

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR




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

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**“Oh... Sorry
'bout that,
Signus.”**

The documents
Signus handed
Lione contained
a glimmer of
hope in this
hopeless
situation.

**RECORD OF
WORTENIA
WAR**

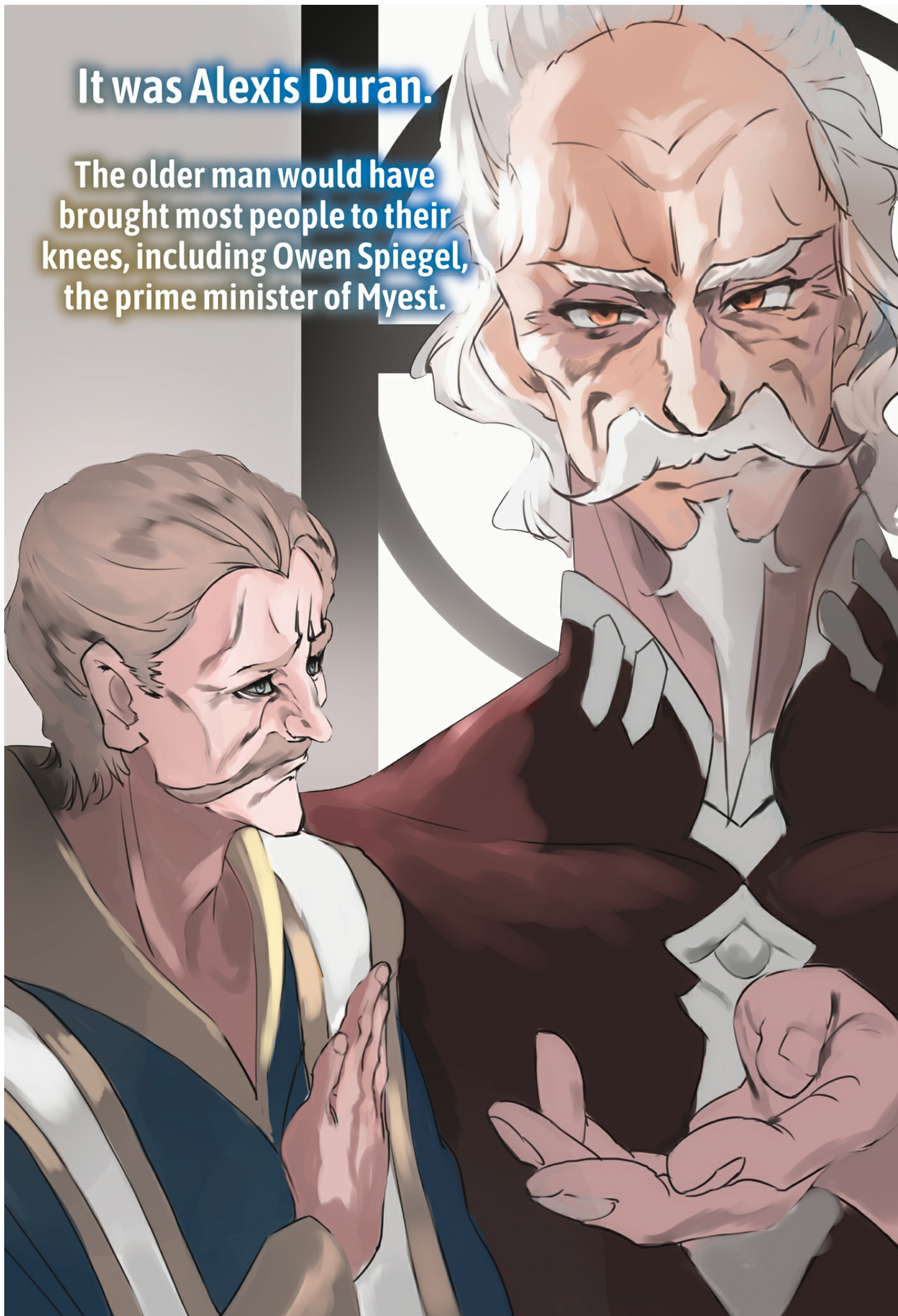
A manga-style illustration. In the upper left, a large, dark grey hot-air balloon is shown from a low angle, looking up. A small basket hangs from it, containing a person. A bright orange flame is visible inside the balloon's envelope. In the foreground, on the right, a young man with long black hair and a slight smile looks towards the balloon. He is wearing a grey and black jacket. Next to him, a young woman with long black hair and a blue eye patch looks up at the balloon with a serious expression. She is wearing a grey and black outfit. The background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

Ryoma
planned to
have a hot-air
balloon take
flight with
people
aboard.

Hot air rose
to the top,
making the
transport
rise higher
and higher
into the sky.

It was Alexis Duran.

The older man would have brought most people to their knees, including Owen Spiegel, the prime minister of Myest.



CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER 1 DELIVERED CARGO

CHAPTER 2 LURKING DANGER

CHAPTER 3 ENDESIA'S REVOLUTION

CHAPTER 4 THE THUNDEROUS WARLORD

EPILOGUE

AFTERWORD



Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: Delivered Cargo](#)

[Chapter 2: Lurking Danger](#)

[Chapter 3: Endesia's Revolution](#)

[Chapter 4: The Thunderous Warlord](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

Prologue

Thick clouds covered the sky, blocking out the sun, making it the perfect example of an overcast day.

Although it was approaching midday, the land was dark. The occasional flash of lightning cut through the sky in the distance, followed by a roar of thunder that reverberated across the land—truly ominous weather.

A young woman looked out her window toward the east. Her room was located within the royal castle in the Xaroodian capital of Peripheria.

Her name was Lione.

Once a mercenary, she now served the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy as a knight. For someone who made her living from battle, she wasn't especially large in stature, standing just over 170 centimeters. She would be considered bigger in build than most other women from Earth, but from a warrior's point of view, she was on the smaller side.

However, within her lay a terrifying talent.

She had the agility of a feline and had a well-proportioned, muscular body fitting for someone with ample combat experience—her body exemplified functionality. Anyone on a battlefield would be able to take one glance at her and understand just how much power lurked inside her. In addition, Lione's refined features, combined with her flaming red hair, caught the eye of many.

Her chest wasn't particularly voluptuous; while some might see this as unfortunate, few would deny her beauty. Everyone had their own taste, but there was a universal standard for beauty. All that appeared on Lione's beautiful, strong face today was doubt and grief.

Man... I don't like the look of that sky. It's makin' me feel uneasy, thought Lione as she ran her hands through her fiery hair. This was a peculiar state of mind for the Crimson Lioness, an experienced mercenary who also played a major role in the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy.

Lione was usually bright, easygoing, and had a mature older sister aura about her, but she was also a calm, calculating commanding officer.

She was frequently criticized for not being very womanly and was often the target of jealous whispers, but she was a veteran mercenary commander. She was once even asked to serve as an officer due to her outstanding leadership abilities.

It was a rare occurrence for the experienced mercenary, Lione, to show such emotion—even if there was no one around her.

That said, Lione's clouded expression wasn't without good reason. If most people had heard the report she'd received from the Igasaki clan, they probably would have lost heart and fallen into a daze.

Did Lione's reaction to the report stem from her realizing just how imposing the O'ltormea Empire was, or did it come from the betrayal of her faint expectations of the Kingdom of Xarooda?

Lione felt emptiness and fragility pass through her mind. *Given the situation, I was somewhat prepared for this. I didn't expect a country renowned for its military prowess to be like this.*

The Kingdom of Xarooda controlled one of the westernmost territories in the eastern part of the continent. They had managed to develop a nation in the basin formed by several dangerous mountain ranges.

Xarooda has also acted as the last bastion against the conquerors from O'ltormea, who have their eyes on dominating the whole western continent.

Everyone living in the eastern part of the western continent was aware of this reality. It was also common knowledge that the knights and soldiers of the Kingdom of Xarooda's army were powerful. However, Lione now knew of a crack in their seemingly strong defenses. This differed greatly from what she had heard from Ryoma Mikoshiba before they left for this expedition.

Well, we are at war. There's bound to be matters we don't expect... I guess...

No matter how well one prepared, even if one could predict various outcomes, reality often found a way to surpass expectations. In a way, to remain composed was a good quality for a commander to have because they

would have the ability to prepare for any unexpected developments.

Regardless, everything had its limits.

It's a historically significant nation, and yet...

The Kingdom of Xarooda had an extremely long history in comparison to the other nations in the continent.

Out of the twenty or more countries that made up the western continent, it had been around the third-longest. In a continent plagued by war, which had frequently caused the rise and fall of nations, Xarooda had managed to stand for close to five hundred years—a rare achievement.

Apart from the Kingdom of Helnesgoula in the northern part of the continent, which had a history spanning over a thousand years, the only other kingdom that could compare to Xarooda was the Kingdom of Rhoadseria to the east.

However, having equally long histories didn't mean their armies were equally strong.

Even so, countries with long histories have certain advantages that put them above the rest.

This also meant there were also a similar amount of downsides. Lione couldn't help but question if the Kingdom of Xarooda possessed military prowess proportional to its long history. After all, the Holy Qwiltantia Empire, one of the three strongest nations vying for hegemony over the continent, had emerged only after the Church of Meneos was established. That was only three hundred years of history. And Lionel Eisenheit, the current emperor, had established the O'ltormea Empire just about ten years ago.

In other words, having a long history didn't necessarily guarantee military strength.

Not that I would ever refer to Xarooda as weak, but... Comparin' them to those other nations is probably unfair...

Compared to the three big nations—which included the domination-hungry O'ltormea Empire—Xarooda was much smaller.

Even then, the Kingdom of Xarooda boasted a substantial territory covering a

third of the eastern part of the continent. It only looked small compared to the other great powers, which occupied a larger part of the western continent. When viewed alongside the southern kingdoms, Xarooda was rather big.

As a country on Earth, it was still a relatively strong nation. The problem was that countries boasting greater national power than Xarooda resided on the very same western continent, and they were Xarooda's enemies.

If someone were to ask me if the country's national power matched its size, I'd find it hard to answer, even if I tried to consider the question thoughtfully.

Because the Kingdom of Xarooda was in a mountainous region, it was also filled with trees and hills. The only issue was that it lacked wide-open plains suited for agriculture, owing to its mountainous terrain. Of course, most of its land consisting of mountains wasn't entirely bad.

Mountains can act as a shield against enemy attacks, and they have a lot of natural water sources. So it's really not a bad thing at all...

The mountains of Xarooda hid many valuable mines. In addition to gold, silver, and copper, Xarooda was one of the only nations on the western continent with iron mines. This resource was vital for forging armaments, and thus a huge advantage for a country like the Kingdom of Xarooda.

It was difficult to overlook the fact that they not only were able to mine such metals, but they also possessed most of the iron ore on the continent. They had become incredibly skilled at forging armor using their ample supply of iron. Gathering the metals needed was practically painless, so there was no better environment for an artisan to hone their trade.

