barons.*

The fact that Ryoma Mikoshiba had entrusted her with the command of the expeditionary force to Xarooda suggested that he considered Lione more important than Robert and Signus, who were the heads of their own families. Only Ryoma Mikoshiba had the full authority to appoint the general commander of the expeditionary force. And Radine Rhoadserians had given him this authority.

Ryoma Mikoshiba's words were final.

It was a strange decision, especially here on Earth, where status was everything.

*Ryoma can put Robert and Signus to work as much as he likes, so doing it this way is probably for the best,* thought Lione.

Robert and Signus were good in an offensive role. To get the most out of them, putting them on the front line was paramount and allowed them to lead their own squads. Lione, skilled on the defensive, supported the Twin Blades by bringing up their rear.

Said lineups made sense tactically, and anyone who had ever dabbled in the art of war would naturally come to the same conclusion. That said, there were times where people let their emotions cloud their decisions. After all, Lione was headstrong—especially for a young woman.

Earth tended to have a chauvinistic outlook. As a result, people would always look down upon Lione simply because she was a woman. This was an undeniable truth. It was a rather old-fashioned sense of value, but many men still adhered to the custom.

*Even the Goddess of War couldn't escape the envy and disdain that men hold toward women.*

Making a common-born woman a commander was unthinkable in a society that honored tradition and social rules. Considering all that, Ryoma's decision to make Lione a commander of the expeditionary force was a rather noteworthy measure.

At the very least, Ryoma Mikoshiba was probably the only person within the western continent who would make such a decision. Still, not everyone would be raising their voices in admiration. If anything, there would be many cries of criticism and opposition—mostly from the country of Rhoadseria's airheaded nobles.

*If we don't deploy the troops, it won't matter who is in charge of them since there would still be people complainin' here. Well, that'll no doubt be this country's nobles, but I'm so darn tired of dealin' with 'em.*

Only people from Ryoma's military forces formed the expeditionary force, and the same went for the troops traveling to Myest.

*The boy decided it would be better to form a troop from only highly skilled soldiers within his grand duchy rather than mix with low-skilled soldiers. With Queen Radine's new rule, getting the nobles to deploy their forces would be hard.*

Naturally, it shouldn't matter who was in charge of the expeditionary force to the nobles who hadn't received orders to supply troops. However, they would still complain about it. They didn't dare publicly insult or oppose Ryoma, meaning they would choose a very roundabout approach.

Said nobles often held Ryoma Mikoshiba back and looked for information they could use to attack him, which was why he was currently choosing the lowborn Lione to lead the expeditionary force.

*That said, I shoulda asked the queen if I could become a noble when the boy was made archduke.*

Not that Lione was interested in being a noble. If she had become one, nothing would change. Even when she had become a knight, she felt nothing in particular about it. That was why she had turned down any offers to become a noble when Ryoma became archduke.

Besides that, though it was only temporary, the fact that her master had changed from Ryoma Mikoshiba to Queen Radine also played a huge part in her declining the offer.

*It looks like I'll still end up in cahoots with the nobles.*

Should Lione want it, Ryoma wouldn't hesitate to make Lione a baron or a viscount. Depending on the circumstances, she could have even been made count. It was clear why Lione was one of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's knights and not a noble.

Lione wasn't too attached to the idea of being a noble, and she was so busy responding to so many rapid changes lately that she simply didn't have the time to receive such a promotion.

*I mean, the boy hasn't even had his own ceremony yet.*



Ryoma had risen to the highest noble title within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Although the news had spread throughout the country already, there was still an expectation for a lavish ceremony to mark the occasion. However, doing so was impossible within the nation's current climate.

If Ryoma had such time to spare, he'd much rather spend it preparing for the coming war. When all the preparations were complete, Ryoma had already issued an order to Lione. He wanted her to lead the expeditionary force and aid the Kingdom of Xarooda.

*All he ever does is ask for the impossible.*

Moreover, Lione knew all too well how dangerous this order was. She was putting her life on the line because the enemy was the tyrant of the western continent, the O'ltormea Empire. They had a large army, numbering between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand soldiers. Yet Xarooda could not command its forces because King Julianus I fell ill. Sending five thousand troops to Xarooda was a drop in the bucket.

It would have been reckless for Ryoma to ask Lione to end the war in the Kingdom of Myest to buy time for him to spearhead a troop heading toward Xarooda instead. In other words, it would have amounted to simply ordering them to die.

But if it were an attempt to buy time just for Lione's group to go down in the flames of glory, there would be no point in time spent making such careful plans nor in preparing such vast quantities of supplies.

*Basically, the boy's got a good chance of winning... Just like that one time.*

His actions also meant he believed the Crimson Lioness could complete the dangerous task. Ryoma giving Lione such a dangerous task set her heart blazing, motivating her. It was the ultimate evidence that he trusted her.

*That face... Whenever he pulls that face, I know he's up to somethin'. But I dunno how far ahead he's planned. He's damn good at deceiving people, that boy.*

Lione remembered Ryoma's meek expression as she covered her face, stifling a laugh. A man called out to Lione, noticing her expression.

“You seem to be having fun, miss. We’re busy checking supplies, organizing marching orders... We’ve been rushing so much our feet are liable to fall off. Seeing as you’re the supreme commander, miss, it wouldn’t hurt if you were to lend us a hand.”

In response to the voice, Lione looked over her shoulder, her gaze falling on a man missing his left arm known as Boltz. He was once Lione’s second-in-command back when they were mercenaries. And he was a cultured man, all too accustomed to restraining his hotheaded captain from making rash decisions.

Boltz wore an expression like he was chewing on a wasp as he glanced sharply at Lione. He had never had soft looks, but nowadays, his facial features resembled those of a demon. Lione gave such tasks such as replenishing supplies and arranging transport to Boltz. But there was a huge difference between the supplies needed for a few mercenaries and the amount needed for a group of soldiers boasting around five thousand members.

He often was unmotivated when working, but he seemed extra annoyed this time. That didn’t bother Lione, making her smile and laugh instead.

“No way... That’s work for my second-in-command, Boltz. I’m busy leadin’ the group, so you keep doin’ what you’re doin’. Just do it how you think is best.”

The two of them glared at one another on horseback. Lione smiled mischievously as if she were satisfied with a prank. Boltz sighed deeply as he dropped his shoulders, looking at Lione with a resentful gaze.

“Man... You haven’t changed a bit, miss. I get sick to my stomach just trying to work out if I can even finish the tasks the lad’s assigned me.”

Lione laughed scornfully.

“The hell ya sayin’? You did way more dangerous work way back when, didn’t ya? Didn’t even have suitable clothing, and could only trust those around ya... That’s all it was back then. Even though we’re going up against the big bad O’ltormea Empire, it’s not like we gotta win no matter what. Depending on what happens, we’ve even got permission to shrink the front line if needed.”

She then turned to Boltz and continued talking.

“Not to mention, we’re workin’ with heavily trained soldiers, with a commanding officer fit to lead such a troop of soldiers. Thanks to Simone, we’ve plenty of food, weapons, and other supplies. I’d say we’ve got it a lot better than we used to, don’t ya think?”

Boltz shrugged his shoulders and silently nodded in response. “Well, compared to then... I guess it is. The boy doesn’t get involved in a war if he doesn’t think he can win, nor does he neglect preparations.”

“Exactly... So, no complainin’. He’s also got those two here and must be plannin’ on going to war with O’ltormea and winnin’,” said Lione, turning to face the second unit of troops who had begun their march. She could see Signus Galveria holding an iron club.

“Ah, the Twin Blades... Yeah, with you, miss. I’m sure we’ll be able to buy some time. Though it depends on the situation in the Kingdom of Xarooda right now, I can’t see us losing... Right?” Boltz stated.

“Joshua will be there in Xarooda too.”

Then, Boltz silently tilted his head and replied, “Wasn’t he the son of General Belares? After the last battle with O’ltormea, I heard he earned the nickname ‘Falcon.’ There was also a rumor that he was a scrounger and nothing like his father. Just as a kite can’t give birth to a falcon, a falcon can’t give birth to a kite either.”

When the O’ltormea Empire tried to invade Xarooda, Boltz was occupied helping develop the Wortenia Peninsula, meaning he didn’t participate in the expedition. He hadn’t met Joshua before. But he had heard about Joshua Belares and Lione attacking the O’ltormea Empire’s supply lines, causing them to delay their invasion.

“That’s right. In fact, it’s pretty obvious concerning the boy,” commented Lione.

“True... In all honesty, I’d describe the lad as a monster of sorts. And his grandfather Koichiro, even more so.”

“Yeah, I get ya. After all, he managed to beat Signus Galveria with ease. It was like taking candy from a baby for him,” said Lione, laughing.

Within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, several talented people worked alongside Ryoma. Among such individuals were the Twin Blades, Robert Bertrand and Signus Galveria. But there were many more. That included the Malfist twins, Laura and Sara, who were like Ryoma Mikoshiba's shadow. Then there was Nelcius, the leader of the dark elves and a warrior known as the 'Mad Demon,' along with his daughter, Dilphina.

There was also Chris Morgan, regarded as one of the best spear wielders in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Leonard Orglen was also known for his ability as a soldier. All these skilled people worked under the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. It would be difficult to find soldiers who equaled them in skill on this side of the western continent or, better yet, even in the world.

Unlike the monsters that served the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, Ryoma's grandfather, Koichiro was a cut above the rest.

"When I heard that story from Mike and the others, I almost collapsed from shock. After all, it wasn't like he was dealing with a few adventurers wet behind the ears," said Boltz.

"Yeah, you're right. I knew his grandfather was a monster, but I didn't think he'd cut through them like butter."

The two of them recollected the bout between Signus and Koichiro. Everyone knew that it was a rehearsal and not the real thing. Showing off one's true martial arts ability in front of a large audience would be the height of stupidity. In this sense, one could truly determine a martial artist's skill in fighting to the death.

Both Signus and Koichiro knew that well. They did not intend to speak ill of the bout nor say it was meaningless. No one would show all their skill within a simple rehearsal, and a skilled person could guess the skill of someone from that alone.

Even if they didn't show off any special moves, one could tell from their gaze and defensive body movements. An especially talented person could even approximate their skill from how they went about their daily lives. When watching Ryoma Mikoshiba in action, it wasn't difficult to work out who had trained him.

However, the way Koichiro fought in his bout with Signus was surprising. Even the Crimson Lions, who had faced many battles, saw movements they hadn't seen before. No one had anticipated Koichiro would expertly deal with Signus's iron club, which he waved around like a storm. Koichiro didn't even move from where he was standing.

He had won against Signus without even inflicting a single wound. It went without saying how talented Koichiro was to achieve such a feat.

"I couldn't put on a show like that even with two arms," said Boltz, shaking his head and noting he was a seasoned mercenary. Although he now worked as Lione's second-in-command and a tactician who often dabbled in work behind the scenes, there was a time he was once known as the Fierce Tiger or the Mighty Sword.

Due to Boltz losing his arm on the battlefield, he rarely had the chance to appear on the front line. However, he was still talented with a sword. He was skilled enough that if he were to fight with Signus or Robert, he might bring the duel to a draw once he got past their defenses.

He was skilled enough with a sword that it wouldn't be too surprising if he were promoted to a knight somewhere. Even Boltz knew that Koichiro Mikoshiba was a cut above the rest in skill. But it was like gazing into a deep, dark ocean. Boltz was unable to discern the difference in his ability and that of Koichiro. Although one could guess the height of a mountain by looking at it, no one could easily guess the depth of the ocean by the same means.

The same could be said of Ryoma Mikoshiba.

"Although he's also scarily talented, the lad doesn't hold a candle to Koichiro's ability."

Lione laughed, then said, "He's still young, so that much can't be helped. That said, a monster is still a monster. Especially the boy."

The difference between Koichiro and Ryoma wasn't a matter of skill but time. Boltz and Lione were aware that Ryoma would someday be as skilled as his grandfather. They had known that much from the moment they first met the boy.

“Yeah, I know. If he wasn’t, who would even let themselves be talked into getting involved in a civil war by a young lad?” remarked Boltz as he recalled the memory. It all began with a request from Pherzaad’s guildmaster, Wallace Heinkel. Ryoma and Lione had been forced to escort a merchant to Rhoadseria. That was where they had captured Mikhail Vanash, who informed them that they had gotten themselves involved in a secret feud over who was next to succeed the throne. The issue involved Lupis Rhoadserians and the very influential noble faction.

It was a battle that determined the future of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Ordinary mercenaries couldn’t possibly get involved in quarrels between such influential people. Nor could they stand up in defiance. Under normal circumstances, political strife would have buried the mercenaries who made up the Crimson Lions in obscurity as poor victims.

The existence of Ryoma Mikoshiba, who had only become entwined in such strife because Laura Malfist had silver hair commonly seen in those with blood ties to Rhoadseria, had changed a fate that would have been most hopeless.

“Heh, you’ve got a point there... After all, siding with the young queen at a disadvantage just to secure his safety was one hell of a gamble. Anyone else would say it was suicide doing such a thing, never mind reckless. If it weren’t the boy suggestin’ we do that, I would’ve high-tailed it out of there too.” said Lione.

Why did Lione accept such a dangerous gamble? It was hard for her to put it into words. Was it simply instinct or fate? Looking back, Lione couldn’t settle what it had been. However, she had fully believed in Ryoma’s words and the future he would bring. The same undoubtedly applied to Boltz. And Ryoma’s words had ended up becoming a reality.

“I always knew the boy was gonna become some big shot, but I never bet on him being an archduke.”

“Same here. I was honestly surprised when he was made baron. Now he’s been promoted even higher,” responded Boltz.

“You just never know what to expect with the boy. I wonder where he’ll go from here.”

“True... I’ll do my best to live up to his expectations.”

Lione sneered as Boltz deeply nodded, and both put their clenched fists together. It was a handshake they had made since they were both mercenaries, one that signaled mutual agreement.

Eventually, the last line of Signus’s troop passed Lione by.

“Well, looks like we’re up. Lads, we’re off!” yelled Lione as she thrust her hand into the air, confirming her surroundings. “Raise the flags!”

Several flags with the face of a red lion embroidered on them appeared in the sky behind her. Ryoma had them urgently made in preparation for her heading to the Kingdom of Xarooda as reinforcements. The soldiers all formed a column, raising their spears to the sky as their war cries rang throughout the streets of Pireas, shaking the buildings of the capital.

It was like a roar from a crimson lion aimed at the O’ltormea Empire.

The Xarooda reinforcements marched west, resembling a large, black serpent slithering along the roads. Simone Christof stood in a watchtower at the west gate of Pireas as they silently watched the troops leave. She then spoke suddenly, addressing Ryoma beside her.

“And there goes the third unit. The artisans had to rush to make that flag, but it’s incredibly appropriate for Lione, the Crimson Lioness.”





“Yeah. While I asked them a huge favor, they did a great job. Make sure they’re paid handsomely for their work,” said Ryoma.

“I assumed you would ask me to do so, so I already did. They were pleased.”

“Good work. Thanks.”