As a result, people often claimed that the Kingdom of Xarooda produced some of the highest-quality equipment on the western continent.

Knights and soldiers have long used weapons and armor from the Kingdom of Xarooda and always treated them as high-quality equipment.

Even if they were mass-produced items, they would already have fetched a higher price than equipment made in other countries. Because Xarooda's goods were not merely ready-made but rather crafted by renowned artisans, it wasn't unusual for their prices to soar.

To those who made a living in combat, it was safe to say equipment from Xarooda was often a subject of envy. That was made evident by the fact that whenever a shipment of goods came from the trading city Pherzaad, a large share of the items were equipment made in the Kingdom of Xarooda.

Recently, Xarooda expanded their trade routes to the northern city of Sirius.

Xarooda was desperately securing a constant flow of funds. Smithing and sales were two main industries within the nation. And the backbone of that industry was the vast amounts of natural ore deposits that lay in the mountains. The ore deposits were the lifeblood of the kingdom.

But therein lies another problem. Such treasure attracts enemies who want it for themselves...

It was the way of the world: if one country excelled at something, another would lag behind. One couldn't gain anything without losing something else. This truth applied to people and nations. The price the Kingdom of Xarooda paid for its success with mining and metallurgy was a lack of self-sufficiency regarding food.

Since Xarooda is so mountainous, where those many metal deposits lie, it lacks empty plains suitable for farming. Previous monarchs tried and failed to change that.

Politicians fully aware of their limited agricultural power would not simply disregard that weakness. In fact, past monarchs in Xarooda had taken great pains to improve the nation's agriculture. But the level of technology available to those on Earth had its limits. Even with their best efforts, Xarooda could barely keep its citizens from starving. Or more accurately, they were one bad harvest away from a famine.

It was a horrifying reality.

This situation made the neighboring Kingdom of Rhoadseria—with its ample amounts of irrigated agricultural fields—look like a tempting place to live. Centuries ago, Rhoadseria and Xarooda had frequently clashed swords due to the former Xaroodian rulers coveting Rhoadseria's land. It was a prime country for food production.

However, living in such demanding conditions isn't always a bad thing.

Due to living in such a mountainous region, the people of Xarooda were built rather sturdy. Moreover, they held a strong sense of loyalty and duty toward their nation—a great boon indeed.

And so, the history and climate of this country nurtured a warlike spirit among its people.

The Kingdom of Xarooda had been able to protect its borders due to the sturdy and incredibly patriotic people who lived there. This was a fine example of how advantages and disadvantages could change someone's outlook or the situation. But Xarooda's geopolitical position had changed dramatically once the O'ltormea Empire established itself in the central part of the western continent and made known its desire to dominate.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Rhoadseria to the east relied on Xarooda as an important defense to avoid an invasion from O'ltormea.

A new era had recently dawned for the three eastern kingdoms, as Ryoma Mikoshiba orchestrated the establishment of a four-country alliance headed by the Kingdom of Helnesgoula. But a new, foreboding cloud had settled over Xarooda.

An incredibly lethal one, at that...

Lione let out a deep sigh. After all, the Kingdom of Xarooda would lose one of its few advantages in the coming war. Despite how dauntless she usually was, keeping her composure in such a situation was challenging. An ordinary commander would find themselves in a state of despair, their mind going blank. Lione's instinct to first analyze the situation and her tenacity to face reality were what made her a cut above the rest as a commander.

I know I said that the people of this country were loyal, but that isn't necessarily the case for the nobles.

There was a difference between the commoners—who had no involvement or responsibility in politics—and the nobles, who did.

A cold smile appeared on Lione's beautiful face.

Was she ridiculing the wavering nobles?

Or was she grieving the idiocy of humans?

We're in a bit of a bind... Judging from O'ltormea's movements, they are hell-bent on destroying Xarooda. But Xarooda is in a state of confusion and has yet to unite against the invaders... Everyone has their own ideas on what to do. We need someone who can coordinate all that and decide on a direction for the nation.

The royal family, bureaucrats, nobles, and common folk were all involved in the war effort. It was a rather dangerous situation because all the groups that made up Xarooda had yet to unite and face the national crisis before their eyes. The discord among the nobles was terrible; their arguments often went in circles as they bickered over what to do at the royal court. Some intended to fight until the very end, but others shouted about negotiating for their survival. Those who prioritized the safety of the citizenry suggested the unconditional surrender of Xarooda to the O'ltormea Empire.

That said, it's a little difficult to just dismiss the nobles' methods as a mere attempt at self-preservation.

The nobles were patriotic; the same could be said for the seemingly cowardly ones who proposed an unconditional surrender for the good of the people. Of course, those who advocated this could have been influenced by the O'ltormea Empire. Considering the situation in Xarooda, surrender wasn't an unrealistic choice to consider.

Still, one should consider that there was a sense of self-preservation and greed that also factored into that decision. No matter how much a noble loved their country, it didn't mean that they would prioritize the prosperity and longevity of the Kingdom of Xarooda. They couldn't always quietly go along with what the country as a whole needed because they were focused on protecting their own individual territories. An even greater problem was that the nobles lacked the power to act decisively.

The barriers of social status on Earth were absolute, although that did not determine all recklessness. A certain Rhoadserian monarch came to Lione's mind.

If the barriers of social status were absolute, then a certain queen wouldn't have struggled so much with the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's politics.

Many nations adhered to rules of social standing a lot more closely, with the monarch holding most of the power, but there were some exceptions. Even if the gods instructed someone to act, it was ultimately that person's responsibility to act on those instructions. Aside from the institutional issues, the nobles had an even bigger problem: the poison known as paranoia.

The nobles doubted that Xarooda could win against the mighty O'ltormea Empire. As a result of them not having any confidence in victory, they could not give solid commands to their subordinates.

It's understandable when their monarch—the pillar of the kingdom—is unable to command the army himself, thought Lione, considering how Julianus I being unable to command was a deadly problem. He could use his position as ruler to forcefully send people to the battlefield, but that's one step above being a powerless figurehead.

People needed a strong desire to fight and kill their enemies. If the soldiers didn't have that, they would do nothing but get in the way. Sending one soldier to the battlefield meant paying for their equipment. Until that soldier died or the war was over, they would need to be supplied with provisions every day, and those weren't cheap.

All one can expect from an untrained soldier is that they'll hightail it out of there once they get a whiff of the battlefield.

Worse still, soldiers who saw deserters flee would also lose their spirit for battle.

There aren't many people who will stand and fight while others around them are retreating.

There were exceptions, of course. Just like in the songs of bards, some soldiers fought to the bitter end with zero regard for their own well-being. Lione had seen it with her own eyes—warriors fighting until the very end. They died noble deaths striving to protect their leaders, comrades, and homes. They all fought fiercely with no regard for themselves.

However, that was only true in specific situations. Since exceptions existed, it wouldn't become the topic of bards' songs. *At the very least, it's reckless putting together a plan based on the assumption that the soldiers will be ready to battle.*

In most situations, it was common for soldiers swept up by those around them to attempt to escape the battlefield. When the enemy saw the fleeing soldiers, they would be quick to press their advantage.

In fact, it's actually rather uncommon for soldiers to die fighting on the battlefield.

Enemies could attack from anywhere, and stray arrows were also a threat. Countless hazards could lead to death on the battlefield, but soldiers were accustomed to those hazards and usually aware of their surroundings. They could ready their weapons to fight, fend off the enemy, and protect themselves with shields and armor. Breaking through such defenses head-on required an overwhelming difference in battle strength. Thus, there were fewer casualties in situations where the fighting was constant and soldiers could grow into veterans.

If one were to ask when the most casualties occur, that would be when soldiers broke ranks, turned their backs on the foe, and tried to flee the battlefield.

Almost all soldiers turn their backs to the foe when fleeing.

Humans who felt they were in danger would naturally try to distance themselves from it, choosing to run in the opposite direction.

That was human nature, after all.

However, it wasn't the best means of escape. When running away, the person could no longer see the danger, leaving them defenseless.

That just increases the morale of the enemy while decreasing it for others on the deserters' side, thought Lione.

Nothing was more encouraging than being able to wipe out one's enemies. Nor was there nothing more demoralizing than seeing your allies being eliminated.

And once your morale takes a hit like that, there's no bringing it back. At least not for me.

It was a domino effect. When that happened, the unit would lose all cohesion and could not recover—it was hopeless. That wasn't due to a failing of Lione, though. Not even the famed Helena Steiner could change the outcome of such a disaster.

All that was left was to be hunted down by the enemy.

It's like giving food to a starved wolf.

Given the dismal prospects, no ruler could dare to conscript more soldiers, not with the threat of the great country of O'ltormea ever approaching. If they were to conscript people, the commoners wouldn't remain silent for long.

Worst-case scenario, they might riot.

Even when considering how patriotic the people of Xarooda were, there was a small chance that they might riot if conscripted. Although no one could say that would definitely be the case, the nobles understood there was still that possibility. Thus, they found it difficult to impose their will onto others. At the very least, the nobles would have to provide some benefits to convince their civilians and vassals of the merits of military service.

Patriotism... Well, it is definitely one of the ways to inspire people to act. But we can't keep dreamin' for ideal outcomes.

Naturally, wanting to protect the country one was born and raised in was always a noble purpose worth putting your life on the line for. Many people were prepared to give their lives marching onto battlefields for that very cause. But it was undeniable that there were often other reasons to fight.

For example, one reason could be peer pressure, and another that one's remaining family members had something to gain from one's service. Based on Lione's many years working in the mercenary business, few people gave their lives for their countries based on simple, honest patriotism, even if that was the perception they wanted to cultivate.

As expected, the loss of Arios Belares, hailed as their guardian deity in a previous war, resulted in weaker control over their army. This, along with their

king's illness, has proved quite fateful.

That didn't mean Xarooda had no generals capable of leading troops.

Grahart Henschel, the Captain of the Royal Guard, and Orson Greed, the Captain of the Xaroodian Monarch's Guard, were among the kingdom's finest knights and capable commanders who could lead an army. Moreover, some nobles were skilled in military strategy.

While there might have been generals to lead the troops, there was no one to coordinate the generals, which was a major issue.

Comparing young Joshua to his father, who was known as the guardian deity, is hard, but he lacks the weight of character Arios Belares had.

Joshua Belares had become known as the Hawk, but had yet to surpass his father Arios. Despite his great ability, he had a staggering lack of experience and real results. At least, that was how everyone viewed Joshua.

To be honest, this situation is more than I can handle.

However, Lione simply couldn't abandon the situation. If she were to do so, the O'ltormea Empire would annex the Kingdom of Xarooda. The empire would then face their swords toward the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, and there was no doubt that their main target would be the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, which controlled the Wortenia Peninsula.

The boy has some kind of tie to the O'ltormea Empire... I guess it'd be too difficult to try and strike a deal now, though.

Even if Ryoma Mikoshiba were to suggest peace or submission, the chances of the O'ltormea Empire accepting were close to none. Ryoma Mikoshiba had killed the empire's main court thaumaturgist, Gaius Valkland, and on top of that, he was also the main obstacle from obstructing their invasion of Xarooda. From Ryoma's point of view, he was simply protecting himself from his kidnappers.

Although Ryoma had slain Gaius, he felt no regret. Choosing to put himself in danger to protect his kidnappers was illogical; Ryoma felt as if he had simply stomped on a worthless insect.

But the O'ltormea Empire viewed it differently. From their point of view, Ryoma had mercilessly murdered one of their country's most important figures, making him their sworn enemy, and then he had continued to meddle with O'ltormea's schemes at every opportunity, posing as an obstacle that needed to be removed.

The two parties had vastly different viewpoints. It was hard to imagine either their perspectives on the situation changing or them reaching any sort of agreement. After all, both sides viewed themselves as being in the right.

Considering the relationship between the two... Even if the O'ltormea Empire opted for peace with the boy, it'd probably just be a way to buy more time.

Or maybe O'ltormea would just pretend to make peace while hoping to catch Ryoma off guard?

It was obvious that once they had the opportunity, they would either assassinate Ryoma or invade the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. As long as that was a possibility, peace or negotiation would never be an option. Of course, this only applied to the man named Ryoma Mikoshiba. Lione and Boltz had more options to choose from.

But Lione wouldn't choose another option.

Dammit. I can't do anything since it's the boy's orders, but I sure got the short end of the stick. All because I got a damn soft spot for him.

She let out another deep sigh to mask her hidden feelings of glee. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

"Who's that? It's open! You can see yourself in!" Her voice had a sharp tone, either hiding her embarrassment or the result of her irritation regarding the situation.

However, Lione's visitor seemed unfazed.

"Oops... Is this a bad time?" A giant man stood at the door. Lione could sense the aura of war around him, the mark of a brave man who had witnessed many battlefields. The man had a rather intellectual look and kind features on his face, which starkly contrasted with his burly build.

Lione awkwardly scratched her head and said, “Oh, just as I was wonderin’ who it was. Sorry ’bout that, Signus.”

But the man calmly shook his head in response to Lione’s apology. He smiled and replied, “Please, no need to worry about that. I’m sure you’re rather exhausted, Lady Lione. Should I come back later?”

Signus Galveria and his partner Robert Bertrand were known as the Twin Blades of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. Both were considered key figures in the duchy’s military. Signus was also vice captain of the reinforcements sent to the Kingdom of Xarooda, serving as Lione’s assistant.

Based on his position as the head of the Galveria family, it was more accurate to describe their working relationship as two colleagues rather than boss and assistant.

“Ah, it’s all right. I just finished reading the report from the Igasaki clan. So, what can I do for you?”

“I see. In that case...” said Signus as he handed the documents he was holding to Lione.

Lione took them and hastily looked over them before nodding deeply. She felt a sense of relief, and her smile was a stark contrast to her gloomy expression earlier. The documents Signus handed to Lione contained what could be described as a glimmer of hope in this hopeless situation.

“I’d expect nothing less from Robert... Not only did he hold the front line against O’ltormea’s great army, but he also managed to push them back,” said Lione, to which Signus nodded deeply.

“Well, Robert is incredibly skilled at landing strong attacks even when outnumbered,” added Signus, his voice filled with a deep understanding of Robert Bertrand.

“Not to mention, Xarooda’s general skillfully assisted Robert... I guess you could say this sort of outcome was expected,” said Lione, knowing Robert Bertrand was among the strongest warriors in the entire Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

Some even went so far as to compare his abilities to those of Helena Steiner.

It seemed the general from Xarooda had done well to support such an exemplary warrior.

“Captain Greed, huh... I wouldn’t expect anything less from him. He is the captain of the Xaroodian Monarch’s Guard, after all,” remarked Lione.

“Orson Greed is highly regarded within the Kingdom of Xarooda, more or less on the same level as Grahart Henschel. Not only that, he’s also currently fighting in a defensive battle within his own territory. He knows more about the terrain and its tactical potential than the O’ltormea Empire, so it makes total sense that with good leadership, they turned the odds in their favor.”

“Taking advantage of the location.”

“You could say that’s all they can do,” said Signus, shrugging.

Ultimately, it would have been unreasonable to expect any more in this situation. Xarooda simply lacked the time and internal unity necessary to mount a more vigorous defense.

“Well, it’s better than nothin’. All we’ve got is problem after problem over here.” Lione handed the report from the Igasaki clan over to Signus.

He hurriedly scanned it, sighed deeply, and commented, “I see... Xarooda’s situation is worse than I thought. The king falling ill has had a greater effect than we imagined.”

“Everyone’s fightin’ to stay alive.”

“It is the duty of a noble to ensure the continuation of their family. Even so, it’s more or less thanks to Joshua’s skill that the front line is still standing, right?”

Lione snorted and responded, “I’d personally like for him to put in more work.” She had spent a lot of time working on managing everything as the commander of the expeditionary forces. So she wasn’t joking when she said she wanted the Xaroodians to do more.

No matter how strong their alliance with the other countries was, the Kingdom of Xarooda’s defensive forces had to take the initiative and spend their own blood, sweat, and tears to protect their civilians.

At issue was the question of *who* exactly would take command of the situation. It would be out of line for Lione and the others, who were there to help as reinforcements, to take the lead of the country's defense.

Well, I know they've got a lot going on. Even so, Joshua's response to the situation was a li'l sloppy.

Currently, Joshua Belares was the sole person within Xarooda tasked with protecting it, for better or worse. Other than Joshua, who was regarded as the successor to Xarooda's guardian deity, no one else in the kingdom had the strength of will to persevere in the face of this difficult struggle.

Lione was confident Joshua, the rising star, would act decisively. Leading a country was challenging, and Julianus's illness had suddenly thrust Joshua into the role. It went without saying that Joshua Belares, who was just past thirty, lacked experience. No matter how talented he was, experience was always more important. Expecting the young man to perform his role perfectly was unfair, considering that he had no time to prepare.

His ability to establish and sustain a defensive front line despite everything going against him was impressive. At the very least, it was enough for a passing grade. However, that wasn't enough. Lione didn't care for mere displays of effort or pitiful whining; she wanted results. If possible, she wanted to see Joshua turn the impossible situation around.

However, Signus shook his head in response to Lione.

"Lord Joshua is blessed with incredible martial talent. Still, conducting negotiations and navigating conflicts of interest is a little beyond him. I think he's doing well, considering it's not the sort of work he's used to. I can understand why you have your complaints, but it's rare to find someone good at both military and political affairs."

"You sayin' I'm askin' for too much?" asked Lione, pouting and frowning. While she understood what Signus meant, she was far from agreeing with him.

Signus smirked and said, "Yes. To be quite honest, I think you are... That said, we work for a man who *is* just that gifted. With *him* as your standard it makes sense that you would judge Lord Joshua harshly."

Lione seemed shocked, not expecting Signus to make such an observation. But she knew deep down that he was correct.

She took some time to organize the maelstrom of feelings within her and sighed deeply as she nodded. "The boy's set an incredible precedent, and I've expected the same of Joshua. Yeah, I get it... That could very well be the case."

"Our master is an outlier. Thanks to our master's talents, serving him is shockingly easy... Not only is he exceptionally talented, he is also fantastic at reading situations and making informed decisions," said Signus, flashing a confident smile.

Was it a smile born from the delight of serving a master who fully utilized Signus's abilities? A sword was only as good as the person holding it. Even if an elite soldier wielded the sword, a hint of doubt in their mind would prevent the sword from reaching its full potential. The soldier chose the sword, but the sword also chose the soldier.

With that in mind, the man known as Ryoma Mikoshiba had the utmost trust of the Twin Blades, Signus and Robert. He was a genius skilled in politics and military affairs and had the mental fortitude to match those abilities.



Calling him a beast who had surpassed average human intelligence would have been perfectly accurate.

Lione smiled wryly as she shrugged her shoulders. “I’ll be honest, I get a li’l creeped out when talkin’ to that boy. Just how far ahead has he planned, you know?”

“True... That man does not know doubt. It’s almost like he always sees how everything will play out. His abilities are almost superhuman, but even so, I highly doubt he can actually see the future.” While Signus slightly exaggerated his compliments, he believed in them.

Lione knew that as well.

“You’re right. That boy’s either a messenger from a god or a pawn of the devil himself,” noted Lione, laughing as if she’d just heard a perfectly timed joke. Even though she was laughing on the outside, her words conveyed something else.

Ryoma did indeed possess extraordinary abilities, and it was true that they both felt his abilities were beyond human understanding. That much they couldn’t deny. But Lione also knew that what they talked about was mere fantasy. Then again, she couldn’t deny that Ryoma was a man of action—he excelled in his decision-making. His ability to always know what to do could be credited to his personality and ability.

At the very least, his ability to respond to each situation is just pure talent.

However, Lione felt like “talent” wasn’t enough to explain everything about Ryoma Mikoshiba. After all, he was hardly the only person blessed with talent. He had traits surpassing those passed down from his parents. Simply put, he had an insight that let him predict the outcome of a situation based on past examples of similar situations.

After all, two plus two equals four.

It was an extremely rudimentary math problem, and no Japanese person who had completed compulsory education would struggle to come up with the answer. One would understand the concept of math problems. Past proof of the correctness of the solution to a problem left little room for doubt in the

present day. Though, people who devoted their lives to advanced mathematics might have questioned such assumptions.

That same logic could account for Ryoma Mikoshiba's unerring certainty. Of course, it was one thing to always be sure and another to always have the right answer. At a minimum, Ryoma had read many books on strategy and learned a lot about Japanese history in his life in modern Japan. Furthermore, he had been exposed to the happenings of the wider world via the internet, TV, and newspapers.

He had absorbed an enormous amount of information.

While the quality and the accuracy of specific information could be called into question, the sheer amount of information available to Ryoma meant that Earth's kings and prime ministers couldn't hold a candle to him. Nonetheless, he was still an amateur in the arts of war and statecraft.

He wouldn't be able to give a professional answer on most topics, but he had enough knowledge to know what direction to take. The people of Earth saw Ryoma's knowledge and talent as otherworldly, as if he had exceeded what was normal for a human.

Putting aside how Ryoma Mikoshiba might evaluate himself, it made sense why Lione and Signus held him in such high regard.

He really is good at predicting what'll happen... I wouldn't call them premonitions, but they're scarily close to it. It wouldn't be so bad if it happened just once or twice, but it gets you thinkin' when he's doin' it all the time... Even if Signus was half joking, I don't think he was too far off.

Regardless of how well he seized the opportunities presented to him as a mercenary, it was impressive that he managed to acquire territory equivalent to a small country and make it a virtually independent nation with his skills and strategies. It was a brilliant accomplishment; he was the only one to achieve such a feat in the history of the western continent.