“Ah, it’s nothing. It’s the least I could do,” said Simone in a beautiful voice that rang like a bell. It also brimmed with confidence and energy when directed at the troops. Most people wouldn’t have sensed anything strange in her statement, although that was only on surface level.

Ryoma could sense a slight sorrow and hesitation in her voice. Looking closely, he noticed that her shoulders were trembling ever so slightly. Even though she had completed her role, it seemed a small amount of unease still remained.

*As I thought, she’s still rather nervous...*

The fight against the O’ltormea Empire would require many supplies, and Simone’s job was to ensure they were adequately stocked. All of the logistics fell on her shoulders, meaning she struggled with the weight of her responsibility.

*Well, I get it. After all, our enemy is the supreme ruler of the central part of the western continent, the O’ltormea Empire. Not to mention, the situation is worse than it was before. Although Simone looks calm and collected, I know she really wants to run away from all of this.*

“By the way, Master... I couldn’t help but notice how you looked at the troops earlier. Are you perhaps worried about something?”

Ryoma let out a wry laugh, surprised she had observed the same thing about him that he was just thinking about her. He tried his best not to let his feelings show, which was natural, considering he was the master of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. The same could be said for Simone, the head of the Christof Company.

*Ultimately, that is the responsibility of those higher up.*

It wasn’t good for leaders to show their uncertainty and bewilderment to

those around them. It would have been better if only the subordinates were anxious and concerned about the future.

Humans never ran out of things to worry about. Their anxieties and worries began as seeds, growing as they carried on through life. Eventually, those seeds would blossom into betraying someone or simply choosing to run from everything.

*In terms of an office, it's similar to the boss complaining that the company won't last much longer when it's in a crisis. It would be fine if seen as a joke, but it might have some people looking to change jobs.*

This wasn't limited to bosses and subordinates, though. It was the same for politicians and civilians or doctors and patients.

*It's not always good to remain closed off from your subordinates.*

People would rebel against a stubborn leader. Before Ryoma was summoned to Earth, a boss in Japan who managed his company a bit too strongly was making the news for workplace abuse. It caused so much news in Japan that the bookstores were filled with books on how to be a better manager. Whether one was good at managing all depended on the situation.

*From that point of view, leadership is better here on Earth.*

Those living on Earth, for better or worse, were accustomed to the hierarchical system. The average citizen couldn't even write their name. If they could do basic arithmetic, then that would be enough for them to become a government official or a merchant.

The idea of a fellowship was for subordinates to motivate and work for themselves, which was a wonderful idea in theory. But without any baseline education it was difficult to tell them to just get to work. This meant that Earth needed strong leadership, even if it was borderline dictatorial. And strong leadership required unwavering will and decisiveness.

*After all, I've witnessed many failures.*

Ryoma recalled Lupis first, as he had never seen a ruler so incapable of leading. Despite her lack of ability, she clung to the throne and tried to take the initiative, only for it to backfire, losing her the crown.

*However, Lupis's unease and lack of confidence were a major part of the problem. She wore her heart on her sleeve too much, revealing it all to Meltina.*

Meltina was incredibly loyal to Lupis and tried earnestly to support her, which Ryoma found commendable. However, Meltina took Lupis's thoughts too seriously and schemed to eliminate Ryoma, which caused the northern subjugation.

It was fair to say the war resulted from Lupis being too careless with how much she revealed her thoughts and feelings. These displays were definitive proof of how dangerous it was for someone in power to be so open.

*That said, I'm also just human.*

No matter how much Ryoma tried to suppress his worries and keep a calm exterior, he could not hide all of it. Such concern was evident when he was around someone he had known for a long time. The more they got to know one another, the harder it was to hide it.

Just as Ryoma had sensed it within Simone, she had sensed his unease, which he had buried away within himself. He was incredibly concerned about the expeditionary force to the Kingdom of Xarooda.

*I have known Simone for a long time now. It's no wonder she saw right through me,* mused Ryoma. Hiding one's feelings too much was also a problem. *If she senses I don't have much faith in what I'm doing, it might cause her worries to grow worse.*

Both being too open and not being open enough were problematic. Finding balance was necessary, so Ryoma answered Simone's question earnestly.

"I spoke with Lione and had the heavy infantry removed from the expeditionary force. I'm waiting to see if that was a good or bad decision."

Simone nodded deeply, instantly working out what Ryoma was worried about.

"I see. The Kingdom of Xarooda is rather mountainous. If their main objective is defense, you were not incorrect in removing the heavy armor."

"I guess... Our soldiers are elite, our pride and joy. However, they *are* going up

against the O’ltormean army.”

Elite soldiers made up Ryoma’s units. Just one of Ryoma’s ordinary soldiers boasted around two times more strength than a soldier from another country. Said strength stemmed from their training in martial thaumaturgy. On Earth, people often favored those who had mastered martial thaumaturgy because they tended to be much more powerful.

The difference between a person who had mastered martial thaumaturgy and a person who hadn’t was akin to the difference between an adult and a child. However, the reason behind the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy’s prowess wasn’t just martial thaumaturgy. The soldiers were trained to read, calculate, and coordinate, contributing significantly to their military strength.

Another critical point was that the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had enough financial resources to equip each soldier with an appropriate weapon for their body type. At the very least, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy provided even ordinary soldiers with equipment typically reserved for knights or nobles in other armies.

Simply put, every soldier had semi-made-to-order equipment. Someone from the modern world would find such equipment surprising. Wearing a uniform that didn’t fit would not only be less efficient but also increase the risk of an accident.

*But here on Earth, where civilians are often conscripted, few people think giving them high-quality equipment is worth it.*

In simple terms, many people simply thought that higher numbers won wars. Of course, having more soldiers than the enemy was helpful in conflicts. Books on warfare often wrote that it was advantageous to gather more troops than the enemy.

*The problem is that few people understand that you can’t just keep increasing your numbers.*

Other countries’ armies often had armor that didn’t fit or had to use spears with signs of rust in times of crisis. The lack of preparation was blatantly apparent. If they were allowed to wear better armor, it would only be in exceptional cases where the need arose.

*We spend a fair amount of money on arms and armor, so that'll never happen to us.*

Ryoma Mikoshiba viewed the lives of his soldiers as more important than equipment. They were taught to read and write, how to train their bodies, and had combat knowledge instilled in them. Even with short-term intensive training, it would take months to years before they were fully qualified. During that time, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy would pay for all of their food and lodging. Considering the expense of all that, it worked out much cheaper to give each soldier good equipment and ensure they lived longer.

*Countries that don't plan such an initial investment see men's lives as cheaper than weapons. If you plan to use them all up, it is much easier.*

Earth's approach to soldiers was simple because one could pluck soldiers from the fields. No one took the lives of people from a lower social class seriously.

*I find it cheaper giving them an education and training them.*

There was some merit to his approach. Ryoma won wars because he spent both time and funds on developing his soldiers. Yet that was a luxury afforded to him as he held tremendous financial power within the western continent.

"You really care for each and every soldier, don't you, Master?" Simone commented. Ryoma responded with a nod.

"They put their lives on the line to fight on battlefields. If I have the funds available, I might as well put it to use and educate my troops to give them the best fighting chance. Though, that's impossible for other countries financially."

Ryoma was getting the most out of the Wortenia Peninsula's location and was benefiting from intercontinental trade, with the Christof Company doing exceedingly well. With such a good financial foundation, he had three kinds of equipment made for his soldiers. The most commonly issued items were the standard-issue armor and helmets made from a combination of metal and leather found on the western continent.

Fortunately, these items were created with each soldier's measurements and body type in mind, and they even had spares. These standard-issue items were of fairly good quality but had no special attributes.

In addition to the standard-issue items, there were two other types of armor: light and heavy armor. Light armor was made from leather gathered from monsters in the Wortenia Peninsula. It was lightweight and focused on not hindering mobility even if the wearer had it on for a long time. Moreover, it matched ordinary plate armor in defense and could be used when traveling long distances or performing surprise attacks.

Heavy armor was close to two times thicker and heavier than plate armor, and was meant for specialized use in defense. It was made from commonplace steel.

Such heavy armor would be difficult to wear and hinder the use of martial thaumaturgy. It was common knowledge that the quickest way to increase the defensive capability of armor was to make the metal parts even thicker. When done carelessly, it made movement challenging. There were many occasions where it ended up being useless garbage.

The dark elves had solved the problem using endowed thaumaturgy, making the armor more practical.

*That said, it's not perfect by any means.*

Both the light armor and heavy armor were exceptional. If people from other countries saw it, they would do anything to get their hands on it. Despite its imperfections, it was an object of envy to others.

No matter how much the leather armor was tempered with endowed thaumaturgy, when comparing the strength of the material to the heavy armor, the steel armor was clearly superior. Regardless, light armor was preferable in terms of weight.

*Although they had been tempered with endowed thaumaturgy, it's not like we can keep adding to it.*

At most, one piece of armor could have around four to five thaumaturgy spells cast on it. Even then, people could only handle armor endowed with that many spells thanks to a technique best performed by dark elves; for most humans, armor with one or two enchantments would be the max. The armor supplied to the soldiers by the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy only had two spells cast on it.



*I would like to increase that number in the future, though.*

Ryoma and those close to him, such as Laura and Sara, were the only ones who could use the more advanced dark elf technique. The technique was not universal and varied based on the situation and circumstance.

*Heavy armor is better since it's a defensive battle at the castle. Even if they jump down from the ramparts and throw themselves into the battlefield, they wouldn't take much damage wearing heavy armor. The only problem is the Kingdom of Xarooda's mountainous terrain.*

These heavily armed infantrymen, once led by Lione, were boasted as one of the strongest defensive units on the western continent. They wore heavy armor and carried shields large enough to fend off enemy attacks. They were strong enough to even repel attacks from Signus and Robert.

Such power had already been demonstrated during the northern subjugation, at the battle of Epirus.

Now Lione's unit had the mission to buy time for Ryoma to end the war in the Kingdom of Myest, so it made sense to send out troops in heavy armor with high defense. And yet this time, Ryoma had assembled a unit in light armor.

There was a reason the expedition infantrymen wore light armor, which was worse at defending, and not heavy armor. The soldiers would need to cross the uneven mountainous terrain of the Kingdom of Xarooda. Although endowed thaumaturgy could make the heavy armor lighter, it would still be a heavy burden for the soldiers.

Heavy armor's true strength was its ability to allow better defense in formations, but this terrain would make fighting in formation challenging. The rugged terrain would also make it difficult for the cavalry to move around freely.

Ryoma had considered all that and had arranged the unit based on the ability to break through enemy lines, considering various possibilities. There was no way to see if it would work except on the battlefield.

Simone had successfully seen right through Ryoma, noticing his worries buried deep inside.

“You did well to notice, Simone. Or did my expression give it away?”

She smiled and laughed as she nodded like a mischievous child.

“No, no. I don’t think many people would notice. I’ve been with you a long time, Master... I could just tell. Plus, didn’t you notice that I’m feeling uneasy too, Master?”

Ryoma lightly shrugged, almost as if he was throwing his hands up in surrender.

“I guess that goes for both of us...”

“It does. After all, we’ve both shared a room before.”

Several years had passed since Ryoma Mikoshiba first met Simone Christof in the fortress city of Epirus. At that time, both had faced the highs and lows of life together. They knew each other incredibly well and were as close as lovers or married couples. Though they had never had any form of intimate interaction, they had met in hotels that rented out their rooms by the hour, hidden away in back alleys, but that was only ever to exchange information.

If anything, their relationship was more akin to comrades in arms.

“Well, you are my fellow comrade, Simone,” said Ryoma wholeheartedly. But she looked a little puzzled by his statement.

“Fellow comrade...? It is an honor, Master. However, I’ve never stood on a battlefield. I don’t deserve such a title...”

Her face displayed two expressions, both at odds with one another. She was delighted with what Ryoma said but also felt a slight sense of guilt. Laura and Sara were undoubtedly his fellow comrades since they had fought by his side ever since being summoned to this world.

Better yet, Lione, the Crimson Lions, the Igasaki clan—even Robert and Signus—were fellow comrades to Ryoma. They had all overcome several battles with Ryoma and had walked the line between life and death with him as vassals. And yet, he saw Simone as one of his fellow comrades. She struggled to accept what he was saying.

*I see. Well, I guess Simone never has wielded a weapon and stood on the*

*battlefield by my side, and I don't think she ever will.*

Comrades stood on the battlefield and put their lives on the line. In contrast, Simone had always supported Ryoma from a place of safety, hence why she felt guilty about how he had referred to her.

Simone Christof was indeed a vital comrade, as well as a vassal. She was most powerful when navigating markets, not on a battlefield with a sword in her hand. Referring to her as a fellow comrade would come across as a little off the mark. While Ryoma understood that, she was still a fellow war comrade. If she ever wanted to head to the battlefield, he would stop her right in her tracks.

People had places where they belonged. For Simone, that was trading in the markets. Ryoma was aware of that, and he never expected her to fight on the battlefield.

*That said, this is a bit of a sensitive subject. If I don't respond to this well, it could cause issues in the future.*

Kiyomasa Katou and Masanori Fukushima, the talented generals who worked for Toyotomi Hideyoshi—said to have ended the Warring States period in Japan—were regarded as two of the powerful Seven Spears of Shizugatake. Both were skilled in martial arts and supposedly hated Kazushige Ishida and Yukinaga Konishi, two men well-versed in politics.

During the Battle of Sekigahara after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's death, Kazushige Ishida sided with Tokugawa Ieyasu, even though they were at war with Kiyomasa and Masanori. That almost gave them more of a reason to dislike Kazushige. Naturally, the shadows of history obscured the truth, leaving unclear whether Kiyomasa and Masanori's dislike for Kazushige had influenced his decision to defect.

Even the name Seven Spears of Shizugatake was said to be an alias. People often believed that Toyotomi had few valuable vassals working for him. Kiyomasa and Masanori disliked Kazushige Ishida because he had never shown any valor on the battlefield, yet he had climbed the ranks. Ryoma couldn't overlook that part of the tales.

Hearsay indicated that Kazushige Ishida, who was talented at logistical support, saw the battle-hardened Kiyomasa Katou as nothing but a boor who

could only swing his spear.

*Though, when it comes to Simone, the situation is a little different, mused Ryoma.*

If the story about Kazushige Ishida was true, then the general dislike for him resulted from him flaunting his achievements and victories while insulting others.

Simone Christof felt self-conscious about her job, having self-deprecation and guilt about her inability to stand on the battlefield. Although she didn't show it in her expression, her emotions were a whole different matter.

"You needn't worry. I wouldn't be able to win without you handling logistics, and I don't need anyone around me who can't see that for themselves," said Ryoma. Simone laughed loudly to relieve her guilt, then smiled as she nodded. *She may still disagree, but she's come to a sort of compromise.*

Ryoma should have been preparing for a war, but there wouldn't have been a point in starting anything if his main logistics officer didn't feel confident.

*However, it is worth giving some thought to training Simone in combat...*

That didn't mean Simone would have to stand on the battlefield. No real reason existed to teach her how to use a sword or a spear, but Ryoma felt a bit uneasy saying there was absolutely *no* need to teach her.