Many would consider it absurd to compare such a unique, almost otherworldly figure to Joshua, who although regarded as a hero of the Kingdom of Xarooda, was still confined to the ranks of ordinary humans.

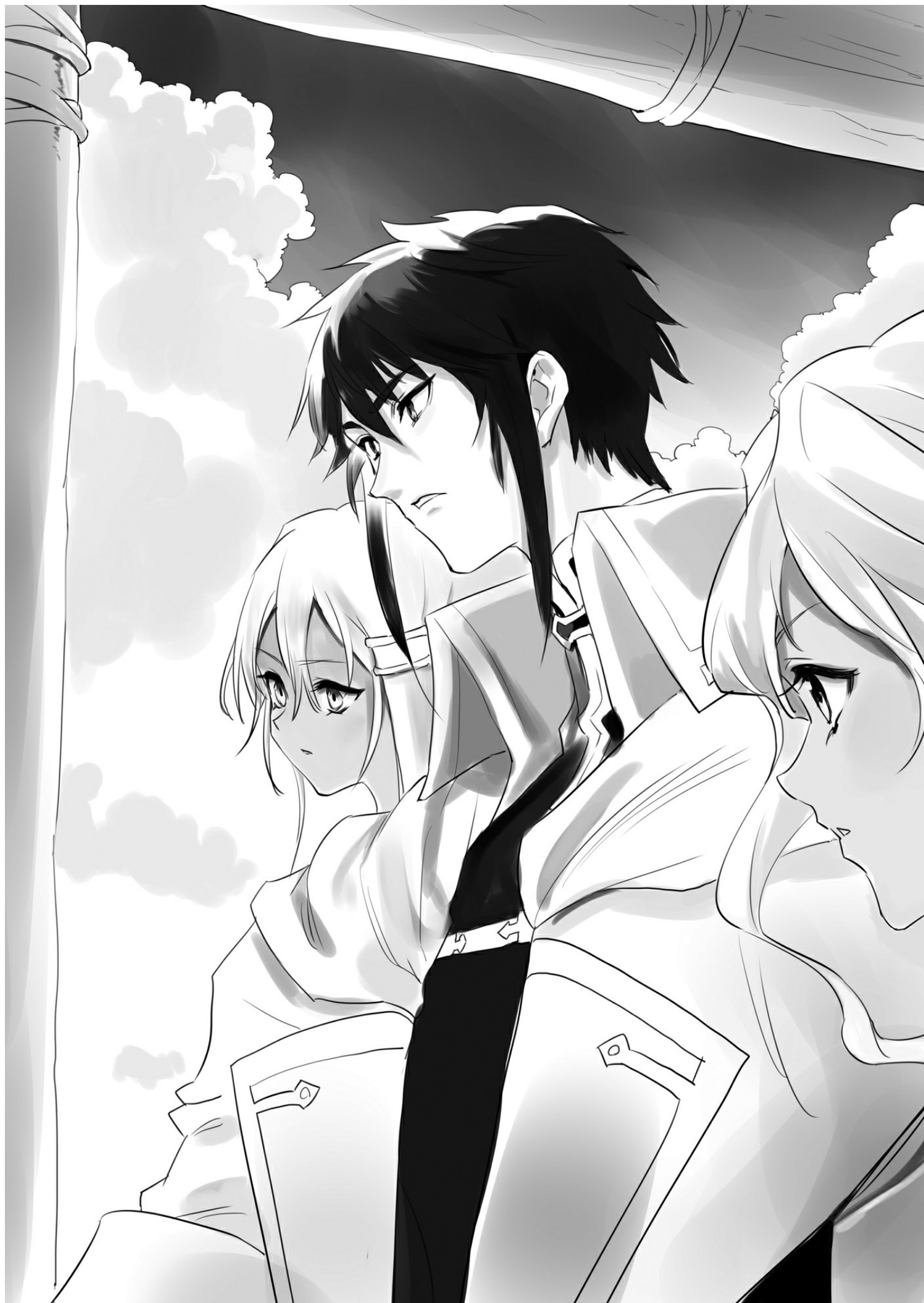
“And we have to live up to such expectations of such a formidable man,” said Lione, sighing deeply again. She turned her gaze toward the window, as if imagining her master at war far to the east.

Chapter 1: Delivered Cargo

Around seven days had passed since Ryoma Mikoshiba and the others raised the siege of Jermuk. Ryoma stood on a watchtower overlooking the fortress city. The Malfist twins were behind him as he gazed over the vast plains and forests that covered the surrounding lands.

Because they were still at war, the trio wore armor and kept a close eye on their surroundings. A stray arrow could still hit them, even in a fortress. They were in the Kingdom of Myest's territory, after all. Even though they were a part of an alliance of four countries, they knew that they weren't completely safe—especially in times of strife.

I can relax knowing I have Laura and Sara guarding me, thought Ryoma as he activated a sight-enhancing technique. He held a pair of binoculars, a device unknown on Earth. These binoculars, ironically dubbed the Eyes of Meneos, could detect the activation of verbal thaumaturgy and would highlight it with a green glow. *Seems to be no signs of the enemy...*



Although their surprise attack, helped by the cover of the sudden rain, had successfully ended Brittania and Tarja's siege of Jermuk, they were still at war.

We've culled their numbers. While I think they've retreated, it's still a somewhat naive hope.

There were only three main ways to end a war, although other possibilities did exist. One way was to defeat the enemy and undermine their morale. Conversely, one's own side could be defeated by the enemy and lose its morale. The final way to end a war involved exhausting all resources on both sides, leading to a ceasefire or peace after negotiations.

Everything else depended on the effectiveness of these three methods.

The best way to destroy enemy morale was to decimate their ranks, leaving a pile of bodies behind. Even if the enemy were hungry for retribution, as the bodies of their allies piled up, it was human nature to begin to value one's own life over revenge.

The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's surprise attack was successful, but it wasn't enough to carve the road to victory for the Kingdom of Myest. Ryoma proved he could crush the sixty thousand men of the Brittania-Tarja alliance with his two-pronged plan, skipping an audience with the ruler of Myest and using the storm as cover.

The two-kingdom alliance had faced a drastic defeat, with the blood of their soldiers staining the plains—around ten thousand fatalities. In comparison, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy army faced a light number of casualties, around one thousand. Only a small number of soldiers suffered grave or irreversible injuries, accounting for around eighty percent of their total injuries.

However, the injured were being administered secret potions from the dark elves, ensuring a swift recovery. If they had lost an arm or a leg, they couldn't return to fighting, but those whose limbs suffered severe damage without being entirely severed could be healed rather quickly.

After a few days, most severely wounded soldiers could return to their units. Considering the battle involved over ten thousand troops, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy army only lost around one hundred men. It was a miracle that defied

common practice on Earth.

In that regard, Earth has something more advanced than anything available on Rearth—magic.

The result of the battle was thanks to the thorough training each soldier had received and their armor, crafted with resources from the creatures that roamed the Wortenia Peninsula.

Well, we spend money on equipment differently from other nations.

In terms of victory or defeat, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy emerged with a resounding triumph. The soldiers had been detailed to dispose of the bodies of their deceased enemies to prevent the risk of disease spreading. When they finally had a moment's break from this unpleasant duty, their morale skyrocketed.

But the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy hadn't done enough damage to the enemy forces to declare the war was over.

Just under ten thousand dead... If the enemy's forces were around sixty thousand, they lost about fifteen or sixteen percent of their frontline forces. By modern military standards, that's serious, but wouldn't be considered total destruction. I'm still unsure if I can apply that metric to warfare in this world, but I guess I'm not too far off the mark.

Troop attrition was a fundamental concept in understanding modern military affairs. The amount of soldiers unable to fight determined the outcome. Losing around thirty percent of one's army would force that side to retreat and reorganize, rendering them useless and resulting in total defeat.

That was based on modern wars fought with guns from a distance. Ryoma doubted he could apply such logic to Earth, where battles were fought with swords and spears. Regarding the siege of Jermuk, applying his logic seemed appropriate.

Heh. Considering the literal meaning of "total destruction," it's strange those in this world use it to refer to the loss of only thirty percent of a side's forces...

Those not well-versed in military affairs might find it an odd way of determining total destruction. That said, it wasn't merely an amateur's opinion.

It had long solidified itself as a major term in military vocabulary, so there would be no way to change it.

When casualties were around fifty percent, it was known as total annihilation. But when they were around one hundred percent, it was known as total destruction.

The definitions of the terms seemed fitting when broken down, although they felt off when contrasting them with the percentages. Ryoma wasn't alone in such thinking.

I don't really plan on splitting hairs over some words a prestigious scholar coined.

Not to mention, it wasn't vital knowledge for an ordinary person in Japan to possess. It was commonly used in more specialized environments, so it would have been strange for your average citizen to suddenly using military jargon like this. Ultimately, "total destruction" meant heavy enough losses that the army would need to retreat to reorganize and could no longer fight.

Based on that information, the damage Ryoma had done to the army—around fifteen percent—wasn't enough to be considered total destruction. It wouldn't be surprising if the enemy army regrouped and attacked again the next day.

But it seems the generals of Brittania and Tarja didn't opt for that. Not like I can say modern knowledge is entirely accurate. The question is whether they simply chose not to attack, or were unable to do so. It's also possible that both sides of the Brittania-Tarja alliance have differing ideas about strategy. That could also be why they're late regrouping.

Ryoma's army had raised the siege and had just under forty thousand men. The remaining soldiers stationed within Jermuk, guarding the border, were a little over ten thousand men. Combined, that made for around fifty thousand soldiers. The enemy had defeated nearly ten thousand additional soldiers at Jermuk, so it was a large army closer to sixty thousand men.

A simple calculation would suggest there were approximately fifty thousand enemy soldiers stationed on the southern border of the Kingdom of Myest. However, Ryoma couldn't be sure the enemy's numbers would remain at that

level.

If we were to fight now, we'd be roughly equal in numbers. However, their force is a bit too depleted to stage another full-fledged siege again, mused Ryoma as he considered one question. Had the enemy come up with a plan to compensate for their lack of military prowess, or were they waiting for reinforcements? They're probably just waiting for reinforcements.

At least, Ryoma couldn't find a reason for the enemy not to call for reinforcements. He didn't have any definite information about the southern kingdoms' plans, so he couldn't be certain. Judging from the available information, no competent commander would have their men retreat.

Jermuk should have fallen, but it didn't go according to plan. Instead of luring the enemy forces to them, Brittania and Tarja were forced to lift the siege and retreat, ruining the reputations of their generals. Worst-case scenario for them could be taking full responsibility by having their heads lopped off as punishment.

Ryoma believed that a general capable of leading an allied army would understand the natural consequences. This meant there was only one answer to the question of whether the enemy was following some plan or was just waiting for reinforcements.

I wonder how many troops they're bringing.

Like all the southern kingdoms, Brittania and Tarja were small countries rumored to have been the locations of much bloodshed. To ensure their survival, they often employed a larger army than one might normally expect for a nation their size.

I should at least expect another thirty to fifty thousand soldiers are on the way. However, those numbers are purely conjecture.

He had no concrete evidence to support this conjecture. The scale of the reinforcements would depend on how much Brittania and Tarja had prepared for this war.

If both countries had prepared thoroughly, it would not have been unrealistic for them to send upward of one hundred thousand soldiers. No matter how long

we stay holed up in this castle, they could still overwhelm us with sheer numbers.

Besides, there was another issue. The battle had reduced the roughly twenty thousand soldiers garrisoning Jermuk by more than half.

Jermuk's forces took a bigger hit than I expected. Since they were in the fortified city, they should have had a defensive advantage and shouldn't have taken so many losses... But I suppose it was inevitable. The enemy had seized the initiative, and the garrison had no idea if reinforcements were coming. The besiegers also had three times more soldiers than Jermuk.

In addition, Jermuk's defense wasn't being led by a high-level general. The initial surprise attack had disadvantaged the Kingdom of Myest. Because the reinforcements from Endesia were late, the morale of those defending Jermuk had fallen, leading to more fatalities. Considering all that, it was a surprise that Jermuk hadn't already fallen.

It is puzzling that Jermuk held out these past several months. That must mean the allied forces' generals were holding back. But why? Were they really just planning to lure reinforcements to Jermuk and attack them? Suddenly, a certain possibility crossed Ryoma's mind. I feel like the Kingdom of Myest's response was also a little strange... In that case, that can only mean...

Ryoma didn't want to consider this possibility, but his instincts were on high alert. He let out a deep sigh.

Well, there's not much I can do about it right now. All I can do is deal with it once I've discerned the enemy's next move, thought Ryoma as he looked at the binoculars in his hand. *These worked exactly as I hoped. They did good work making these, considering I gave them a pretty shoddy description. Good work, Nelcius. You did a fine job with these.*

Ryoma had asked the dark elves to make the binoculars. Not only did they strengthen one's eyesight, but they also had night vision and shades to protect from sunlight. They were waterproof and fogproof, and thanks to the materials harvested from the creatures that lived on the Wortenia Peninsula, they were also incredibly durable and lightweight. Altogether, they were as excellent as any military equipment could be.

If word about the binoculars got out on Earth, armies worldwide would want them. Ryoma found the dark elves' proficiency with verbal thaumaturgy admirable.

I did ask a lot of them, seeing as they didn't have much time to put them together. Next time I see them, I need to think of a gift to give them.

People only worked diligently when they received compensation or recognition for it. Without those, people wouldn't work. Of course, the dark elves—a type of demi-human—weren't human. People who racially discriminated against demi-humans had probably never once thought to pay them for their work. If anything, they probably only thought about putting them to work.

Some people might have viewed them as wild animals or monsters that needed to be driven away. In fact, many people living on the western continent deemed demi-humans as a lesser race who had lost in the holy war. But Ryoma believed that demi-humans, who were intelligent and capable of emotion, deserved equal treatment.

Though, that's not something that can be achieved overnight.

It was challenging to change a person's preconceptions, which Nelcius, the chief of the dark elves, and Ryoma knew all too well. That was why the dark elves didn't leave the Wortenia Peninsula and avoided interacting with human society. Their relationship with the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was an extreme exception. With only the duchy connecting them to human society, rewarding them with money or goods was pointless.

Of course, the dark elves and the other demi-humans would become subjects of the Mikoshiba duchy.

Once it came to that, currency would become necessary, although bartering was currently their main form of trade. After all, the dark elves had no opportunity to use currency anywhere but in Sirius.

In that case, I should ask Simone if she can arrange the exchange of goods. If I send them money or jewels, it won't mean much to them and will just be shiny decorations.

The dark elves were enamored with alcohol, tobacco, tea, sweets, and spices such as pepper. These items weren't readily available on the Wortenia Peninsula. Having lost the war and been forced to live secluded in an uncivilized land for nearly five hundred years, the dark elves valued these items more than anything else, as they were the closest they would get to civilization.

It was probably safe to say they were almost addicted to such goods. They had restrained themselves for almost five hundred years. Now that their desires had been unleashed, they couldn't stop themselves.

Plus, the dark elves have very long lives. It must be hellish living without any creature comforts.

For humans, living long and never aging was a mere pipe dream. However, it was closer to a never-ending nightmare of bare survival for the elves who had lived close to a thousand years.

There was a difference between simply living and *enjoying* living.

Ryoma had foreseen the dark elves' reactions to such items when he first began negotiations with Nelcius.

Well, it's kinda the same for me...

Ryoma's taste for gourmet food—a trait he shared with Koichiro—didn't suit a young man of his age. Ever since he was summoned to Earth from Rearth, his desire to eat delicious foods had intensified and became almost unbearable—a stark contrast to his life in Japan. He deeply longed for what he couldn't have.

That's why once you finally get your hands on something you really like, you're reluctant to let it go...

Compared to life in Japan, Earth was a huge downgrade in quality. Even though Ryoma wouldn't have said that culture and technology on Rearth was inferior to Earth, comparing some aspects of daily life was laughable.

In Japan, one could fill a glass with water by turning the faucet. However, those on Earth had to use a well and draw water. There was a vast difference in convenience.

One couldn't drink the water unless it had been boiled to eliminate

impurities. There was water that was made safe to drink with endowed thaumaturgy, but that was only available in districts where the nobles and wealthy merchants lived. That was how it was here on Earth, making life in Japan feel like paradise.

I know people say it doesn't taste the best, but Japan has some of the safest tap water in the world.

Even securing water, something essential for survival, was a huge undertaking here on Earth. Considering that mere survival was such a struggle here, there was no comparison between life on Earth and the level of luxury goods and cultural arts back on Rearth.

That's not to say Earth is without its own outstanding works of art and cuisine.

The royal castle in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria's royal capital, Pireas, had portraits of previous rulers painstakingly painted by royal court artists. Ryoma didn't think much of the very *generous* portraits, but putting aside personal taste and trying to be more objective, the artists clearly possessed exceptional talent.

In the same vein, there were some delicious foods on Earth. But they were few and far between, and none really stood out compared to Rearth's cuisine. Due to there not being much variety, Earth's food was generally of lower quality.

It was very much a mixed bag. After all, enhancing one's own skills required constant refinement.

My situation is like looking for gold in a river, except there's a ton of sand there.

Not even the high-level paintings really matched Ryoma's taste.

Styles of art included impressionism, neoclassicism, realism, and symbolism. There were many schools of art, and many artists, yet few people liked them all equally. Even if someone liked the majority of all art, they would still have a preference when comparing two pieces. People's personal tastes varied greatly, and having a wide selection was essential in catering to those differences.

The same could be said for cuisine. And that was why it was hard to let go

once one discovered cuisine they liked. If it were too expensive to buy or a rare item that was difficult to get, one could give up on it. If it was still within reach and only required a little effort on someone's part, the craving for it became greater.

In that sense, even the binoculars Ryoma had in his hands were special, labor-intensive items. The dark elves, constantly striving to improve their craft, had frantically assembled them. The endeavor showed the results of coexistence and co-prosperity.

Though it's not without its problems...

There were no issues with the weapons, endowed thaumaturgy, or medicine the elves made. It was all high quality—probably *too* high quality.

The main problem was the lengthy crafting process and the difficulty of obtaining the necessary materials. There were also, at times, small differences in the quality of the finished items.

Only a few dark elves could skillfully use verbal thaumaturgy to make weapons and medicine, which limited the rate at which new items could be crafted. Ensuring the quality of those items took a significant amount of time. The monsters used as materials were also a problem.

The guild set the danger level for the monsters to be harvested. Most of the time the monsters were higher than Rank B, which meant they required a lot of time to prepare and hunt for.

As a result, mass production was impossible. The same went for armor, helmets, swords, and medicinal items. Production took years, so they barely had enough to equip the current army. During wartime, the supply of equipment would decline at an alarming rate, owing to items being damaged or simply lost.

War was fundamentally a resource-consuming conflict.

Considering the consequences of war, Ryoma wanted to maintain their current stock, but that was proving difficult.

After all, it took a lot of time to put together these binoculars, or our hang gliders. I wanted to have more of them made and stored away, but... This isn't

something that can be solved by throwing money and objects at them, thought Ryoma.

It would require time and labor, and the dark elves weren't known for cutting corners—which could be a downside when time was of the essence. They prided themselves on that fact, though. Naturally, it wouldn't be an issue if the dark elves' creations were considered one of a kind items for personal use. The basic functions of the items were fantastic.

However, the army might find inconsistencies among the personalized items if they decided to repurpose them. That was an issue that couldn't be ignored.

So long as they're handmade, there'll always be differences in the quality of individual items...

Ryoma wasn't criticizing the artisans' ability. When it came to special, high quality items, having them made to order by a skilled artisan was always the better option. In fact, as long as money wasn't an issue, it was common on Earth to have weapons or armor made to order for the user.

Unfortunately, artisans were not suited for mass-producing items for many people, such as an army. The items would need to be uniformly high quality.

As Nelcius says, the thaumaturgists who work on verbal thaumaturgy are the kind of people who take a lot of pride in their work. Well, demi-humans, not humans...

Even if mass production wasn't possible, Ryoma wanted to quickly devise a way to handcraft the work, meaning less work for the verbal thaumaturgists. Ryoma didn't plan to handcraft everything; he knew that wouldn't be possible.

Although it may be too much to ask of absolute beginners, they should have something to do. If we have them work on what they can, and leave the finishing touches to the experts, that should speed up production.

The shift to mass production could offend the artisans who were proud of their work. Denying the younger generation the opportunity to contribute would hinder their personal growth and worsen production. This issue existed in the modern world too.

That reminds me of how Asuka's dad used to complain about that a lot.

Ryoma pictured the relative he hadn't met for many years. Asuka Kiryu's father, Kensuke Kiryu, was a salaryman working at a major manufacturing company. He was a manager who overlooked onsite housing construction.

As expected, the manufacturing company where Kensuke Kiryu worked at had all-new recruits, fresh out of university, undergo manual training. That wasn't an issue in itself, but there were many other companies that refused to invest in educating their recruits.

In housing construction, subcontractors and sub-subcontractors were frequently used. However, these companies still adhered to traditional master-apprentice values, where seniors would teach recruits.

Specifically, they would learn on the job by watching their seniors at work. It didn't differ much from mimicking and learning the movements of one's martial arts master.

Even Ryoma had no clear memory of being taught Mikoshiba-style martial arts by Koichiro. He spent a lot of time watching Koichiro's movements, which were written in ancient scrolls, and then recreated them.

One's intuition was important in martial arts training, so it was vital to mimic the movements.

Well, I can't deny the importance of learning from others... In fact, that's how I learned from my grandfather.

Ryoma had consistently used this tried-and-true method, achieving a level of proficiency that only required extensive practice. The same could be said for learning a craft.