*I have the Igasaki clan keeping watch on her, but even that has its limits. No one knows what the future holds, so I cannot guarantee her safety. If she has the means to protect herself, her chances of surviving anything would be considerably higher.*

Despite the lack of immediate danger, enemy organizations could simply send out an assassin or conduct an act of terrorism—to put it in modern terms. In such instances, it was less about killing the enemy and more about having the correct means to retaliate. It could be the difference between life and death.

*It would be a good idea to teach her some self-defense. Or should I give her a concealed weapon or poison to use instead?*

The best method would be to teach her unarmed combat. Not that showing

her how to use a spear or a sword was necessarily bad, but knowing self-defense with unarmed martial arts, such as jujutsu or kenpo, was better. This option would suit her if she were suddenly attacked.

That said, Ryoma was short on time. Simone often traveled to the Kingdom of Helnesgoula for trade, meaning he had only a little time to train her. Not to mention, Ryoma would soon head to the Kingdom of Myest with his own troops, thereby reducing their time even further. But that didn't change the fact that Simone needed some form of training.

*It's often said that a little learning can be dangerous... For now, we'll just have to wait.*

Now that one of the expeditionary forces had left for the Kingdom of Xarooda, it was time for Ryoma to set out for the Kingdom of Myest. And so, he changed the subject.

"By the way, how are the preparations for the expedition to the Kingdom of Myest going? I apologize for asking you to manage the expeditions for both Xarooda and Myest, but there was no one else I could ask."

Simone shook her head in response. "I'm aware of that. There is no need to apologize... However, it will take me some time to prepare the provisions and materials needed."

Ryoma frowned as he let out a sigh. "I see. Well, that makes sense. There's not much we can do since all the materials accumulated in the royal capital are all being sent to Xarooda."

"I asked Lady Yulia if she could use the Mystel Company and the other merchants in the north to get us more materials, so that shouldn't take too long. We also have some goods coming from the central continent."

As the O'Itormea Empire was invading the Kingdom of Xarooda, it was the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's duty to do everything in their ability to assist with reinforcements. All four countries in the alliance, led by the Kingdom of Helnesgoula, had to uphold this pact.

From a geopolitical standpoint, given the stakes of the war in the Kingdom of Myest with the southern kingdoms, there was no other option but to delay the

full reinforcements to the Kingdom of Xarooda. The main issue now was how best to assist Xarooda in the meantime.

*Lione is skilled, but she is less famous than the likes of Lady Helena.*

Helena, the Ivory Goddess of War, led the expedition unit to the Kingdom of Xarooda as their supreme commander in a previous war. Even though they were a little under three thousand men strong, Xarooda was more than accepting of it, thanks to Lady Helena's fame.

But the situation was different this time. Neither Helena nor Ryoma, the Hero of Salvation, were able to travel to the Kingdom of Xarooda. Helena was assisting Radine as her counselor as well as keeping the nobles within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria in check. Meanwhile, Ryoma had to head to the Kingdom of Myest as aid.

It was an unavoidable situation.

Even though the Kingdom of Xarooda understood, that didn't mean they would simply approve. There would be even more backlash than last time, so bringing gifts to quell their discontent was more important.

In war, one could never have too much food or too many weapons. With the Kingdom of Xarooda, they were undoubtedly desperate for anything they could get.

*We must offer food and weapons as well. For now, we'll give Xarooda the supplies we've stockpiled in Pireas. That should help them keep their front line strong. We would probably profit even if we sold them at a discounted price.*

Naturally, Ryoma couldn't continue providing Xarooda with free supplies. He could sell them some to tide them over temporarily. He had nothing to lose, considering the Kingdom of Xarooda to be a future customer in this way.

*We can also set up sales with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, which supplies the materials too. This talk is about whether we can even stop the O'ltormea Empire's invasion,* thought Ryoma, knowing he had to put his needs aside for now. There was no way he would lose the war due to them. *Simone is doing an excellent job with the trading side of it all.*

Since Ryoma had already shared his main policies with Simone, he did not

need to micromanage her.

“Which brings me to the question at hand. Did you hear back?”

“They said they didn’t want to get involved with the wars above the waves... But upon presenting them with a letter from Nelcius, they would like some time to deliberate.”

Ryoma nodded. “Nothing we can do about that, then. Based on the geography of the ongoing war, fighting could take place on the sea. So I wanted to recruit the Merfolk, who are accustomed to the seas. I imagine if I push for it, it’ll all be for naught. We’ll just have to negotiate with them patiently.”

He had anticipated their potential aid in the coming war but was disappointed their response wasn’t in his favor. The relationship between humans and demi-humans had soured in the past as a result of the Holy War. Ryoma was relieved they hadn’t halted all communication and were considering his offer.

“Yes. Nelcius also asked for some time, if possible,” continued Simone.

“It’s best to have the demi-humans negotiate among themselves. If we do so, we should prepare some ships in Sirius. Sorry for asking this at a time like this since we want to use boats to gather more supplies.”

“Please don’t worry about that. I’ve already asked Alejandro. We have around ten ships docked at Sirius’s port.”

Ryoma nodded deeply in response.





*With that, we've made all our moves. At the very least, we've done our best.*

While Ryoma understood what they were capable of, he couldn't say his plan was perfect. After all, Ryoma felt conflicted that he hadn't taken the initiative this time. That didn't mean he would lose, though.

"Sorry for all the trouble," said Ryoma, gazing toward the southeast, where the Kingdom of Myest stood. He could faintly see the ever-approaching fog of war.

Two weeks later.

The sun shone over the land in the middle of the sky, and a breeze blew through the fields. Sweat covered the soldiers, making their cheeks wet. However, they didn't feel so hot because of the sun or the temperature.

A horn blew, followed by the clash of a gong reverberating throughout the land. The forty thousand men that made up Ryoma Mikoshiba's army began marching to the southeast. They would assist the friendly nation of Myest in fighting their aggressors, the southern kingdoms Brittantia and Tarja.

## Chapter 3: A Gloomy Storm

At around 10 p.m., Ecclesia Marinelle read reports received from various regions across the land inside the palace of Endesia in Myest. The wrinkle in her brow showed the reports had brought less than good news.

While the reports were unfavorable, and she would have done better not knowing them, she had to be aware of the news. Next to her desk was a food cart with untouched ham, cheese, and various other light foods. A lone cup of tea had long gone cold. The maid in charge, who often looked after Ecclesia when working in the capital, had prepared the food because her master didn't have much time to eat. Sadly, the maid's effort was for naught as the food would end up being thrown out.

Ecclesia had zero intention of eating any food as she had no time to spare whatsoever. She was one of the three generals in the Kingdom of Myest, and as a military leader for the kingdom, she had no time to relax.

In addition to her usual work, she was busy sending an expeditionary force to the Kingdom of Xarooda as well as dealing with the invasion of both Brittania and Tarja on Myest's southern fortress city, Jermuk. As the sole person behind the country's success or failure, she couldn't afford to spend her time frivolously.

*It would be a lot easier if those two could help me...* thought Ecclesia foolishly. Such a thought was impossible, though. The two people she referred to were the other generals in the Kingdom of Myest.

One of them was Cassandra Hellner, the famous female admiral of the navy in Myest. The other was Alexis Duran, a veteran warrior and the strongest within the Kingdom of Myest. Both were exceptionally skilled generals on an equal footing with Ecclesia. However, they had left the capital due to certain circumstances, so Ecclesia couldn't ask for them to assist her.

Cassandra Hellner was a fiery, renowned, and skilled general with a keen eye for strategy coupled with extensive combat experience. But her main stage for

war was the ocean, and she rarely ever moved from Pherzaad, a port city in Myest that was their main trading hub.

If the Kingdom of Brittania had challenged Myest with a naval battle, Cassandra would utilize her fleet and join the battle. The Kingdom of Myest boasted one of the largest navies in the western continent—something Brittania and Tarja were well aware of—so it was hard to imagine they would bring the war to the ocean. As long as the war remained confined to Jermuk, Cassandra had no reason to prioritize it.

It would be far more effective for Cassandra to focus on gathering provisions and supplies in Pherzaad, in the northern part of the kingdom, than to battle in an area outside her expertise. In the case of Alexis Duran, his reason was more apparent. He was a general who had amassed several achievements in battle against the Kingdom of Brittania as one of the oldest men in the Kingdom of Myest's army.

Alexis declined to participate in the war because he was recovering from an injury. He was cooped up inside an estate in the royal capital, Endesia. Yet he hadn't passed on his position to his heir, his son. Nonetheless, Alexis was still the de facto master of the Duran barony, though he had officially retired from the position.

It was unclear if Alexis was really in rehabilitation. After all, he had denied all visits. King Phillip had sent a court physician to visit him, but Alexis had refused to see them, so nobody knew about his condition. If there were any way to find out, it would probably be through the servants at the Duran estate. Still, they had remained silent. Regardless of the truth of Alexis Duran's condition, one could argue that he was unfit to perform his duties as a general.

During this emergency crisis, only one person had an extensive history in strategy and could command the army: Ecclesia Marinelle.

*Of course, there may be some unknown talented strategists among my subordinates. But I don't have time to look for such people.*

Essentially, the Kingdom of Myest was one of the three countries on the eastern part of the western continent. It held tremendous financial power due to its maritime trading and had more than enough talented people. In addition

to Ecclesia and the other two generals, many other talented strategists could lead soldiers. But few people could formulate strategies for the country as well as lead and command generals.

A major issue was that competence alone didn't make them eligible.

*Even if they have the ability, it'll all be for naught if those around them don't approve. No matter how wonderful their strategy is, the lack of followers will be as good as drawing a castle in the sky. They'd just end up like Meltina Lecter, who was dragged into being a strategist by Her Majesty Lupis. Those around her rejected her ideas, and in turn, she accomplished nothing.*

Ecclesia might find a promising candidate, but they would need time to prove themselves before anything else. If she ignored that and just pushed ahead with what she wanted, it would end up in pure self-destruction for all those involved. She knew this and had to do something about it, even if it meant working herself down to the bone. However, both her mental and physical condition were reaching their limit, crying out for repose.

"Phew... I guess the exhaustion is getting to me..." commented Ecclesia, sighing deeply. *Even my eyes are blurry.*

This made it difficult for her to determine what was on the documents. Undoubtedly, it resulted from her working on them for so long. Her eyelids twitched as her eyes became even more blurry. She tried blinking a few times, but it did nothing to clear her vision.

Thus, Ecclesia gave in and set the documents on the table. She lightly massaged her eyes with her hands. But this superficial attempt to rest her eyes was futile, doing nothing to ease her exhaustion. After all, it wasn't as if she had spent only one day doing this.

*This is to be expected. I have done nothing but shut myself away in this room and read documents. I'll have to suck it up and take a rest.*

She didn't want to waste a single moment. But there was no way she could continue her work in this condition. So, she lifted herself from her chair as she let out a huge yawn. As she stood up, the cracking of her joints reverberated around the room. She moved her neck, causing the same sound to ring again.

*It feels good to finally move around after sitting for so long.*

Joints didn't always crack as a result of exhaustion, though it did feel good when they did. Deciding to stretch her legs some, Ecclesia gazed at the scenery outside of the window.

*Oh, but we're not having great weather tonight. A gloomy cloud is blocking the moon... Will it rain?*

The night sky hid behind oppressive clouds, as if poetically representing the Kingdom of Myest's situation. Anyone else would have felt as gloomy as Ecclesia had they read all the reports from across the kingdom.

Then, the quiet sound of a cat's purr filled the room. Ecclesia looked around the room and soon realized it was the sound of her stomach. Relieved, she let out a sigh.

*How improper, having my stomach growl... I'm glad I'm alone.*

As a person, having one's stomach growl when hungry was normal. But Ecclesia had to keep up appearances as a general and a noble. She was still an unmarried young lady, after all. It would have been inexcusable if her stomach had growled in front of someone. Although it was a natural physiological phenomenon, humans could not withstand hunger once they became conscious of it.

Ecclesia headed toward the food wagon and poured herself a cup of tea. *The tea is freezing cold... The aroma has all but gone, yet it's still delicious.*

But the tea would have been more delicious while hot. No one had used verbal thaumaturgy to cool it, so that process had happened naturally after it sat out a long time. Normally, no one of a noble rank would have drunk it. It was to be expected that Ecclesia would have asked for the preparation of a fresh pot. All she had to do was ring the bell to call the maid.

Instead, Ecclesia found the tea somewhat sweet. The flavor was usually rather tart when warm. She felt the tea hydrate her whole body, then nibbled a piece of cheese on a plate. Her first bite was so small that it resembled that of a mouse. She then took several bites, devouring the cheese as it filled the empty void in her stomach.

She tore the stale bread into two halves, ripped off a piece, and put it in her mouth alongside some cheese. Then she used her fork to stab a few slices of ham, snatching them off the plate. It was an incredibly impolite way for a noble to eat, but there was also profound meaning to how she ate.

Ecclesia wasn't just a noble lady but a warrior who had walked the battlefield and crawled through it covered in mud. She had eaten soup made from low-quality, waste vegetables with her fellow soldiers to prevent starvation. When not in the company of others, she could relax a little and eat in such a manner.

After a few minutes, she finished eating almost everything that was on the plates. She poured herself another cup of tea and gulped it down in one go, then sighed loudly and rubbed her stomach.

"That calmed my stomach some... Honestly, I could have done with a little more to eat."

The bread and cheese weren't bad, but Ecclesia had worked all day without lunch. She wanted to fill her cheeks with mountains of thick meat. However, she had eaten enough, and sat back again, reaching for the documents she had dumped on the table earlier. She hesitated a little as she reached out, almost as if she had remembered what the documents contained—none of which was good news. Yet she continued to check their contents.

Around two hours had passed. Before Ecclesia knew it, the stack of papers had all but disappeared, declaring that her grueling bout of paperwork was finally over. A deep sigh escaped Ecclesia's mouth as she finished reading a letter that had been firmly sealed. Her sigh was a clear sign of relief that she had finally finished.

*Or is it a sigh of grief at what I just read?*

Not even Ecclesia knew what it was; perhaps it was both. But that didn't mean that she had finished for the day. If anything, her real work was about to start.

*His Grace Ryoma Mikoshiba will arrive here with forty thousand men in just a few days.*

However, it wouldn't be the knights of Rhoadseria but elite soldiers of the

Mikoshiya Grand Duchy. They would change the tide of war dramatically.

*I received word that they left the royal capital of Rhoadseria around ten days ago. But they'll arrive in Endesia sooner than I thought, so they must have rushed when marching here,* mused Ecclesia. The report was a happy one, though it also appeared dreadful. *I really wanted all of this to be resolved before they arrived.*

She bit her thumbnail in annoyance, a bad habit she slipped into when she felt irritated. It was not appropriate for a young noble lady. Her mother and wet nurse had been trying to fix that habit of hers since childhood. As a result, she had mostly trained herself to stop, but whenever she became irritated, her old habit would raise its ugly head again.

Ecclesia was justified in feeling irritated as organizing the reinforcements headed to Jermuk had taken longer than expected. Since the delay was due to a dispute over leadership in the Kingdom of Myest, she found it even more challenging to remain calm about the situation. In fact, she had already failed to do so.