When Ryoma was living in Japan, he saw a TV show about metal workers who built a giant disk by hand. The show frequently highlighted Japan's technological prowess, and a certain episode showcased how the metal workers used a technique known as hera-shibori to achieve precision that machinery couldn't match.

He clearly remembered how impressed he felt watching their devotion to their studies.

It had been a few years since Ryoma was summoned to Earth, so he didn't

know if those tradesmen still worked at their craft. There was a chance that the workers' movements could have been recorded by motion capture, then that data could have been used to program machinery to recreate the artisans' work.

There were talks of doing that already due to the lack of people wanting to take up the profession.

In order to record the data, the artisan first needed to create the product and meticulously record the whole process. Experienced artisans were essential for this process, as only they could make certain items.

It was a part of a craftsman's skill to be able to make small, hard-to-describe changes as well as use their abilities and general intuition to make the product into what the patron wanted.

Based on that, it would be difficult to achieve the same results from just following a manual, without knowing the true intention behind the product. Naturally, reaching such a level required a willingness to undergo a lot of adversity as well as trial and error. It was a difficult path.

Although it was safe to call it an ascetic practice, it was the road to becoming an artisan.

But I wonder if it's an appropriate way of teaching everyone... Hmm. It'd probably work on craftsmen, but not officer workers.

Some people could mimic their master's style, while others could not. The process existed as a good measure to determine if people would be able to handle future training.

While such a method could potentially have applications to professional development, it wouldn't be effective for the mass training of ordinary office employees.

Kensuke Kiryu and other senior employees often complained about new recruits who disliked that way of learning and transferred to different companies. It boiled down to whether they were tradesmen who wished to devote their lives to the craft or simply viewed it as a means of making money.

Many masters and veteran workers taught that way because it was how they

had developed. Originally, such a method was akin to a company entrance exam. As society modernized, it lost its nuance and became a mere shadow of its former self.

I feel like opening the doors, gathering many people, picking those with talent, and providing them with a specialized education is a good process. Productivity would greatly improve if some parts of the process were streamlined with handcrafting or assembly line work, with artisans handling the finishing touches.

No matter how many times Ryoma asked for these changes, the situation did not improve. The elves handling production simply didn't realize the necessity of it.

The artisans would either make their opposition clear or pretend to go along with it and wait for the situation to cool off. Unless they actually accepted it, production volume wouldn't improve.

If Ryoma forced them to change their system, it would undermine the friendly relationship that he worked so hard to build.

I've heard that improving both production and sales is difficult.

Ryoma had no experience in an actual workplace, so he didn't know for sure, but there were plenty of useful resources on the internet or the bookshelves of stores and libraries. There were many descriptions of managers who, because they didn't know what they were doing, caused confusion and a lack of direction among their subordinates.

There's nothing more dangerous than an "improvement plan" that doesn't take the actual workplace conditions into consideration.

Oftentimes, a plan made with good intentions added to employees' workload and reduced productivity and security. When overly complicated manuals ignored operational efficiency, those at the workplace created their own manual for reference.

This form of cutting corners could be attributed to a lack of awareness, resulting from managers giving their subordinates too much work. Said development occurred when work was sent to the workplace without considering whether it was suitable for that setting.

Nothing ever good came from clueless bosses sticking their noses where they didn't belong.

But if they pay too much attention to what people say at the workplace, then it's hard to make any drastic changes, mused Ryoma, considering that companies were essentially groups.

If one were to ask what the group's objective was, it would be to have various employees come together and make a profit. Many companies made empty promises of contributing to society, when their true purpose was to make a profit.

Should they not turn a profit, they would go bankrupt or have to slash their expenses to save money and survive a little longer. There was one effective, easy method that ensured the survival of a company, though.

Layoffs.

However, not all office workers would readily accept that. The company's higher-ups had to cut off their employees' way of living in order to ensure the longevity of the company.

That's a decision that pays no regard to the thoughts and feelings of their employees. As far as I know, there aren't many companies in Japan that dismiss their employees in such a reckless manner. Even so, the callous essence of layoffs remains the same.

Of course, that was regarding layoffs. If the higher-ups listened to employees and implemented their ideas, it would be harder for them to make a profit and could cause information security issues.

In the end, what was important was conversation and explanation. Clarifying the company's goals would enable the higher-ups to understand everything in the production workflow.

However, that did take time.

Even Ryoma knew he would need to talk with Nelcius about his subordinates, the verbal thaumaturgists, but that wasn't possible right now. He was in Jermuk, a fortress city located far south of the Wortenia Peninsula.

If anything, it's a problem for later... I expect my grandfather will do a good job up there anyway. Or at least, I hope he doesn't mess up our relations with the elves.

Suddenly, a messenger ran to the top of the tower with hurried steps. Judging from their appearance, they had urgent news, but they didn't look worried or frightened. The messenger looked rather happy and relieved, which only meant they had good news.

Laura had the messenger relay the message to her before whispering it into Ryoma's ear.

"A message from the lookouts on the northern wall. There is a group heading toward Jermuk bearing the Kingdom of Myest's flag. They are around three thousand men strong, and a convoy appears to be following them."

Ryoma lowered the binoculars and adopted a suspicious expression as he digested the information. "I see... I was curious how this situation would resolve itself, but it seems this is how... Not what I'd hoped for. Oh well..."

An oppressive silence filled the atmosphere.

Ryoma, the young ruler, exuded a cold, sharp aura. The messenger began to shiver ever so slightly in response.

Several seconds passed.

Eventually, Ryoma—having analyzed the situation—smiled curtly as he issued orders.

"Laura, could you send word to General Randall to prepare the soldiers for immediate deployment? I assume he's already received a report from the northern watchtower, but just to be sure..."

In giving this order, Ryoma came perilously close to overstepping the bounds of what a mere commander of foreign reinforcements had any business doing. But as unfortunate as it was, Hans Randall was lacking as a general. While Ryoma wouldn't say Randall wasn't completely talentless, he would say the man was rather ordinary.

Although Randall was in charge of defending the fortress city of Jermuk, he

usually was the leader of a thousand-man unit. He had no experience leading over a thousand men, so he wasn't well equipped for the task.

Not to mention that Jermuk was currently under a wartime regime, meaning normal government procedures had been disrupted. It meant that Randall, who was leading the defense of Jermuk, had a growing list of responsibilities. The man also tended to pay excessive attention to his honor.

Although Randall was grateful to Ryoma for leading the reinforcements and saving them from an urgent situation, he was clearly worried about his position.

The fact that, in terms of overall status, Ryoma was the highest authority in the fortress city of Jermuk only added to Randall's worries. Hans Randall was a part of the chain of command of the Kingdom of Myest and was the person most directly responsible for defending Jermuk. However, the appearance of someone higher in status than him had threatened to upend the chain of command.

Randall had realized that himself. In such a situation, doing anything slightly outside the norm could have huge repercussions.

I need to be careful around people like Randall. Any communication issues could lead to all sorts of trouble.

If Hans Randall proved truly incapable, Ryoma would have come up with a solution to deal with it. He could think of plenty, in fact.

Ryoma could threaten him with violence or curry favor with money. In a worst-case scenario, he could order the Igasaki clan to make Randall "disappear." After all, they were at war with the allied forces of Brittania and Tarja.

People commonly died or went missing in war, a truth reflected by the numerous corpses littering the ground outside the fortress city's walls. Under these conditions, there were numerous methods to dispose of a person.

We could say he tried to desert his post, or that he was conspiring with the enemy...

Naturally, Ryoma didn't want to use such measures against a fellow member of the four-kingdom alliance. Many people had incorrect perceptions about

Ryoma, as evidenced by the fearsome moniker “Devil of Heraklion.” In fact, he was a rational and intellectual person with a strong sense of morality and obligation.

Even so, he was prepared to use ruthless and inhumane means to achieve victory.

Though I don't have to go that far this time.

While Randall was a mediocre general, he had sacrificed a lot. He had protected Jermuk for nearly two months without a clear idea of when reinforcements would arrive. That was proof of his loyalty to the Kingdom of Myest.

It is true that the defense of Jermuk was a military success, but I'm not sure Hans Randall really deserves much credit for it.

From what Ryoma could tell, the enemy army had intentionally chosen not to take Jermuk. However, that was merely conjecture; Ryoma had no way of proving it.

If Ryoma were to share this theory, some people would assume he was simply jealous of Hans's military achievement, and Hans himself might take it as a personal affront. On top of that, it would undermine the confidence the soldiers currently holed up in Jermuk, making them question their own commander's ability. This would raise the question of who in Myest was fit to lead an army of ten thousand soldiers.

Simply removing Randall might not be the best idea. For now, we just need to make a few compromises.

In short, Ryoma needed to ensure Randall saved face as much as possible. Laura must have picked up on Ryoma's intentions. She remained silent and nodded before turning on her heels to deliver the message.

Sara put her finger on her chin, tilting her head in thought. Her sister's report seemed to have slightly disturbed her.

In reality, she was right to be.

At the very least, anyone with some knowledge of war and strategy would

feel somewhat uneasy after hearing that report.

“I wonder what’s going on. The royal capital likely recognizes that we have limited resources after a siege, so I can understand them sending a convoy. But... Only sending three thousand troops as reinforcements? That’s barely enough for a vanguard.” Sara mused. Ryoma was caught off guard by her thorny tone of voice as she shared her suspicion.

It’s rare to see Sara so expressive, thought Ryoma.

That said, she was right to question the number of reinforcements and be slightly unsettled by this news. Jermuk desperately needed weapons and rations for the troops, but sending only three thousand soldiers along with those supplies was laughable.

The enemy alliance had at least fifty thousand soldiers. If Myest really wanted to change the tide of war, they would need tens of thousands of reinforcements.

However, Myest had only sent three thousand. It was incredibly strange for a country that wanted to protect its borders to send so few soldiers.

It’s difficult to determine another country’s exact military strength, even when dealing with an allied nation... Looking at these numbers, it’s as if Myest has no intention of defending Jermuk...

Ryoma had reached a different conclusion, though. Once again, it was just conjecture.

“It’s fine. I’m sure we’ll work it out when we meet with them,” said Ryoma as he patted Sara on the head.

The drawbridge at the northern gate creaked as it slowly came down. A group of soldiers bearing the flag of the Kingdom of Myest passed through the wide-open gate. Three thousand soldiers acting as reinforcements led the group, with a line of carts behind them. Ryoma looked at the general of the troop, who was on horseback, and smirked as he approached before speaking.

“Heh, so it’s you...”

Normally, there wasn’t much that a mere three thousand reinforcements

could do. But if they arrived alongside an especially capable general...

With a name like the Whirlwind, Ecclesia Marinelle—who is considered one of the strongest generals in the Kingdom of Myest—will surely double the effective strength of the troops, mused Ryoma.

Dispatching an elite commander with just a few thousand soldiers was not considered a standard tactic in war. If anything, it was strange, but there was likely a reason Myest was acting in this way.