Now it was just a matter of deciding what to do about it.

She slapped her cheeks in an attempt to perk herself up before giving in to her defeatist thoughts. Three days later, just outside the northern gate to Endesia, an army appeared, bearing a flag with a double-headed snake curled around a sword adorned with silver and golden scales.

It was early in the afternoon.

A dark cloud hung in the sky, almost as if it resembled the future of the Kingdom of Myest. Under such weather conditions, Ryoma welcomed a beautiful guest in a tent he had set up in the outskirts of Endesia.

“Long time no see, Lady Ecclesia. Well, I did meet with you just a few months before, so I’m not sure if ‘long time no see’ is the right phrase here.”

For a modern Japanese person, this way of greeting someone one hadn’t seen in a few months was fairly normal. On Earth, it was rather common to go months, or even years, without meeting someone. The means of transport on

Earth were limited to walking, horse carriages, or boats. Even if it had been a few months, it wouldn't be wrong to say that one had seen them only the other day.

Ecclesia bowed politely in response to Ryoma's greeting. It was a courteous greeting suited for the man who had risen to one of the highest ranks, besides monarch, in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

"Welcome to the Kingdom of Myest. Thank you for traveling such a long way," responded Ecclesia.

Ryoma raised his right hand, gesturing to a chair prepared earlier for Ecclesia to sit on.

"I never thought the next time I would see you, Your Excellency, would have been on the battlefield against the southern kingdoms," she continued as she sat. Her expectations would have been correct. Ryoma never imagined he would set foot in Myest due to the current circumstances either.

"Agreed, I didn't imagine that I would meet with you so soon, nor did I see myself marching here to the Kingdom of Myest. That is especially true when considering the situation in Xarooda, with the O'ltormean invasion," said Ryoma.

Ecclesia gave a wry smile in response. Ryoma wasn't being sarcastic; he had some reservations regarding the situation.

"I thought the same... While I'm aware we can't predict the future, I never expected this."

The two of them smiled at one another. In reality, none other than the gods could predict everything. A person's response to such an unexpected situation was a true test of their ability and value.

"I read your letter regarding the matter, so I have an idea of what is going on," remarked Ryoma.

"The situation's more or less the same as I wrote," added Ecclesia, opening a map of Jermuk on top of the table. She then began a reenactment using the map, reviewing her current information.



“So, this is the state of the war. As I thought, it doesn’t look good,” said Ryoma, scowling. Two chess pieces resembling the soldier units around Jermuk lay on the map. One chess piece represented ten thousand soldiers, so around twenty thousand soldiers held the castle in the fortress city.



On the other hand, six black chess pieces represented the enemy forces.

*The enemy force is around sixty thousand men strong. Even though Jermuk's soldiers are holed up in the castle, that is still a remarkable difference in number,* thought Ryoma.

It was as the saying went; there was strength in numbers.

*However, this cannot be solved like a mathematical equation.*

There were too many variables, so it was impossible to take all of them into account. Ryoma's forces were at a major disadvantage, but that didn't mean it was all bad news.

*One good thing is that Jermuk is still in good condition.*

It seemed they had been able to avoid Ryoma's most feared outcome. Nevertheless, Ecclesia's assumption was the sole basis for that conclusion. It was uncertain if that was actually the case. Even without confirmation, Ryoma concluded it was a highly accurate report.

About a month and a half passed since the allied kingdoms of Brittania and Tarja had begun their attack on the fortress city of Jermuk, with around sixty thousand men. Still, there had been no word that Jermuk had fallen yet.

*If they are under siege, their means of communication may be limited. It would have been a different story if they had prepared fuel for signal fires ahead of time.*

The soldiers within the castle had been sending out regular reports up until Jermuk was besieged. No clear information had come through since then. Their enemies surrounded them, making it difficult for the forces within Jermuk to provide more information.

Considering that the enemy's siege was still going strong, there was a high chance that Jermuk had not yet fallen.

*Another possibility is that any communication was locked down and Jermuk has already fallen. If I were the enemy general looking for a quick conclusion to the battle, it wouldn't be such a bad idea to lure the reinforcements to Jermuk and take the battle to open fields.*

Based on what Ryoma had heard from Ecclesia, that would be one of the worst outcomes, although he knew that the probability of that was low. No matter how skilled the southern kingdoms' commanders were, there was no way they would be able to keep the fall of Jermuk entirely a secret.

*If I were in a similar situation and I ordered the Igasaki clan to prevent any information from leaking, it would only delay the information's release by a couple of days.*

Even if the enemy forces could silence Jermuk, it would be impossible for them to do the same with everyone in the city's vicinity, such as villagers and residents of nearby towns. They would have begun to flee toward Endesia to avoid getting caught up in the war.

*Although we're already in the middle of a war, there is no way I would miss such a sign.*

Ecclesia's spies had confirmed there had been no unusual movements, and that the enemy forces were continuing to hold the siege.

"Well, it's better than the worst-case scenario I imagined. *If* this information is correct, that is."

Guessing the meaning behind Ryoma's words, Ecclesia nodded deeply.

"If the fortress city Jermuk falls, I expect the enemy will sweep through the country like an avalanche. It's just that much of a key location for the southern area of the kingdom," said Ecclesia.

If it came to that, Ecclesia would have a mountain of documents several times bigger than the last one she worked through. Since that hadn't happened, it was safe to assume that the siege of Jermuk was ongoing.

"I see... You're quite right," acknowledged Ryoma.

Even then, it was hard for them to relax.

"The neighboring villages have been looted, and the areas surrounding Jermuk have been ravaged... It's been quite the headache for the Kingdom of Myest."

There were thirteen villages and six towns dotted around Jermuk. Most of

them had already been looted and raided by the enemy army, apart from four villages and two towns. The invaders had killed all the men and had abducted all the women and children. The buildings were then razed to the ground, leaving nothing but dark piles of ashes.

This only came to light when those lucky enough to escape had found refuge within Jermuk.

“I’m aware we’re at war, but it’s so painful. The royal court has begun securing funds for postwar reconstruction.”

“Well, you must prepare to restore the region after the war. However, all that preparation will mean nothing if we fail to protect Jermuk. The soldiers from the southern countries seem to be a rough bunch, no doubt a result of those countries being rather impoverished,” declared Ryoma, to which Ecclesia nodded.

Attacking an enemy country’s villages and towns was one of the standard tactics in war. Ransacking villages that played an essential part in a country’s agriculture was a surefire way to attack their means of income. This tactic was similar to one prevalent during the Warring States period in Japan, known as *randori* or *ranbodori*. Though, it wasn’t necessarily unique to Japan.

Every part of Ryoma’s world had participated in looting during a war. Even in ancient Greece, which practiced democracy, slaves were still kept. And looting during war hadn’t been entirely eradicated even in the twenty-first century. That strategy weakened the enemy and kept one’s soldiers’ morale high.

Naturally, looting wasn’t unusual on Earth, where modes of communication were limited, and there were no such concepts as human rights.

*Looting also had a lot of benefits for soldiers.*

Those benefits included the soldier making income from capturing civilians from the enemy country and selling them to slave traders. They could line their pockets with gold from breaking into houses and picking out goods to sell or even finding stashes of money.

Soldiers abducting good-looking young women and having their way with them often went overlooked too. Knights and soldiers who explicitly worked for

the kingdom would receive some form of pay, but the same couldn't be said of conscripted soldiers.

*We pay all our soldiers a monthly wage.*

It was safe to say that paying the soldiers a monthly wage was a rather unusual phenomenon on Earth. During wars, conscripted soldiers never received compensation in wages. Their superiors provided food and equipment, but it was safe to think of conscription as a form of forced labor.

*It might not be accurate to say they receive no compensation. They might get cash rewards from their commanders or regional lords if they perform well and win many battles.*

Even taking that into account, conscription was an arduous task that required a lot from the soldiers.

*Soldiers often have many justified complaints, which affect their morale. In some cases, they might even lay down their weapons and escape to the enemy side. In worse cases, they could revolt.*

No one liked doing something that wasn't in their best interest. If they had to risk their lives and fight, there was not much point in making them do so by force. Eventually, they might display hostility and hatred toward their superiors. But both the commanders and regional lords knew that. As a result, they would allow soldiers to loot the enemy country's settlements to suppress complaints.

Some would appear to be apprehensive about looting. But if it was an order, the soldiers had no right to deny it.

*Not many people want to do such a thing to fellow civilians. Plus, if it's an order, it makes them somewhat immune to guilt over what they're actually doing.*

Once men began to lose control over their consciences, only one destination was left. As the saying went, bad money drives out good.

The soldiers were able to forget about their grim reality for a while, and line their pockets while doing so. They chose to turn a blind eye to what they were doing, even if it harms their consciences in the process.

Ryoma didn't endorse such acts, especially when one hoped to rule that territory afterward.

*I wouldn't endorse it, but that doesn't mean I would rule it out as an option if the situation called for it.*

Depending on the situation, sometimes the bad move ended up being the best move.

Most commanders wouldn't give the matter that much thought. They usually allowed soldiers to do such heinous things to boost their morale. Those in the ruling classes on Earth thought that since they didn't pay their soldiers with money, it was better to allow them to pillage instead.

The nobles had nothing to lose since it was someone else's property. Neither soldiers nor politicians had reason to take the initiative and stop it. That was especially true of the southern countries of Brittania and Tarja, the latter known for being quite skilled in battle.

But that was due to having exceptionally proficient soldiers, which in turn was due to the poverty prevalent within the southern kingdoms.

To those living in the southern kingdoms, looting other countries wasn't just a tactic or a war strategy. Instead, it was a means of survival. The situation resembled that of Shingen Takeda, the ruler of the Takeda clan, known as one of the strongest warriors in the Warring States period.

"It's just like the Takeda clan," Ryoma murmured thoughtlessly.

That was an off-the-cuff remark, although it seemed Ecclesia had overheard.

"Takeda clan? Is that a noble house from the Kingdom of Rhoadseria?" Ecclesia looked confused as she quizzed Ryoma on the name.

Ryoma smiled as he shook his head in response to Ecclesia's question.

"It's the name of what was said to be the strongest clan back in my birth country. The Takeda clan ruled a part of Japan that was known as the Kai region."

In modern times, the region was known as Yamaguchi and famous for its grapes and *koushuu* wine. However, Kai's mountainous terrain made it

unsuitable for other forms of agriculture.

*Kai was also famous for having a gold mine, which the Takeda clan then used to produce their fortunes. They could have used it to buy food.*

During the Warring States period in the fifteenth century, strange weather had resulted in a mini ice age, which made it difficult to cultivate crops because of the freezing temperatures. Basically, Japan had been close to a famine during that time.

*Unfortunately, it doesn't matter how much money you have if there's nothing for sale.*

The Takeda clan even went on expeditions outside their home region in order to find food to survive.

Adapting to these harsh conditions gave the Takeda strength to triumph in countless wars, which earned them the title of the strongest clan during the Warring States period. One couldn't deny that continuously invading other countries and looting them didn't play a major part in their soldiers' training. Every soldier had ample real-world experience.

The southern kingdoms were in a similar situation. Ryoma thought they were in a dire situation even compared to the Takeda clan. After all, the southern kingdoms' land was in no way massive.

*It's less that the two kingdom's territory isn't that large, and more that Brittania and Tarja barely make up a tenth of the land that the O'ltormea Empire and the other kingdoms govern.*

But with the realms that made up the southern kingdoms divided into several parts, and were all ruled by their kings, that changed a lot. They also needed fields appropriate for agriculture, most of which would then need proper irrigation. The forests ran amok with monsters too.

Moreover, the Kingdom of Tarja specifically had a lot of forests and few fields. While they could clear out the forests and cultivate new land, the terrain was rather uneven, making it difficult to find good prospective farmland.

*Not to mention, they don't seem to have much in the way of special exports.*



The southern kingdoms weren't home to many fertile regions like the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, nor did they benefit from foreign trade like the Kingdom of Myest, nor were they blessed with mines like the Kingdom of Xarooda. Their limited land, with few natural resources, made it difficult for them to accumulate national power. That said, they could have used their vast forests and focused on forestry, or even fishing.

Considering that almost all the southern kingdoms had equally vast forests, any one country would face stiff competition from the others, making it difficult for a country to rely on forestry as their sole industry.

The southern kingdoms would have nowhere to sell their wood, after all. At the very least, they couldn't sell to other kingdoms in the south. It made no sense for the other countries to import goods they could cultivate themselves. The southern kingdoms wouldn't make much profit if they sold timber that wasn't in high demand.

Supply and demand ruled the market. For the southern kingdoms' natural resources to be profitable, they had to send them to their continent's western region. Still, that wouldn't leave many countries to which they could sell.

If they had boats that they could use to transport their goods to different countries, it would be another story. But they wouldn't be able to sell it for a high enough price to make it worthwhile.

*That would leave the three countries in the east and the O'ltormea Empire in the center. They could consider the Holy Qwiltantia Empire in the west, but I doubt their lumber would sell there.*

Both the O'ltormea Empire and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire were powerful nations that ruled vast territories. They also had large forests dotted around their regions, meaning they could harvest them when needed. So they did not import lumber from different countries purposely.

The same could be said for the other countries in the east, starting with the Kingdom of Myest. As a result, the southern kingdoms had no main industries from which they could profit.

"If we looked at the southern kingdoms based on their economic power, they'd be around a fraction of our own," said Ryoma. That didn't mean every

country that made up the southern kingdoms.

Even when examining the entire southern part of the western continent, it was no match to the Kingdom of Myest with its maritime trading with other continents.

*Simply put, a country's strength is decided by its population, the size of its land, and its financial power... A country's national power is usually proportionate to their military power too.*

The rich are strong, and the poor are weak.

"How the poor suffer," he continued, displaying various emotions in his words.

Even Ryoma might have withered away to nothing in the Wortenia Peninsula if he had made one wrong move. When thinking of it that way, it was surprising that the countries belonging to the south still maintained their independence. In a way, it was no longer a simple miracle. It was simply strange.

In reality, it was exactly what the countries within the western continent wanted. The southern kingdoms had no industry or fertile lands, but that only applied for now.

Hypothetically, having a military capable of wiping out all the monsters who dwelled in the forests and clearing the land to allow for cultivation would make the situation different. It wouldn't be entirely impossible if they had such power to spare.

Because the O'Itormea Empire owned the central, landlocked region of the continent, its people often had to travel through other countries to participate in foreign trade. If they occupied one of the southern kingdoms, they could use it as a stepping stone to revitalize the region with trade. That was always an option they could choose.

The national strength of the O'Itormea Empire would grow if they had access to maritime trading.

Such a fact was self-evident to the rulers of the three major kingdoms who wished to rule the entire continent. Should the O'Itormea Empire and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire attempt to conquer one of the southern kingdoms, other

countries would definitely butt their noses in.

When the O'ltormea Empire tried to invade one of the southern kingdoms several years ago, the Holy Empire of Qwiltantia and the Kingdom of Helnesgoula mobilized their troops along their borders.

Thus, the O'ltormea Empire soon retreated once they realized they could not conquer the southern kingdom in a short amount of time. It was an example of other countries trying to maintain balance on the continent.

Although, it was confirmed that the southern kingdoms hadn't maintained their independence because of that alone.

*There's no mistaking that the soldiers of the southern kingdom are all incredibly strong. However, it would be difficult for them to stave off pressure from other countries and protect their borders with just the might of their soldiers.*

Given the difference in strength between the southern kingdoms, the O'ltormea Empire, and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, it wouldn't have been surprising if they had already annexed them.

The countries in the southern part of the continent had maintained their independence for so long because of the people living within the dense forests. However, it was questionable if they were considered residents of the southern kingdoms.

*They don't belong to a country, pay taxes to the country, provide conscripts for the military, or work as laborers... So, it is hard to say if they really do belong to one of the southern kingdoms. I guess they could be considered barbarians. Or maybe they are from a lower caste, much like the five lower castes in Japanese history.*

For one, they lived in unique villages within the forests and were hunter-gatherers, surviving on animals and monsters. The southern kingdoms weren't so naive as to ignore their existence, but they refused to be ruled, fending off other countries with their combat skills gained from hunting monsters. They were especially talented warriors.

Besides that, the people in the southern part of the continent lived in various

places across the region and had solid lateral connections. It seemed they hadn't formed their own country, and the southern kingdoms looked upon them lightly as a tribe. In some essence, they ruled the southern kingdoms.

While others just hated them, the leaders of the southern kingdoms hated them but heavily relied on them.

It was easy to assume that when the O'ltormea Empire and the Holy Qwiltantia Empire tried to invade, the higher-ups of the southern kingdoms hired the tribes as mercenaries. The relationship between the tribesmen and the kingdoms was fluid, which was difficult for those from other countries to grasp.

When Alexis Duran tried to invade the Kingdom of Brittantia, the tribesmen fought back, causing severe damage. Ultimately, Alexis and his forces were driven out and made to retreat. It was a blessing that the tribesmen never wanted to leave their own forests.

*I wonder if it's because they recognize their sphere of influence. Or is there another reason they never choose to leave? Though, I did hear about the one time they did leave...*

That said, there were never any times when they joined in wars outside of their territories. There was no better news for southern kingdom residents in invasion-prone areas. Ryoma didn't have much time to search for an answer to such an unimportant question.

He had only one matter to deal with: preventing the fall of the fortress city Jermuk. But his following question was important.

"So, have the reinforcements already left for Jermuk?"

Ecclesia's expression stiffened, then she slowly shook her head.

Ryoma grasped the situation from that alone. He crossed his arms and looked up at the ceiling, closing his eyes.

*Damn. Just as was written in the letter. I already knew about this, but...*

His response was rather relaxed, considering the country was at war. After all, twenty thousand men were confined to the castle in Jermuk, which made them

believe that the Kingdom of Myest would send reinforcements to their aid.

Normally, it wouldn't have been strange for the Jermuk soldiers to surrender to the enemy, given that the reinforcements were taking so long to arrive. But they had not surrendered, because they knew that if they did, the enemy forces would raze every village on the way to the royal capital of Endesia, leaving nothing but ashes in their wake.

Jermuk should have received reinforcements immediately. Any resources on war or textbooks about wartime strategy would explain the significance of a rear guard.

There was no way that a woman like Ecclesia wouldn't be aware of it.

*What timing, and exactly when there's discord between the north and south. The great woman known as the Whirlwind isn't all that well-versed in strategy.*

Ryoma didn't want to blame all of Myest's situation on Ecclesia. Yet his train of thought couldn't help but head toward that direction. The main problem mainly lay in the history of the Kingdom of Myest.

It was also the result of a plot hatched by Ryoma Mikoshiba, meaning he was also behind this situation. The situation would worsen because of the current issues brewing within the Kingdom of Myest.

*I have to address the nobles' frustrations in the Kingdom of Myest.*

The Kingdom of Myest was a long and narrow country separated into northern and southern regions, with the current rift stemming from financial disparities between both sides. The north and east sides of the country had access to the ocean, so they could benefit from maritime trade and extra defense. For the country with one of the strongest navies, those areas rarely had to worry about being attacked.

Since they had such a strong command of the sea, they did not fear an attack from enemies, which was an entirely correct attitude for them to have. Due to its ironfisted control of the seas, the country could boast one of the most financially successful marketplaces on the western continent.

The kingdom's financial blessings were spread throughout the country, making it one of the strongest economic powerhouses in the western

continent.

However, that didn't mean everyone in the Kingdom of Myest enjoyed the financial blessings equally. It was easier to focus most of the fortune on the marketplace of Pherzaad and the surrounding areas.

In modern terms, it was as if Tokyo had become a financial powerhouse and all the other regions were cut off, which could be said was the case already. The rich got richer, and the poor got poorer.

The law of the jungle applied within the financial world too.

Moreover, the nobles who owned land in the western and southern parts of the kingdom were heavily responsible for national defense.

*They're landlocked. The nobles living on those sides must constantly focus on protecting their borders with other nations. They have to build fortresses, repair castle walls, and employ and train soldiers.*

Those were the main duties of a noble who owned land, but they were also a large financial burden for them.

Hence, the nobles formed factions—northeast and southwest.

The southwest faction prided itself on its national defense and military specialization. In contrast, the northeast faction focused on its overseas trade and further development of its finances.

But the political balance within the Kingdom of Myest experienced major changes in the past few years. This resulted in the relationship with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, which was on the western border of the Kingdom of Myest.

In recent years, the two kingdoms hadn't crossed swords; instead, they often worked together to repel the O'ltormea Empire's attempts at invasion. The Kingdom of Myest eventually became an ally to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria due to cooperating with Ryoma Mikoshiba's diplomatic strategies.

As a result, the Kingdom of Myest began to trade more with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, something the nobles in the west benefited from. It meant everyone in the Kingdom of Myest had become more economically prosperous.

The exception was the southern nobles of Myest who had been at war with the southern kingdoms. That was inevitable from a geographical standpoint, though. As such, the southern nobles weren't disadvantaged because of political unrest or someone's ill will.

Although, it was still a brutal truth to swallow.

The embers of unrest within the kingdom had long been smoldering. They had all roared to a flame when Brittantia and Tarja became allies and attacked Jermuk.

What further complicated the problem was that the southern nobles were receiving assistance with military expenses as a reward for protecting the borders.

Those funds came from the northern and eastern nobles, further complicating things. Of course, it was officially assistance from the Kingdom of Myest. But in reality, that money came from taxes paid by the nobles of the northeastern faction to fund the country's defenses.

That wasn't a problem in itself. If anything, it was a surefire way to ensure that everything was fair. But that only applied when there wasn't a war happening.

*Once we're in wartime, it becomes an issue.*

In this case, the problem was that they were paying money to those defending the country.

The issue was with the rights and duties of those making the payments. It was fine because the northern and eastern nobles had more financial flexibility and were sending financial support to the south. There, the nobles walked the line of poverty since they had to spend so much to protect the country.

Due to this transfer of funds, a hierarchy began to form between the two groups of nobles.

*The northern and eastern nobles probably think they've fulfilled their duty by having paid their own money... After all, no one wants to get involved in a war.*

From their standpoint, they thought that the south had become their shield,

so they sent financial aid during peacetime.

If the Kingdom of Myest had been like the southern kingdoms and could only live off looting and scavenging other countries for food and fortune, the situation wouldn't have become what it was. But most of those living in the Kingdom of Myest didn't want to go to war for no reason.

They had several other avenues of living, after all.

Additionally, the fact that Jermuk had yet to fall probably only validated their belief that they didn't need to do anything more. The northern and eastern nobles saw the war as somebody else's problem.

That was why they had rejected the idea of sending any reinforcements. While their argument had some logic, it wasn't entirely groundless. Ryoma had no intention of saying they were in the wrong.

*The nobles in the south have been stopping invasions from the southern countries for a long time now. Given this, there's a degree of logic to saying that the southern nobles should take the lead this time. That's why they had received aid to finance their defenses. But I guess that's not everything.*

If the northern nobles remained stubborn about the matter, and delayed the sending of reinforcements, then the mighty fortress of Jermuk wouldn't stand for long.

Ryoma let out a deep sigh.

Based on the information from Ecclesia about the ongoing situation, Ryoma could see through to the northeastern nobles' underlying intentions.

The reason they did not want to dispatch any reinforcements wasn't just due to their rights and duties. It simply came across as if they were using their rights and duties as an excuse for not wanting to risk their lives or those of their citizens on the battlefield.

Of course, Ryoma understood where they were coming from. Still, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pettiness and baseness behind their actions.

*The northeastern nobles have such an attitude even though their country is being invaded. They don't want to put their lives on the line and are just happy*



*to pay money and leave the dangerous, dirty work to someone else. They've got balls, tsk.*

Nothing was more disheartening than the inability to send reinforcements to help an ally. But Ryoma couldn't spend all day feeling disheartened by others.

*How do we deal with this situation?* thought Ryoma, despite having the answer already.

Every minute counted in this situation.

That said, it wasn't impossible for Ryoma to have the nobles of the Kingdom of Myest adjust their attitudes or for him to appeal to their patriotism and have them put together reinforcements. It would just take some time.

*It's no use... I don't have any time to run around trying to convince the nobles. If I went about it the proper way, it would take at least a month.*

A lot of time had passed since the enemy had begun their siege around Jermuk, which meant Myest and company couldn't afford to wait another month.

Though that was a groundless conjecture, and no strategist would ever plan their next movements on a groundless guess, Ryoma also didn't plan to stand around and do nothing.

*In all honesty, I'm not too keen on this idea. But I guess there's nothing else to do.* Ryoma had a rather dangerous plan in mind.

Depending on the circumstances, it could affect the relationship between the Kingdom of Myest and the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Not to mention that Ecclesia might refuse to help too.

*After all, I'm planning to head for Jermuk and break the siege with only my own forces. It's an unthinkable plan.*

Rhoadseria and Myest were a part of an alliance spearheaded by Helnesgoula. But they were all different countries, each individually ruled by various monarchs.

The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had no problem serving as reinforcements in the Kingdom of Myest's war. But it wouldn't make much sense for them to be the

only reinforcements.

Ryoma still hadn't had an audience with the king of Myest, Phillip. The nobles might be in uproar for not carrying out the correct procedures, claiming that their nation's sovereignty had been violated.

Regardless, Ryoma had other concerns.

*I've yet to meet with the king of Myest. If I can come face-to-face with him, there may still be a way.*

In many cases, those at the top approved something without it going through the standard procedures. For example, modern office environments had situations where a business negotiated with the boss directly and set up a contract outside of the usual channels.

For such negotiations to proceed, one first had to lay the groundwork ahead of time or, at the very least, have some form of confirmation about what the person they were negotiating with was like. It was a risky move to forge ahead with trying to make such a deal without having done any of that.

*But I have nothing else I can do... Plus, if we mobilize the troops now, it might take the enemy by surprise. They won't expect my troops to move so suddenly when I haven't even had an audience with the king.*

Ryoma let out yet another deep sigh and stared at Ecclesia. A steely, firm gaze shone through his eyes. An aura surrounded him, the kind only someone who knew the battlefield could produce.

Ecclesia shook ever so slightly in response to his gaze.

"I have a plan," said Ryoma.

A look of joy covered Ecclesia's face. She felt like a tortured soul in the depths of hell who had just noticed a thin string of hope appear before her.

However, Ryoma would soon crush that happiness.

"In all honesty, I'm not too keen on it, and there is a possibility that it'll put you in a tight spot, Lady Ecclesia. But what do you think?"

It was Ecclesia's only hope.

After hesitating briefly, she nodded. She believed this was the way to save the Kingdom of Myest from the plight they were in.

## Chapter 4: The Two-Headed Snake Scowls

Countless tents surrounded the fortress city of Jermuk and all the soldiers had formed ranks and marched. The tips of all their spears gleamed as bright as icicles shining in the sunlight.

The campsite, which blocked the entrance to the castle, also stretched along the roads, acting as a wall to ensure no messengers or escapees could get out.

While they were sixty thousand men strong, it wasn't realistic to surround a city. That was especially true when their target was the key to the Kingdom of Myest's defense, Jermuk. Even if they successfully blockaded all the important locations, they couldn't claim their siege was so secure that not even an ant could crawl out of Jermuk.

Regardless, the generals who led the allied armies were all too aware of that. They had even put together a contingency plan. If they knew there was a hole somewhere, they could guard it and set up a net to catch any escapees.

About two months had passed since they began their siege of Jermuk. The messengers from Jermuk sent to spread the word and seek aid, and the spies sent to get an idea of the situation had all ended up as corpses.

The allied armies had also been occupied with gathering information on the Kingdom of Myest while maintaining control of the siege. These groups had a good grasp on information about the Kingdom of Myest due to the continuous questioning of prisoners of war and the spies they had sent to other countries.

Furthermore, the spies learned of the current discord over the nobles' financial differences and the reason reinforcements for Jermuk had been delayed. They also knew that an army of reinforcements, led by the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, was also headed their way.

Both outcomes were among the several that the generals of the allied forces had already anticipated. The fortress city of Jermuk was simply bait laid out to lure bigger prey.

Defeating the reinforcements out in the field was one of their objectives during the siege of Jermuk. The fortress's role as bait was about to come to an end amid various intersecting schemes.

The fateful day had almost arrived.

It had been two days since Ryoma met with Ecclesia Marinelle and left the royal capital, Endesia, with his forty-thousand-strong army.

The light rain from the morning progressed into heavy rainfall. All this made it appear the gods were purifying the land before the vicious war that was to come.

A group of soldiers in full suits of armor occupied a forest several kilometers from Jermuk that day. The area was once a communal space where nearby residents would collect firewood.

Ryoma Mikoshiba stood among the soldiers and observed his surroundings. He wore black armor, with the sword Kikoku hanging from his belt.

*This armor is awesome. It's lightweight and lets me keep my stamina. Without the endowed thaumaturgy, I would be exhausted trying to move in it. But I'm ready to go into battle even now... When I asked Nelcius and the others to make it, they requested a lot of tobacco and tea, but this made it totally worth it.*

Usually, it would take around five days to reach the fortress city of Jermuk from the southernmost part of the royal capital, Endesia. Since this march would be followed by battle, six days was a more likely guess.

And yet Ryoma Mikoshiba and his army had completed the journey in just two days, having marched at an incredible speed.

If they had taken extreme measures to shorten their travel time, the soldiers would have been exhausted. By the time they arrived at the battlefield, the soldiers would have been unable to fight and would need time to recuperate. That was why most generals had to keep their soldiers' fatigue in mind as they marched; this was common knowledge when leading an army.

But the dark elves' endowed magic armor had destroyed all common sense and made the impossible possible.

*We'll have definitely caught them off guard with this...*

The news of Ryoma Mikoshiba arriving at the Kingdom of Myest with reinforcements would have no doubt reached the Brittania and Tarja alliance by now. But they would have not been expecting his forces to be heading to Jermuk without him having an audience with the king.