“I see you ended up saddled with responsibility for this situation, Lady Ecclesia,” said Ryoma. “Though I saw it coming, I guess you got the short end of the stick...”

Ecclesia, still on horseback, shrugged in response. “Yeah... But you needn’t worry about that. It wouldn’t be smart to make an archduke, who is also the general of the reinforcements, take responsibility for the Kingdom of Myest’s internal shortcomings. It makes more sense for us to deal with it among ourselves.”

“My apologies,” said Ryoma, bowing his head deeply.

Ryoma had an idea the situation would come to this. He had also considered that Ecclesia might have been sentenced to imprisonment or house arrest, so sending her here could be seen as the better option.

Even though the Kingdom of Myest had decided on this, he still felt uneasy and thought the solution was foolish. But he also knew that the government had to distinguish between right and wrong, including that someone had to take responsibility for it.

Ecclesia knew all the risks, but that’s not everything.

Was it her sense of moral responsibility?

Ryoma was still convinced that the plan of sending Ecclesia was necessary in order to save Jermuk. That said, it didn’t erase the price that Ecclesia had to pay. He couldn’t simply accept the consequences after seeing the sacrifice Ecclesia made.

However, Ecclesia slowly shook her head.

“Ever since I agreed to your plan, I knew this could happen, so please don’t worry. Besides, you’ve done a lot more than expected,” she said earnestly.

“Understood. Then, I’ll stop apologizing...” replied Ryoma, nodding.

He focused his sharp gaze on Ecclesia. It seemed rather cold coming from a person who had just apologized, but Ryoma’s gaze told Ecclesia that he wouldn’t accept any half-hearted answers to the questions he was about to ask. He also had to consider how he would conduct himself based on those answers.

After all, the lives of our soldiers are riding on this, thought Ryoma.

A soldier’s job was to fight on the battlefield. That job included killing enemies as well as potentially giving their lives. And so, the job of a general was to order the soldiers to put their lives on the line and fight. Although this seemed akin to telling them to go to their deaths, it was fundamentally quite different.

It was important for Ryoma to justify the actions the soldiers would carry out. Without that, he wouldn’t be able to bring himself to give the order.

“If you’re here, then who is organizing the next lot of reinforcements? Surely this can’t be it?” asked Ryoma naturally. Despite her nickname, even Ecclesia could only do so much with three thousand soldiers. At best, it would simply buy time. *Ecclesia’s appearance on the front lines means she either finished organizing the armies or passed the work on to someone else.*

Ecclesia would have preferred to be on the front lines from the beginning, leading the vanguard if possible.

So, does that mean they had no one else to manage the army in Ecclesia’s place?

Still, Ryoma also thought that three thousand men weren’t all the reinforcements. This left the question: Who had taken over organizing the army?

Did Prime Minister Spiegel take over? Or did the king himself take the initiative?

However, Ecclesia mentioned a name Ryoma hadn’t expected. “General Duran is forming the army in Endesia. The southern nobles of Myest have

tremendous faith in him, so I doubt it will take him long.”

“General Duran... You mean Alexis Duran?” Ryoma asked suddenly, shocked by the name. *Wait...really?*

Ryoma had definitely heard the name Alexis Duran before. Of the three famous generals in the Kingdom of Myest, he was considered the strongest and had served the longest. Due to his old age, General Duran wasn’t in the best condition and had been recovering at home for several years.

Of course, “recovering at home” was just a cover story. It was rumored he had long been turning down any invitations to the royal court for several years, staying locked up at home because of a bumpy relationship with the current king of Myest, King Phillip.

Rumors were just rumors. At this point, Ryoma couldn’t discern the actual truth of the situation. If Ecclesia was telling the truth, their military power was even stronger. But it remained true that Ryoma struggled to make sense of the appearance of such an unexpected person.

Ecclesia laughed as Ryoma looked puzzled, which he rarely was.



“No doubt you’re surprised. I was also shocked when I heard it from His Majesty, but it’s true. I’ve personally met with General Duran and passed my work on to him. He decided he couldn’t sit idly by while the nation was in danger. Spurred him out of his sickbed...”

When Ryoma heard that, he was at a loss for words and mused, *If that’s true, that’s good news, but... Is it really the truth?* Myest’s survival depended on this war. One could say that General Duran’s decision was commendable, and the timing was impeccable. *In fact, it’s suspiciously good timing.*

Something was off. To be more exact, Ryoma’s warrior instinct was trying to tell him something. He couldn’t just tell Ecclesia he had a bad feeling about General Duran, though.

I can’t really distrust the Kingdom of Myest’s generals on a simple hunch...

Ecclesia didn’t doubt General Duran’s words at all. There would be no sense in Ryoma sharing his fears with her. He knew that she wouldn’t simply accept what he had to say without any concrete evidence. In a worst-case scenario, she might accuse him of slander. Either scenario could irreparably damage the relationship between the Kingdom of Myest and the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy.

This puts me in a tight spot. I’ll have to get the Igasaki clan into Endesia and monitor the movements of Myest’s generals. We’re already struggling for people... This got really annoying all of a sudden...

Ecclesia tilted her head to the side, confused with Ryoma’s reaction.

“Is there something bothering you?”

“No, no... I wasn’t expecting such good news... Apologies,” said Ryoma, swiftly changing the topic. Since he couldn’t give Ecclesia a clear answer, he had no other option than to be vague.

“You’ve a lot of cargo with you—is it mostly armor and provisions?”

“Yes. We figured they’d all run out while under siege. We gathered food and weapons from the area around Endesia. We also brought some alcohol, given the soldiers’ likely exhaustion from being locked up within the fortress,” responded Ecclesia, looking over her shoulder to a row of carriages.

These carriages were flying a flag with the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's emblem, a silver and gold two headed snake. Ryoma had requested this shipment from Sirius to be sent to Nelcius before he left Endesia.

"We also brought some cargo sent from Sirius and addressed to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, so please make sure to check the contents later," said Ecclesia, handing Ryoma a wax-sealed letter.

Honestly, I was kind of antsy waiting for this to arrive. It was quicker than I expected. Probably thanks to Simone sending boats to Sirius, thought Ryoma as he glanced over the letter he received and exhaled with relief.

Within the cargo was a secret weapon that Ryoma had asked Nelcius to make. It was his trump card—one that took labor, time and a lot of money to make. The item had the potential to transform the nature of war on Earth and drastically alter Ryoma's military capabilities. But he was reluctant to use it and expose its existence to the other countries of the four-kingdom alliance.

Though we might be in an alliance now, no one knows what tomorrow holds, thought Ryoma. Sworn enemies might have existed, but there was no such thing as an ally forever. *Unfortunately, there's not much I can do in this situation.*

Ryoma would have to keep the ace up his sleeve a little longer, taking care not to use it thoughtlessly or at the wrong time. But he would need to use it eventually; if not playing this ace meant the enemy ultimately defeated them, there would be no point in keeping it secret.

It gives me some peace of mind knowing I have my trump card to fall back on.

During war, having such a feeling often gave a psychological advantage.



One was more likely to make mistakes if they had lost their composure. Ryoma smiled savagely like a predator who sensed its prey might give in as he watched the horse-drawn carts pass by.

Ecclesia, who was in the corner of Ryoma's eye, began to speak.

"We brought them as you requested, but... There's a lot of cargo. It's hard to believe it's only weaponry and food. May I ask what on earth you have in those carts?" Ecclesia looked intrigued. After all, Ryoma had them brought on a boat all the way from Sirius. It was only natural that it would pique her curiosity. But he simply remained silent and shook his head, knowing he had to conceal the information. There was good reason to keep the weapon and its capabilities a secret.

If their enemies caught a hint of it, it would halve the effectiveness of the secret weapon. Aside from keeping it secret, Ryoma also understood that without actually seeing it in action, Ecclesia would never believe him, no matter how much he explained how it worked.

Chapter 2: Lurking Danger

Endesia, the royal capital of the Kingdom of Myest, occupied a corner of the western continent. At Baron Duran's manor on a piece of land tucked away in Endesia, a horse-drawn cart made its way through the gates of the property.

A butler wearing a tailcoat and a group of maids welcomed the guests to the manor.

"Welcome, Your Excellency. The master is waiting in his office."

A man nodded in response to the butler's greeting.

"He's always in that room, eh? Thanks," said the man before going through the house and up the stairs to the second floor without needing anyone to guide him.

The man was around fifty years old and 170 centimeters in height. Despite his slim build, he didn't appear overly skinny. He also didn't seem too familiar with the battlefield, yet he seemed to work out and take good care of himself. His hands were white with hardly any marks on them, showing he mostly lived a life indoors.

He gave off the air of a civil official or a bureaucrat more than a warrior.

Moreover, he was a middle-aged man with a well-toned body, dressed in fine noble silk clothes, and had his gold hair combed back. Above his top lip was a well-groomed mustache. His face was refined and masculine, with a look of strong will that was common among nobles.

While his expression might have looked arrogant to others, it was evidence that he held a position where he was responsible for ordering others all day. But at the same time, the man possessed another quality equal to his haughtiness. Perhaps one could say he exuded confidence and dignity.

As a man of high standing, it was a little unusual for him to walk around a stranger's mansion with no attendants. Usually, the maids or butlers would guide him through the mansion, but not this time. It wasn't the best behavior

for a guest, and yet the man seemed entirely confident, proving he had visited this mansion several times before.

He leisurely strolled on the crimson carpet along the hallways until he finally stopped in front of a door and extended his hand toward it. Before the man could knock, a voice called from within.

“Is that you, Prime Minister? The door’s open. Come on in.” The master of the mansion had noticed the man’s arrival.

I often hear that soldiers who spend many years on battlefields have heightened senses. As usual, this is beyond mere mortals, thought the man.

After all, the carpet running through the hallways would have muted the man’s footsteps. The room beyond the door served as the master’s main office as well as a space for greeting guests. Naturally, it was a rather large room.

If the furniture remained as it was when the man visited the other day, the master of the mansion’s desk and chair would be at the back of the room near the window. It was quite a distance from the door. No matter how battle-hardened a soldier was, there should have been no way for him to sense anything.

Moreover, I’m not even here with malicious intentions.

Those who had walked between life and death often had very sharp senses, honed to help them survive perilous battlefields. This usually meant they became accustomed to sensing hostile intent. However, the man visiting Alexis Duran’s manor had no intention of harming him.

Regardless, Alexis had sensed his arrival. His ability had long surpassed others after a lifetime of many wars. It explained why he had no need for guards outside his room. Even in his own manor, one might regard the lack of guards as carelessness. But the master of the manor had reached such a high level of ability that it didn’t feel like he was doing it to show off.

It could just be a trap and not a show of skill.

The visitor felt a sense of uncertainty flutter through him. Even so, the master of the manor had given him permission to enter. The visitor had no plans to remain standing at the door.

“Excuse me,” said the man, turning the door handle.

Suddenly, the man felt his blood run cold. An older man was sitting at a desk. It was Alexis Duran, the master of the manor, who seemed to be in his late eighties or early nineties. He was also the source of the office’s suffocating, intimidating atmosphere.