Had Ryoma started off wrong, it could have caused issues with the friendly relations between the Kingdom of Myest and the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. It would be nothing short of a disaster to go such a long distance to help an allied country only to complicate their friendly relationship.

But that was why it made sense to do it tactically.

*Plus, we managed to get here in two days, when it would usually take six. The enemy wouldn't have seen us coming at all, thought Ryoma, looking at the southern sky where a large cloud covered his vision. Looks like there'll be more showers... Just as I thought...*

The weather was an essential factor when waging a war. Depending on the circumstances, it could influence whether they would win or lose. It could affect the strength of the soldiers or the usefulness of their armor.

Koichiro Mikoshiba had documented the weather's effect on combat in his treatise on Mikoshiba war tactics.

There was a time when armies worldwide, both east and west, employed shamans or wizards to hold rituals controlling the weather, hoping to make an ally of nature.

Of course, shamans and wizards could not even bring the rain or wind. But they at least knew enough about the coming weather to make it seem like they did affect it.

It was like the old saying, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

*The ability to read the weather... I used to think I'd have zero use for it in modern Japan, but I never once thought I'd be summoned to a place where it would come in handy.*

In modern society, one could check the weather forecast at the click of a

button. Few people worried about the weather unless they wanted to become a meteorologist or a fisherman.

For those who worried about the weather, the most they would do was check the sky to see if they should take an umbrella with them. If they were wrong, it wasn't the end of the world. At most, they'd find somewhere to shelter from the rain or have to buy an umbrella at the convenience store.

With that in mind, how much value was there to learning how to read the clouds and the wind? The same could be said about learning other things.

The modern age had a plethora of knowledge that most people were unsure how to use or benefit from. But that didn't make any of it useless. It was a matter of not having the chance to put it to use.

Ryoma could finally put that once-useless knowledge into practice. Having realized that, he noted how life was quite funny in its own way.

*I'll have to apologize next time I see him,* mused Ryoma as a smirk crept across his lips.

Ryoma needed more time to experience the curiosities of life. Depending on how the battle went, he would have to change his strategy.

As he mused, Laura Malfist approached from behind him on horseback with a report from the Igasaki clan.

"Master Ryoma... We've received news that Chris, Leonard, and the others are in position. They will follow our lead."

Ryoma nodded in response.

"I see, good... Tell them to go ahead as planned," he said, feeling a twinge of unease. *So those two will be the ones to begin the battle. I have heard that both of them are skilled.*

Nevertheless, Ryoma did not doubt Chris Morgan and Leonard Orglen's abilities. He first met Chris during the civil war in Rhoadseria. Chris's father, serving as an adjutant under the then-retired Helena, asked him to join the war. Ryoma knew that Chris had honed his skills working under Helena.

Last month they had a duel for show, so Ryoma was well aware of Chris's skill

with his spear. Unlike Chris, Ryoma didn't have enough evidence to determine Leonard's skills.

Leonard Orglen was famous for being as talented in combat as the prime minister, Diggle McMaster.

That said, one's ability on the battlefield was starkly different to that of a duel. Ryoma knew Leonard was talented at strategizing, as evidenced last month when they cornered Viscount Romaine together. But he wasn't aware of his ability as a fighter or the extent of his ability as a general.

*Still, he does have Helena's testimony supporting him. I'm sure there'll be no problem.*

If Ryoma were unsure about their abilities, he wouldn't even consider them for such an important position. Better yet, when comparing them to the leaders of the Mikoshiba army, Signus Galveria and Robert Bertrand, he didn't feel particularly uneasy about Chris and Leonard.

They had experience, after all. Signus and Robert had stood alongside Lione on some of the harshest battlefields. As such, Ryoma could not complain as he knew their strength and that the time for worrying had long passed.

*I need to focus on what is before me,* thought Ryoma as he squinted his eyes and looked toward the sky.

Ryoma was practicing a form of meditation before the battle. He took a deep breath before slowly sighing as if refreshing all the air inside of himself. With it, the Muldahara chakra in his perineum began to rotate. It was a type of thaumaturgy, known as martial thaumaturgy on Earth, that made the user stronger than the average person.

Suddenly, Ryoma's calm expression changed, showing that he had switched from peace to war.

*This'll do for now...*

In more modern terms, it was as if Ryoma had put a car in low gear. Once he confirmed his body was filled with prana, Ryoma gently clasped his hands together to see how much power he had.



He then turned his gaze to Sara, who stood beside him.

“Did you put the gag bits on the horses?”

“Yes... I’ve finished checking them.”

Gagging horses so their neighing wouldn’t make a sound was standard procedure when launching an attack at night. Although the sky was already making way for dawn, Ryoma planned to use the rain as cover and launch a surprise attack.

“The rain will probably block out the horses’ neighs, but we should take these precautions just in case.”

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the fate of the three kingdoms in the east all relied on this risky gamble Ryoma was about to take.

His feelings resembled Nobunaga Oda’s as he readied himself for the Battle of Okehazama. Ryoma didn’t know if it was true, but theories stated that the surprise attack at Okehazama was successful due to heavy rain.

*Or do I feel more like Mori Motonari before the Battle of Itsukushima? Or rather like Hojo Ujiyasu, who destroyed Uegi’s forces at the Battle of Kawagoe-jyou?*

All were battles that anyone interested in the Warring States period would have heard of at least once or twice. Of course, Ryoma had no idea of how accurate the tales were.

Even if the stories were exaggerated, there were records of successful surprise attacks in Japanese history, where the attackers turned the situation in their favor with their strength and wisdom. Either way, Ryoma didn’t view the heroes of Japanese history as being similar to him, nor was he conceited enough to rank himself on the same level as them. That would have made him simply arrogant.

But it was true that the stories Ryoma had heard from his grandfather, Koichiro Mikoshiba, had played a vital part in shaping him into a man. Not to mention, he was no longer a simple high schooler living in Japan.

*Honestly, I want to follow the footsteps of the Japanese heroes in history.*

Should praying to them bring any benefit, Ryoma would gladly worship them. Doing so was an easy price to pay. Putting ability aside, Ryoma was so prepared for the coming battle that his confidence matched that of historic heroes.

Effectively, the lives of more than ten thousand soldiers—and many more civilians—rested on his shoulders. Ryoma quietly unsheathed Kikoku, which was affixed to his hip. The cry from the blade sounded like a woman's wail, blending in with the sound of the rain.

Like its owner, the sword was excited.

Ryoma gave a slight nod in response to Kikoku, then turned to the twins who accompanied him everywhere and smiled.

"Sara, Laura... Watch my back for me. I'm gonna be going all out. It's been a while," said Ryoma, with a devilish, bloodthirsty expression. Rather, it was the face of a great serpent that swallowed its prey whole—a smile befitting the owner of this fearsome sword.

Even before such evil, the Malfist twins hardly moved an inch. They were calm, dainty demons because they served the head demon, Ryoma.

"Leave it to us!" exclaimed the twins.

Ryoma nodded, then raised Kikoku toward the sky. A silent command.

The soldiers, mounted on their horses, awaited their orders, their fighting spirit blazing like a raging fire.

"March!" shouted Ryoma as he swung down Kikoku with a motion that looked like he was cutting his way through the enemy lines.

With that, the golden and silver two-headed snake quietly began its march toward the fortress city of Jermuk. They were on their way to remind the hunter, who had fallen into his own trap, who the real prey was.

The sixty thousand men who formed the Brittantia-Tarja alliance had set up camp, surrounding Jermuk in all directions and covering the four gates within the city. They endured the roaring rain that covered the horizon. Black clouds had covered the sky for a few days and were finally releasing all they had

accumulated.

It was around eight o'clock in the morning. But the commanding officers had already ordered everyone to remain on standby in their tents. Nobody wanted to go to battle in the ferocious rain. Apart from a few unlucky sentries, most of the soldiers were passing the time inside their tents.

Yet they were still on a battlefield.

There were no recreational facilities, and many soldiers were illiterate, so reading books wasn't an option either. Most of the time, they had only three ways they could kill time. They could repair their weapons or drink alcohol. Otherwise, they'd cover themselves in a shabby blanket and nap.

Even if they tried to nap, it would soon be dawn, making it difficult for them to sleep. Seeing to their weapons didn't kill much time either. It would only take them an hour or two unless the weapon had been through a particularly harsh battle or the owner was too lazy to keep on top of its maintenance.

As a result, most soldiers had already finished tending their weapons, meaning they had around ten hours with nothing to do. This, in turn, led to them to drink to stave off the boredom.

Since the commanders knew their soldiers' mentality, allowing them to drink within the camp was customary. It was possible to say that it was a necessary evil to maintain morale. Despite their permission to consume alcohol, certain restrictions were in place. The rain prevented them from fighting, but they stayed in their tents on military duty. It went without saying they couldn't get too drunk.

They couldn't be drunk in case the enemy launched a surprise attack on them, as it would render them unable to fight. The generals of the army knew how to handle themselves, though.

Thus, the soldiers had no other options than to pass the time by taking sips from a small bottle of alcohol dispensed to them by the army's quartermaster.

Naturally, it wasn't enough to satisfy the soldiers who had endured brutal battles day after day. But if they drank more than allowed, the soldiers could face the death penalty in a worst-case scenario.

It became a common sight to see the majority of soldiers, besides the heavy drinkers and reckless fools, grumble as they made do with the liquor they received. Compared to the unfortunate sentries who had to do their rounds in the pouring rain, the soldiers were rather happy.

However, some soldiers were even more fortunate than the others. They had four options to choose from when it came to killing time. The camps around Jermuk faced every direction: north, east, south and west. In one of the camps to the north, there were around twenty soldiers gathered together in one exceptionally large tent, filling it to the brim. They were there to play a game, and the smell of their sweat filled the area.

“Make your move!”

“What’re you waitin’ for? Pull a card already and play it!”

“All right, who’s up next? Any takers? We’ll finish here if not!”

The soldiers were gambling for prizes. It was a popular card game played using a deck of fifty playing cards, which were said to have been brought from Rearth in the distant past. As long as you had a pack of cards, you could play games like solitaire alone, and a gathering for a few people could be enjoyable. The cards were an exceptional item. Although one had to exercise caution to avoid misplacing them, they were lightweight and could be used for a variety of games. This made them perfect for entertainment.

As everyone was stuck inside due to the rain and awaiting orders, one of the soldiers found a deck of cards among their spoils. That started it all, and after two hours, a sizable crowd had gathered.

These soldiers engaged in a poker game called “Texas hold ’em.” The dealer dealt five cards to each player, and they competed against another five community cards. It was a game of wits and often got quite heated. Even spectators would place bets on who would win and lose, creating quite the lively atmosphere. They were betting using jewelry and currency looted from the nearby towns and villages.

In other words, they were betting on people’s stolen belongings. The soldiers had nothing to lose if they didn’t win, and when they did win, they made a killing. They had everything they needed to raise the stakes.

For a while, they had been making rather large bets, such as ten gold coins. One soldier bet a necklace inlaid with large rubies, which would cost around ten to twenty gold coins in a store. Many people were winning big, making it quite the wild gathering.

After all, just a few gold coins were enough for a person on Earth to live on for a year. They could live a rather comfortable life even if they went on a spending spree and had at least five coins. Considering that, it was easy to understand why they were having so much fun placing such wild bets. Despite their gambling, the soldiers knew that they were being idiotic. Given they were soldiers, one misstep could lead to their demise on the battlefield. Because of this, their spoils of war had value.

They wanted to enjoy their lives somewhat—least until the day they won the war or retired from the army. The fact that they didn't bet on alcohol, which could be considered the most commonly available commodity for this type of gambling, was a good indication of their mental state. Soldiers living on the battlefield held the drops of alcohol before their eyes as more important than the mere possibility of an affluent life in the future.

"All right, no more bets! Show me your hands!" The soldier acting as dealer prompted the three other soldiers, who were continuing to bet, to stop and show their cards.

Unexpectedly, a soldier shouted in a strange voice as he spread his hand on the table.

"Oooohhh! Look at that, a straight flush!" The man raised his voice as he pointed to the cards on the table. He had a jack of hearts, a ten of hearts, and a seven of hearts. He was delighted and had a bright red face.

But everyone around him wasn't as excited. In fact, they were rather cold.

"What the hell are you sayin'?"

"Jeez, you've got that entirely wrong. Take a better look," said voices around him.

Once the soldier who was the dealer confirmed that the man also had an eight and nine of hearts in his hand, it caused a commotion among the

onlookers. But they didn't react with words of congratulations or surprise at his high-point hand.

"Whoa, wait a minute...?"

"You gotta be kidding me..."

"A straight flush? You cheatin' or somethin'?"

Various voices rang out across the tent.

Their comments were past the level of criticism and were closer to booing, but it was an expected reaction. A straight flush in poker was the second-best hand to get. A five-card hand with a joker included was the third strongest hand to get. Still, the hand as a whole was one of the strongest in the game.

Other desirable hands included the five of a kind—which consisted of four cards of the same rank and a wild card—or a royal flush, which had a number ten card, a jack, queen, king, and ace all in the same suit. There was also a straight flush that only required five sequential cards of the same suit.

In that sense, a straight flush was a perfectly realistic hand.

But in a game like Texas Hold'em, the chances of making such a strong hand were meager. One reason was that, unlike poker, a person couldn't exchange any of their cards. After also checking the first two cards dealt in the preflop round, players decided whether to continue betting. Ultimately, the game involved using the five community cards and two initial hole cards to determine the winner.

The honest opinion among actual players was that a flush was the best and most realistic hand to get, especially when all cards are in the same suit.

In poker, players had to imagine their opponent's hand to decide whether to continue betting. Still, it was rare for a player to assume their opponent might have a straight flush when making their decision.

Most hands consisted of high cards or a single pair. If a player was lucky, a straight might occasionally occur. So it was only natural that when someone managed a straight flush, people would react with surprise and doubt. Not to mention, the stakes were high. Of course, it wasn't like they could use their

money on the battlefield. A drop of alcohol still held some worth.

Once the war was over, the value of alcohol would change dramatically. It wouldn't be surprising if a person without any ethics was to cheat in order to win big. The problem was that everyone around the soldier thought of that possibility. This possibility was the same as saying that they were guilty as charged, and the alleged cheater couldn't simply remain silent.

The man would lose the trust of his fellow soldiers if they accused him of cheating. Such would be even more important than winning or losing in poker since they were on a battlefield. In order to survive, one had to work with their comrades on the field. But what would happen if those around a man labeled him as a cheater? At the very least, they could end their bonds of friendship.

Not many people would go out of their way to help someone branded a cheater, especially in an environment where one had to do everything they could to survive. In a worst-case scenario, a cheater may wake up cold and lifeless in their assigned bed the following morning.

Normally it wouldn't go that far. But every time they went out to fight, one would be on edge, worried about receiving an arrow from behind. Should the situation escalate, it was obvious that the man would soon end up as a corpse buried in Jermuk. That was why the man began to plead his innocence desperately. However, his pleading only made those around him even more doubtful.

"Like hell! Who're you calling a cheater?! Got any proof to back that up?!" Anyone else facing accusations of actions they don't remember would react similarly.

The same went for those around him after having been asked if they had any proof.

"Proof? Whaddya mean, proof? Why you asking us for it?"

"You're the cheater. You show us the proof!"

"Take your clothes off. Then we'll be able to make sure!"

The onlookers were offended by the man's pleas of innocence, and their gazes grew even more severe. Unlike the enthusiastic atmosphere before, the

tent had become quite cold and tense. The situation, which could have been resolved with a simple understanding or not allowing the hand to win, got out of control.

All that was left was to decide if the man was innocent or guilty, which he found unbearable.

“Fine! I’ll strip down, and you can search me!” the man desperately called out.

It would be embarrassing for a man to strip naked in this situation, but accepting his shame was the best thing to do since his life hung in the balance. When he reached for his belt, he suddenly stopped.

“What’s up? Thought you wanted us to search ya!”

“I knew it, you’re a cheater!”

But then soldiers around them stopped them from jeering.

“Hey, wait a minute... Did you hear that?”

“Hear what? It’s just the rain...” They strained their ears, focusing on their surroundings. Another sound had mixed in with the sound of the rain. One of the soldiers noticed the ground was shaking. The vibrations grew stronger and stronger.

“Earthquake maybe?” The man’s voice reverberated throughout the tent. The ringing of a bell, followed by the cries of a surprise attack by the sentries, soon canceled out his voice.

“We’re under attack! We’re under attack!”

The soldiers jumped and ran out of their tents, weapons in hand. However, it was a decision that was leading the men to their death.

“Go, go! Run through them!”

Through the shouts and cries, a unit of cavalymen appeared like a sudden gust of wind.

The enemy unit’s leader was mounted on a black horse, swinging a Japanese sword from left to right. Even though the soldiers couldn’t look at him clearly



because of the rain, they could at least see his figure.

“It’s the enemy general! Surround him and kill him!”

The soldiers prepared their weapons in response to the order.

As the enemy leader abruptly appeared before them, all the soldiers’ swords and spears were slashed in two. It was an impossible sight. Although their weapons hadn’t been custom-made, blacksmiths from the Kingdom of Brittania had crafted them. There was no way they would break in two from a single hit. But they didn’t have time to even question it.

All of a sudden, their bodies went limp as their eyesight faded, consumed by the endless darkness.

Ryoma Mikoshiba forcefully wiped the blood from his cheeks after cutting his way through the enemy camp. In his left hand, he held Kikoku, which was red with blood. He wondered just how many people his sword had cut down. A deep, dark crimson soaked his right hand, reaching up to his shoulder. Drops of blood fell from his fingertips, making it clear that he had killed more than ten or twenty people. Though he probably didn’t make it to a thousand, it was safe to say he had slain at least two hundred people.

Even though only ten minutes had passed since they launched their attack, Kikoku had already claimed many lives and prana. From the minute Ryoma had made contact with the soldiers, he had cut them all down. He didn’t pause once, not even to catch his breath. All he did was slaughter, embodying the strength and power of a storm in human form. Regardless, his blade continued to glow.

The raindrops began to trickle down his sword, combining with the blood and rinsing it off, leaving behind a sharp blade. The cold, unblemished blade hungrily devoured the sacrifices made by Ryoma’s hand. Then, Kikoku’s absorbed prana flowed through his body, enabling him to achieve power greater than the average human.

His spirit was heightened as an almighty power ruled Ryoma’s body. He felt a sense of glee, resembling the ecstasy an overwhelmingly strong person might feel when toying with someone weaker.

*It's like I'm drunk on blood.*

Ryoma finally reached the stage where he could open his sixth chakra, known as the ajna chakra, between his brow. That was something even the best fighter on the western continent had never done. Yet he was now clearly moving beyond that, beginning to activate the Sahasrara, also known as the crown chakra, at the zenith. It indicated that he was approaching the domain of the Attainers, those who had surpassed human capability.

There was only one reason Ryoma had already made his first step into a domain that should have been impossible to attain in such a short time.



*Kikoku... Is this a mere fraction of your power?*

Ryoma had repeatedly unsheathed Kikoku and cut down countless enemies. It seemed that it was merely child's play to the sword. Kikoku may have been starved of prana this whole time.

*Well, it is a bewitched sword that went many years without someone to wield it.*

Ever since Kikoku came into Ryoma's possession, it had taken many lives and finally revealed its true power. However, he wasn't entirely satisfied because he could not control the sword's power.

*Kikoku... You're a wondrous sword that makes me incredibly powerful. But this isn't a martial art. This is just pure violence.*

The sword suddenly stopped channeling power into Ryoma, almost as if understanding his thoughts. He felt the joy and absolute power drain from his body. It appeared that Kikoku, which was supplying Ryoma with power, found him ungrateful and began to sulk.

Either way, Ryoma was still in the middle of a battlefield. He was elated that his sword had understood how he felt, though. Besides, he couldn't be overcome with such feelings and power when commanding an army.

*Though, it makes me think I should just cut them all and be done with it.*

The fact that something like that would be possible when holding Kikoku was what made it so terrifying.

Seeing they were at war, Ryoma knew that annihilating the enemy would be a bad move. It was obvious that it would be an unneeded act detrimental to his cause. Not even Kikoku could slay over a thousand people with a single swing, unlike a missile. If an allied soldier died while Ryoma was off chasing the enemy, it would lead to a net zero outcome in each side's combat strength.

If Ryoma killed one person and lost two soldiers, then his army would be in the red in terms of combat strength. War boiled down to efficiently taking out the enemy's soldiers. As such, Ryoma had run far past the enemy's front line, cutting them down. It confused their ranks, leaving them a disoriented rabble.

So, it was time for Ryoma to take control and lead his own forces.

Jermuk and the position of the enemy around the city entered Ryoma's thoughts.

*The enemy has set up camp in each direction to ensure they've blocked all the city gates. I'm currently in the northern camp,* thought Ryoma. If he continued to attack the northern camp, the enemy forces would likely send reinforcements from the eastern and western camps. *It's the shortest route, after all.*

Fortunately, Ryoma had laid a deadly trap for them. He planned to use the rain as a cover to attack the northern camp, then launch a surprise attack on the reinforcements coming from the east and west. It was a dangerous plan, as one wrong move could spell destruction. But his gamble had gone according to plan.

"What about the rest of the units? Have they moved out already?" Ryoma shouted at Laura, who had been following him closely.

"Everything is fine. Chris is leading the second unit, while Leonard is heading to the northern gate with the third to launch a surprise attack!" responded Laura, giving her report through Wezalié's Whisper, which Ryoma had in his ear.

Sara, who had scouted ahead a little, rushed back toward Ryoma.

"Master Ryoma! I saw movement in the Jermuk garrison. They caught wind of our surprise attack, and it seems they're responding!"

"All right, we've made a hole in the enemy lines! Have the Igasaki clan contact the soldiers in the garrison and instruct them to provide support in coordination with our attack! Regardless of how the battle goes, they are forbidden from opening the castle gates to chase the enemy! Got that?!" added Ryoma as the battlefield conditions changed at a dizzying speed.

The ferocious rain showed signs of letting up, making way for conditions favorable to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy army. The other units, led by Leonard Orglen and Chris Morgan, successfully flanked the enemy reinforcements and broke through their formations. Hence, the chain of command on the enemy side collapsed. Upon hearing the report, Ryoma punched his fist into the air as

he looked up toward the sky.

*This settles it.*

No matter how good the enemy general was, they couldn't turn this situation in their favor. Shortly after, Ryoma rendezvoused with Chris and Leonard's units, and the army of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy entered Jermuk. The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy forces then halted to regroup and further examine the situation, and the allied armies of Brittania and Tarja did the same.

A few hours later, the allied forces south of Jermuk started their march toward the border, swiftly ending the situation. Ryoma watched as the allied troops disappeared into the overgrown forests that lined the southern border. Using a pair of binoculars, he stood atop a watchtower at the south gate and sighed in relief.

"Hm... Looks like they're retreating." The enemy generals had given up on the siege of Jermuk, ending the battle that had gone on for close to two months.

The soldiers around Ryoma started to celebrate in response to his words, their faces filled with joy. Yet he paid no attention to the soldiers of Jermuk, instead glaring at the retreating enemy forces with a frown.

*Our successful surprise attack already determined the outcome of the battle. If it were me, I would have retreated as soon as I realized we'd suffered losses, especially with the possibility of a follow-up attack. So why didn't the enemy general do that? Even if he prioritized collecting his wounded, doing it further away from Jermuk would have been safer. I could just put it down to them not thinking that far ahead, but their response felt half-hearted. Were they just seeing how strong we were, or have they possibly set a trap?*

That was purely guesswork on Ryoma's part, but his instincts told him that he was indeed correct.

*Ah, well... Let's first celebrate this victory.*

Ryoma then turned to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy soldiers lined up below and thrust his fist high into the sky as a sign of victory.

He had declared the end of the battle for Jermuk. The victory roar of forty thousand men echoed, shaking the heavens, almost as if chasing off the clouds

and the rain. Everyone was aware that today's victory was the prelude to a new war.

Around half a day had passed since the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's surprise attack raised the Brittania-Tarja alliance's siege of Jermuk. The allied forces had crossed the border and retreated to the Kingdom of Brittania, but that was a mere temporary step.

At the foot of a hill, a few kilometers from Jermuk, the allied forces had set up a camp in order to house their defeated troops and reorganize. They wouldn't have chosen to set up camp so close to the border if they had acknowledged that they had lost. In reality, the camp's atmosphere had no sense of defeat or pathos. Usually, the soldiers would be wearing solemn expressions. But those in the camp were not completely without any shock that they had lost. Instead, they were somewhat disappointed and distrustful of their generals, which was an unusual spectacle for an army defeated in battle.

The men who served as the emotional pillars for the allied soldiers were inside a large tent set up in the center of the camp. A large, burly man was wiping the dirt and rain off his body with a cloth handed to him by a servant. After carefully wiping down his log-like, thick body, he double-checked that he was completely free of sweat and dirt before sitting in a slightly muddied chair and facing his partner.

"Raul... Wipe yourself down. This war has taken an interesting turn. I don't want you catchin' a cold or nothing," said the man as he passed Raul a clean cloth provided by his servant.

A general wouldn't usually be so attentive to others, but this man likely didn't care for fake formalities.

The man was Bruno Accord, captain of the Kingdom of Brittania's proud Griffin Knights. He served as the experienced general of the Myest invasion. His closely shaven black hair and beard made it difficult to assume his age, but he seemed to be around his midforties. These features made him look more like a ferocious bear than a human. He was huge, standing almost 190 centimeters tall and weighing around 150 kilograms.

He wasn't known as the "Man-Eating Bear" for show or exaggeration. Regardless of his appearance, Bruno was not only a knight, but also a multitalented general and one of the best tacticians in the Kingdom of Brittania. It was safe to say that he stood out among the generals serving his nation.

Bruno had devised a plan to use the attack on Jermuk as bait to lure the enemy out and settle the battle on the open plains. Though it seemed even a general as great as he was astonished by the battle earlier in the day.





Raul accepted the cloth and slightly nodded at Bruno, then carefully wiped himself down as he spoke.

“They really made a joke of us... So that’s the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy’s army, huh? They’re as strong as the rumors say. Our soldiers are no less capable than any other army’s, but I could feel the refined, practiced strength of the Grand Mikoshiba Army. I’d guess they’re employing the use of martial thaumaturgy to strengthen themselves. What a ferocious enemy!” exclaimed Raul, shrugging his shoulders. Although he was a commander of the Kingdom of Tarja’s army, he was acting as a vice captain for Bruno in this war. He was also in his midforties but had a neat beard, long golden hair, a medium build, and was lean with effeminate features.

His partner, Bruno, looked more bear than human, while Raul had feminine features that made him popular. Seeing many ladies lining up to dance with Raul at dinner parties in the Kingdom of Tarja was common. Despite his appearance, Raul Giordano was a natural-born warrior. In addition, he wasn’t the type of general who focused on tactics or strategies. He was a brave one, cutting his way through the enemy’s front line while swinging his spear. Rumors circulated that he bore scars from countless battles beneath his armor. Knowing his history on the field, it wasn’t such an unbelievable rumor.

Even Raul, known as the Fiery Tempest for his fierce attacks, felt that the army led by Ryoma Mikoshiba was surprisingly strong. His description of what happened held the reverence of a battle-hardened warrior.

Bruno nodded in delight and smiled.

“They certainly were somethin’. I’ve heard the rumors about that guy, and I’m gonna be honest, I thought it was all exaggerated... But seein’ him in action like that, now I’m wonderin’ if the rumors were downplayed...”

Raul returned a wry smile. “They call him the Devil of Heraklion... That’s quite accurate. Calling him a devil is no mere exaggeration. After all, he cut down our battalion commanders with a single stroke of his blade.”

“Exactly... I wouldn’t wanna fight against ’im. At the very least, I’d sure as hell say no to a one-on-one with ’im. Going against someone as skilled as him wouldn’t be easy. I might forget my role as a general and get lost in just going

toe to toe with him.” That was both a compliment toward Ryoma and a joke about himself.

Getting too engrossed in head-to-head combat was a bad habit for Bruno. Whenever he saw a skilled opponent on the field, he strongly desired to bash them in with his beloved hammer.

Raul had only watched Ryoma Mikoshiba fighting from afar, but he still sensed something about him as a warrior. His instincts told him that he found a worthy contender to fight. If Raul had the opportunity, he would love to request a duel with Ryoma. However, Raul and Bruno knew that would be difficult.

Sadly, Laura and Sara Malfist always surrounded Ryoma and followed him like his shadow. Trying to break through the twins’ defenses and going straight for Ryoma to fight him was impossible. That would only be possible if the other accepted a duel, but Raul kept his expectations low. Ryoma Mikoshiba was a battle-hardened warrior and a ferocious fighter, and Raul could sense he was not the kind of person who valued martial arts as he and Bruno did.

If necessary, Ryoma would accept a duel. Otherwise, he might decide there was no point in accepting it and refuse.

“Well, I don’t know if he would ever take me up on the offer. Many skilled individuals surround him. He has the silver and gold-haired twins following him. They seem like they could put up a good fight. Besides, he’s an exceptional warrior and a ferocious general.”

Bruno nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, he seems to have a skilled eye for tactics... Reports indicated his arrival in Endesia only two days ago, so I thought he’d reach us in about four days. But he completely outsmarted us. He read us like books and didn’t want to pass up even a small win. That’s only somethin’ someone who started off as a mercenary and climbed his way up to grand duke can do... What the hell did he do to get here from Endesia in only two days?”

“You’re quite right. Judging by how long it took him, it seems he skipped out on an audience with the king... That or he had already met with the king ahead of time. Either way, it was a bold move from him. Even if their countries are on

good terms, going to battle without having an audience with the king isn't something the nobles of Myest will look on lightly," replied Raul. In simple terms, it was a diplomatic faux pas.

Although Bruno found it a trifling matter, even he knew well enough that one couldn't ignore a country's honor like that. Depending on the time and place, it could trigger a war. While Bruno found it effective, he didn't have the courage to do something like that. It was part of the reason they never suspected that Ryoma Mikoshiba would march so quickly.

"Well, it certainly worked. As a result, our expeditionary forces suffered some major damage... The camp in the north has been all but annihilated. But we should be happy that the other three units got off relatively lightly," said Bruno, sighing and looking at the sky.

His sigh was filled with regret and anger because the allied forces he commanded had been single-handedly wiped out. Even though he tried to remain calm, it was only due to logic suppressing his overflowing emotion.

Any general would feel something when losing subordinates and men. The mental anguish was significantly worse when they had become sacrifices as a result of one's own negligence and miscalculations.

But he could not show his suffering to his other men as they might begin to doubt his capacity to lead if they saw him in that state. That doubt would then change into anger and despair, causing the whole unit to fall apart. Bruno understood that all too well, so he wore a mask covering his true thoughts.

"If the opposing side chased after us, then we could have responded in kind... But unfortunately, they prioritized helping Jermuk and chose to go inside the city."

It wasn't that Bruno was a sore loser. He had prepared a plan to attack the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy if they had chosen to pursue his forces when they retreated. It was a plan that could have given Bruno a chance to kill Ryoma Mikoshiba if it had gone well.

Even if it hadn't gone well, it would have given him enough of an upper hand to turn the tide of battle and get them out of their unfortunate situation.

Bruno felt as if he'd lost his chance at winning. Unless Ryoma pushed further, he had to keep his trump card hidden.

Nevertheless, Bruno's words were merely wishful thinking that ignored all the core components of wartime strategy. Strategically, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's goal was always to rescue the fortress city of Jermuk. Ryoma had made the right decision not to pursue the enemy.

"Well, we held Jermuk under siege for two months. They were slowly running out of food... The others likely suspected as much and began their march with that in mind. Confronting the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy could have been a real bother for us," related Raul, referring to a rather realistic development.

Bruno felt ashamed of his thoughtlessness.

Winning a battle was always important, but it seemed he had remembered the most important part was first confirming if one *could* win.

"You're right... I'm just talkin' stupid. It's a shame we couldn't eliminate the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. At least our plans are goin' without a hitch... I'm sure we'll get a chance at redemption soon," said Bruno.

"After the Kingdom of Myest mobilizes all its armies," added Raul.

Bruno nodded in response.

"We'll have the others who are awaiting their turn make their move too. Until then, we'll let our enemies enjoy the sweet taste of victory," said Bruno, taking a large gulp of his drink.

It was a vow of retribution for the impending decisive battle and a tribute to the fallen soldiers.

# Epilogue

The Kingdom of Myest's capital, Endesia, was filled with cheers, thanks to the information shared from the royal palace just a few hours before. Civilians jumped with joy in the streets as they cheered.

Women were throwing confetti made for festivals from second-floor windows. It made for a fantastic sight, like powdered snow dancing through the air.

While it was still around midday, cheers of people drinking in celebration filled the taverns. The tavern owners, anticipating the reactions of their customers, showcased their business acumen by discounting the prices on the alcohol. For them, it had been a long-awaited peak season.

It wasn't surprising that the civilians living in the royal capital were all in high spirits. The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had defeated the allied forces of Brittania and Tarja, which had besieged the fortress city of Jermuk.

Naturally, the war hadn't been won in its entirety.

The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy had only broken through the enemy lines, raised the siege, and made their way into the castle. But the war, which started with a surprise attack by the allied forces, had already gone on for a few months.

At that time, the Kingdom of Myest had been forced into an disadvantageous position for several reasons. Few people understood these various circumstances.

The Kingdom of Myest would never take the initiative to spread information that would bring shame to the kingdom. Even if the people of Myest didn't understand it logically, they weren't fools.

Although the information hadn't been made public, rumors and hearsay were spreading.

Among that gossip was the information about the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's victory. It would have been impossible for the citizens not to get excited and

celebrate. That was a luxury only those without any responsibility could afford. They were commoners, after all, and could do so.

Some unfortunate people were unable to escape their responsibilities. One was seated in an office deep within the royal capital palace in Endesia.

King Phillip sighed deeply and appeared troubled. This was unusual for him, as he had ruled over the Kingdom of Myest, the most prominent of the three eastern countries, for several decades. But it wasn't an unreasonable response.

"Well, well... What do we have here... The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. I've heard he was an exceptionally talented strategist, but I never thought he would resort to such means..." He had previously heard rumors from his niece, Ecclesia.

Seeing the outcome of the political strife in the neighboring Kingdom of Rhoadseria, Phillip was aware that Ryoma Mikoshiba was no ordinary man.

*If anything, he is the man who deposed Lupis Rhoadserians, the country's ruler at the time. A man like that isn't bound by a country's diplomacy,* thought King Phillip.

It was well known that Ryoma went by another name: the Devil of Heraklion.

While he was regarded as the savior of Rhoadseria, many still believed that he had chased former ruler Lupis Rhoadserians from the kingdom and replaced her with a puppet queen.

Undeniably, having such a reputation affected people's trust in Ryoma Mikoshiba. That decline in trust led to people believing that his total disregard for diplomacy was a malicious act toward the king of Myest.

Should it be necessary, Ryoma Mikoshiba would have happily attended an audience with Phillip. Even if he hadn't thought so, he would have still followed protocol if the situation in Jermuk wasn't an emergency.

As a response to an emergency during wartime, he had deemed it was an opportune time to attack and had chosen to go for victory, disregarding protocol. It was a correct decision for a general leading an army to make, yet a limited number of people would understand that.

Just the thought of the response of those who wouldn't understand it was

enough to make Phillip's stomach churn. As someone in the center of the situation, Phillip harbored no ill will toward Ryoma. He also thought that Ryoma Mikoshiba had made the right decision, and he understood that the whole cause behind this situation was the Kingdom of the Myest.

*Our country hadn't finished organizing our units yet. Even so, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy army consisted of only forty thousand men, but he went up against sixty thousand men. Knowing that man, I assumed he would win. It would, however, have further dragged out the war.*

Myest's internal conflicts had affected the aid sent from other countries. Regardless of that fact, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was successful in defeating the Brittania-Tarja alliance and freeing Jermuk.

Considering both the outcome and the events leading up to it, any fair assessment of the situation would conclude that Ryoma Mikoshiba's decision was the correct one.

Phillip understood that and had no intention of blaming Ryoma for it. He didn't think there were any other options than Ryoma talking to him, though.

*Not that I can think of, anyway...*

Of course, there were those with gifted minds in the world. Those kinds of people may have been able to come up with an alternative plan and criticize Ryoma's decision. But Phillip found it unethical to fault someone without first offering an alternative.

Fortunately, Phillip was a man who wasn't so shameless as to ask someone to do what he couldn't do himself. He considered it settled. The main issue was handling it externally, and the main point was that it needed to be solved diplomatically.

*I'm worried about how the nobles will respond.*

The nobles from the Kingdom of Myest were considerably better than those from the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. That resulted from King Phillip's solid royal authority, which he maintained because he was effective at keeping the nobles in check. Simply put, the manner in which Viscount Romaine managed his territory would never be allowed to happen in the Myest.



If someone were to rule similarly to Viscount Romaine and such actions were made public, he would have been immediately stripped of his title and executed. Noble society also valued noblesse oblige, meaning they all understood that anyone like Viscount Romaine would not be entitled to inherit his family's estate and would be thoroughly excluded from the family.

No nobles had been punished like that during Phillip's many years on the throne, meaning that the country's self-regulating system worked exceedingly well. The nobles from the Kingdom of Myest were outstanding compared to the rest of the western continent.

It wouldn't have been accurate to say they did not have their complaints about the current situation. They took pride in their status and loyalty to their king due to their excellence. Moreover, they placed a lot of value on tradition and etiquette.

*They definitely won't be too fond of this.*

Though, it was a normal reaction for them to have as nobles. It would be difficult to have them think otherwise. Phillip couldn't see a satisfying solution to the problem.

*Even though Jermuk has been freed, the Brittantia and Tarja forces are still lingering around the border. We still very much require the aid of Ryoma Mikoshiba. What should we do?*

Phillip was a renowned ruler, although he seemed to struggle with how to deal with this situation.

Sometimes, a savior appeared at the most unexpected times.

"Your Majesty... Chancellor Spiegel is requesting an audience. What would you like me to do?" announced the guard standing in front of the door.

"Owen? That's fine. Let him in." As soon as Phillip had finished speaking, the doors to the office opened, and Chancellor Owen Spiegel entered the room.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty," said Owen, kneeling.

Phillip waved his hand, signaling him to stop. He then smiled as he spoke to Owen with genuine affection, "No need for such pleasantries. It's just me and

you here. You can be more relaxed around me, my dear brother.”

Owen, the recipient of such affectionate words, shook his head.

“I cannot do that, Your Majesty. You are the king of Myest, and I am your vassal. Although we are brothers who share the same father, we must maintain the distinction between master and servant.”

Phillip’s face clouded over in response.

“Distinction between master and servant... I suppose you are right.” Though Phillip understood Owen, he couldn’t help but feel a little displeased by it.

He struggled to truly accept it, seeing as they were family. Chancellor Spiegel returned a wry smile.

Although this had happened many times, Chancellor Spiegel likewise struggled to accept Phillip’s side of it. He was appropriately strict for a chancellor who governed the country’s politics.

Phillip shrugged in response to his brother’s stubborn attitude, something that had happened many times before. He wasn’t so childish that he would get angry over his brother rejecting his affection. He then asked the reason for Chancellor Spiegel’s visit.

“So, what brings you here? Though, it’s also fine if you just came to see me. Maybe we can enjoy a nice meal outside in the garden.”

Unfortunately, Chancellor Spiegel shook his head in response to the suggestion.

“There is a reason I am disturbing you today, Your Majesty. I came to deliver this letter.” Chancellor Spiegel took out a heavily sealed letter and placed it before Phillip.

“A letter? That you, the chancellor, have come to deliver it to me?” Phillip wore a puzzled expression.

It was a natural response. Even though Owen Spiegel was his half brother, he was also the chancellor of the Kingdom of Myest. For him to act as a messenger was unusual.

But Phillip’s questions were answered when he saw the sender’s name on the

letter.

“I see now... There is some meaning behind you personally delivering this letter,” Phillip said. Chancellor Spiegel slowly nodded.

“But why, why now? Why did he send such a letter now? He’s been confined to his estate due to illness for many years.” Phillip took out a paper knife and opened the letter.

Phillip scanned the contents of the letter before rereading them more carefully.

The contents of the letter must have been shocking. He finally looked up from the letter.

How much time had passed?

At the very least, surely more than enough time needed to read a letter. However, Phillip didn’t care for such trivial matters at that moment. He then sighed deeply and directed a sharp gaze toward Chancellor Spiegel.

“Do you know what is written in this letter?” Phillip asked. It was a determined question, one that didn’t allow any falsehood.

If the contents of the letter were true, it would mean several of Myest’s dilemmas would be solved. Knowing this, Phillip had spoken with a firm tone. Yet Chancellor Spiegel simply nodded slowly in response.

“Yes... It was I who requested this letter be written.”

Phillip let out a deep sigh in response. “I see... Then, is it true? Is that man... Is Alexis Duran really returning to military duty?”

The letter came like a bolt from the blue, leaving Phillip in shock. One of the strongest generals in the Kingdom of Myest was to return. Philip considered Duran’s return even better news than the liberation of Jermuk.

Despite this, the king failed to pick up on the slight malice hidden within the letter that would lead the Kingdom of Myest into further hardship.

## Afterword

Though I don't think this applies to anyone, if this is your first time picking up *Record of Wortenia War*, it's nice to meet you. For those who have been reading since volume 1, long time no see. I'm the author, Ryota Hori, and I was able to finish volume 25 safely.

I've kept up the pace, writing three volumes a year, or one every four months, meaning it's been eight years since HJ Novels first published *Record of Wortenia War*.

If you count all my years as an author and the three novels published by another company, that would mean it's been ten years... Including the other three novels, that would total twenty-eight novels.

It's often said that ten years feels like ancient history. Although it should feel like a long time, I feel like it passed by in the blink of an eye. It could have something to do with my main job that I do alongside being an author, but I feel like the days are flying by. To be honest, I want more time.

Can we have forty hours in one day? If I had more time, I could try my hand at a few novels I've been cooking up. Instead, I have my hands full, making sure I keep on top of *Record of Wortenia War*.

I'm sincerely asking the gods for help today.

The past ten years have really flown by, so much so that I've been too busy to spend time thinking such useless thoughts. I have to say that it seems being an author for ten years is rare.

The other day, I went to a social gathering for the first time in a few years. I hadn't been since the pandemic started. But I was surprised to hear the above fact from a younger person. They were right, though. Writing a novel is hard, and keeping it up is also hard.

I have many novelist friends who have worked in this business for ten years like me, so I never really thought about how long it had been until it was

brought up. But it reminds me of how fortunate I am that I can continue writing books when it's been said that books aren't selling as well.

Even though I've hit volume 25, I'm only halfway through the series. We're not even halfway through the storyline I planned, so it'll be a few years yet before it's finished.

I am in my forties and am a little worried that I won't be able to live long enough to finish it, but I hope all the readers out there will stick with the series.

Putting my worries about my health aside, let me go over the highlights from this volume.

In this volume, the Kingdom of Myest, which until now played a small role, was front and center. Myest is a strong country that is rich, has a strong army, and is blessed with many talented people. However, they are not without their problems, not unlike the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

But if the kingdoms aren't struggling in some way, I can't really think of a way to advance the story, so... It is what it is. They say that when three people get together, they form a clique.

I think I would like to explore that facet of human nature in this story further. Plus, I have plans for the southern kingdoms to continue appearing. The only named countries thus far are Tarja, Brittania, and Beldzevia.

I planned for there to be around ten kingdoms in the south, meaning only one-fourth have been introduced. Since I will continue to introduce them, though, please look forward to it.

I also want to bring more attention to the civilizations outside of any imperial influence.

The demi-humans will also appear more. I touched on them lightly in this volume, but those living in the seas will play a greater role in the next volume.

Given that Ryoma's main base is the Wortenia Peninsula, we can't ignore the ocean around it. One of the main pillars of *Record of Wortenia War* is the cultural exchanges in the story. I plan to delve into the Wortenia Peninsula, with Nelcius at the center.

I hope you enjoyed volume 25, which introduced many new factors into the story.

Lastly, I would like to thank all those involved in making this book possible and those who picked up this book to read. If all goes well, volume 26 will be released in November of this year, so I will see you all again then.

I'll do my best to continue writing *Record of Wortenia War*. Thank you.













# Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: Collaboration of Shadows](#)

[Chapter 2: The Crimson Lion Roars](#)

[Chapter 3: A Gloomy Storm](#)

[Chapter 4: The Two-Headed Snake Scowls](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 26 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

# Copyright

Record of Wortenia War: Volume 25

by Ryota Hori

Translated by Jade Willis Edited by Mario Mendez

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © Ryota Hori Illustrations Copyright © bob Cover illustration by bob

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2023 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2024 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

[j-novel.club](http://j-novel.club)

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: August 2024