I’m always taken aback by his presence, no matter how many times I meet with him... No ordinary human is capable of such raw energy.

That put Alexis a league above other people. It might have been more accurate to say it was a difference in power so great as to render him a different sort of life-form. Of course, that wasn’t visible to the naked eye. But one would instinctively pick up on Alexis’s raw power. The older man would have brought most people to their knees.

The same went for Owen Spiegel, the prime minister of the Kingdom of Myest, who was considered the king’s right-hand man.

Rather pitiful of me as a prime minister, but...

It was rather unusual in the first place for a prime minister to make such a visit without their attendants. Moreover, the host was too busy to personally welcome Prime Minister Spiegel. While the house staff had greeted the prime minister, Alexis’s failure to appear at the door would have been considered a social faux pas among the nobles of the western continent.

Depending on the situation, one could even interpret it as a declaration of war. However, Prime Minister Spiegel held no grudges in the face of such ill manners.

Prime Minister Spiegel then thought, *I mean, it makes sense... I’m nothing like him...*

In the Kingdom of Myest, Prime Minister Spiegel held a higher social rank than the old man before him. Although the prime minister of a country and a general were both incredibly important figures, there was still a clear hierarchy between the two. When thinking about it normally, the prime minister who managed the country’s politics had a higher position than that of a general. However, this hierarchy only applied to their official positions. The real issue

was the difference in their abilities and rank as humans.

This old man has more power and prestige than I could ever hope to have...

Alexis Duran was one of the three generals of the Kingdom of Myest and was known as the strongest among them. Four words could summarize his military feats and achievements over the years: always victorious, always undefeated. His achievements shone brightly like a sky of stars.

No other general in the Kingdom of Myest could boast military achievements comparable to Alexis Duran. It was fair to say that he was unrivaled. Or better yet, he could be referred to as a god of war. It would have been more accurate if he were known as a monster, though.

This man is far removed from humans...

General Duran was a veteran army general who began working for the Kingdom of Myest in his twenties and spent nearly sixty years on battlefields. However, he still looked as if he were in his late sixties. That was one of the traits of a warrior who had mastered martial thaumaturgy at a high level.

He was just over 180 centimeters in height. While Duran didn't have a small frame, neither did he have a giant one. At the very least, he didn't use his size as an advantage, intimidating his enemies with it. He was bigger than average, and his body had undoubtedly served him well as a warrior.

His hair had begun to recede on top of his head, leaving only white hair on either side. He had trimmed his white beard short. Looking at that alone, it would be fair to say he had aged appropriately. But his muscular build, medium-sized frame, and taut skin—none of which seemed to have deteriorated with age—contradicted that.

In fact, it was less his appearance and more the prana that emanated from him that made him seem younger. His problem-solving skills, knowledge, and decision-making were sharp as ever.

That much is obvious from the huge pile of documents on his desk... Even Prime Minister Spiegel felt tired from looking at them. Just organizing the documents alone would take a lot of willpower and stamina. You wouldn't think he'd been holed up in here for years...

Alexis was in good condition despite not having left his mansion in years. Seeing him as he was, no one would believe he had been staying in his manor on bed rest until around ten days ago.

“I must apologize. Even though I invited you here, I must finish reviewing these documents. Would you mind taking a seat on the sofa over there?” said Alexis.

Prime Minister Spiegel nodded. “That’s fine. I am well aware of how busy you are... So I don’t mind you seeing to your urgent work first.”

“Apologies,” replied General Duran before returning his gaze to his desk.

If one were to ask who the busiest person in the Kingdom of Myest was at that moment, it would be no mistake to name Alexis Durand. Of course, Ecclesia Marinelle was also deadly busy organizing the army. However, that was due to the nobles refusing to hand over their troops to help with the reinforcements, so she had to spend some time persuading them and making adjustments to plans and schedules.

General Duran was well-regarded among the kingdom’s southern nobles, meaning they had become more cooperative since he returned to duty. Considering his age and experience, few people would have the resolve to reject General Duran’s words. Even with the southern nobles listening to his requests, his workload remained undiminished.

If anything, it’s more accurate to say that while he’s overwhelmed with work. Ecclesia’s situation is completely different, thought Prime Minister Spiegel as he sat on the sofa near the window, moving his gaze to General Duran at his desk. *As I thought, he doesn’t look like he’s been ill at all. Him being on “bedrest” was just an excuse for him to turn down royal court duties...*

Naturally, serious illness could afflict even people who appeared healthy on the outside. Prime Minister Spiegel was aware of that, yet he didn’t think that the old man before him was ill enough to reject the king’s requests.

I don’t think I’m the only one who realizes that. Judging from Ecclesia Marinelle’s expression that one time, she no doubt thinks the same thing.

Prime Minister Spiegel reminisced about his presence at the meeting between

Ecclesia and Duran, which had occurred after a few years of not seeing each other. After all, a former senior colleague who she had not seen for many years because he was on bedrest had turned up at her office to discuss taking over work as if nothing had happened.

No wonder she couldn't hide how shocked she was. It was an unusual look for the strong woman known as the Whirlwind...

But Prime Minister Spiegel had brought orders from King Phillip, asking that General Duran take over Ecclesia's work. She had no choice but to agree.

Well, Lady Ecclesia was struggling with the southern nobles... She probably considered it a blessing.

Ecclesia Marinelle was the youngest of the three generals in Myest. However, she was just as strong as the other two generals in war. Ecclesia, being in her thirties, was considerably younger than the other two. Alexis Duran was approaching his nineties, and the other general, Cassandra Hellner—while considered young for an admiral leading a large fleet—was already in her late forties.

General Duran had a profound, deep maturity about him, while Cassandra was at the peak of her career as a general; her experience and youth were in perfect balance.

Compared to that, Lady Ecclesia is still evolving. She has room to grow, but it could be seen as immaturity too.

The age gap between General Duran and Ecclesia was close to that of a grandfather and his granddaughter. Although Cassandra was closer in age, the age gap between her and Ecclesia was still close to a decade, making Cassandra more like an older sister.

Even though they were all considered strong generals, there was a hierarchy. Those around them who knew that found it difficult for them to treat the generals equally.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. While those who encounter Ecclesia Marinelle tend to take her lightly, being able to dismiss one person's opinions often helps make decision-making quicker.

When everyone was on an equal footing, making decisions usually took longer. Of course, exchanging opinions often led to better ideas, but that also took time. In most cases, time was of the essence.

This is especially true in urgent situations like this one. Decisions can be expedited when there is an established hierarchy, thought Prime Minister Spiegel, while also admitting that it was not without its own problems. *In such a situation, the disadvantages become more apparent than the advantages.*

The problem lay in Ecclesia Marinelle's achievements and the significance she held as a unique individual. That was not to say Ecclesia was inferior. She simply had yet to develop the ability to make those who opposed her fall silent and in line.

To put it simply, the people don't take her seriously. That is to be expected. They still see her as a young girl, after all, thought Prime Minister Spiegel.

The southern nobles had clearly demonstrated by their actions and words that they didn't take her seriously. Besides her age, it was also a huge issue that House Marinelle's territory was based in the north of the Kingdom of Myest.

Ambascia, House Marinelle's territory, is northwest of the merchant city Pherzaad. It's a relatively developed territory that also serves as a stopover point for trade routes between Rhoadseria and Pherzaad. Groups of merchants travel back and forth, spending a lot of money in the city.

The Marinelles were incredibly well-off. In fact, it was safe to say they were one of the main financial powers within the Kingdom of Myest.

I've also heard that trading with the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy has proved profitable in recent years...

In other words, they were one of the richest families in the Kingdom of Myest. This meant the southern lords viewed them as their enemy.

Although they sometimes met at soirees in Endesia, they only exchanged perfunctory greetings. They weren't friendly with one another at all.

House Marinelle, with their northern territory, rarely ever interacts with the southern nobles. Something like that can have a huge impact on negotiations.

How long two parties had known one another was one of the factors in a relationship that could affect a negotiation. An easy comparison would be lending and borrowing money. If the one asking were a blood relative or a close friend, someone might go out of their way to get the money together for them. When it was someone they hadn't met before, there weren't many people who would simply give them money.

Humans were led by profit, or they wouldn't act. In the case of soldiers, the responsibility was even greater. If one was going to put so much burden on them, there also needed to be a corresponding level of relationship.

However, Ecclesia Marinelle has had no time to build those connections.

The formidable woman, who had inherited both the family estate and the title of general from the previous General Marinelle, displayed outstanding skill on the battlefield. However, she was very likely overwhelmed just upholding her parents' connections to other nobles. She'd had no time to forge new connections of her own. Trying to create new ones of the spur of the moment was hardly practical either.

Ordinarily, the appropriate course of action would be to put aside differences and conflicts of interest to instead prioritize the main threat. Even if they didn't like it, no one could deny that it was the right choice.

Still, humans are foolish creatures... Even though their own nation is under attack, they can't put aside their selfish needs and unite to defend it.

There were people who knew it was the right thing to do but didn't choose it. Many would likely struggle to make the right choice. It stemmed from their human desires, which was a source of strength for humans as well as something that limited them.

But that's why humans could become stronger. They're able to survive because they have such greed.

Prime Minister Spiegel felt it was foolish. He had witnessed far too many people driven by their desires, straying from the path of human decency. In fact, he had witnessed houses that had lasted for a hundred years fall and passed judgment on them with his own hands. Yet that foolishness was proof that they were merely human. As much as it couldn't be helped, it was the

source of their strength too. Sometimes, people's greed and desires were so strong that they disregarded their own lives and those of people around them.

Plus, I'm equally foolish.

If enough people knew Prime Minister Spiegel's choice, around half of them would laugh it off, calling it stupid. They might wonder why anyone would willingly take such a gamble. After all, Owen Spiegel was one of the most influential people in the Kingdom of Myest after the king.

As prime minister of the Kingdom of Myest, Spiegel held most of the responsibilities regarding government affairs and diplomacy. It wouldn't have been an exaggeration to say he wielded more power than King Phillip. Even though Spiegel understood that, he couldn't give up on his dreams and ambitions.

This is a one-in-a-lifetime chance... thought Prime Minister Spiegel as he silently waited for General Duran to finish his work. He wasn't sure how much time had passed. Perhaps twenty minutes. Around the time Prime Minister Spiegel finished the drink the maids brought him, the sound of General Duran's pen running across the paper finally came to an end.

"Ahem... Apologies for making you wait a while," said General Duran, rising from his seat. He then sat in front of Prime Minister Spiegel.

"Ah, it's fine..." Spiegel responded. That wasn't what he truly wanted to say, though. Prime Minister Spiegel was one of the busiest people within the Kingdom of Myest. He felt like every minute and second mattered; he was a very meticulous man. From the minute he woke up until he went to bed, he paid great attention to his watch as he lived his day-to-day life and requested the same from those around him.

Saying the prime minister lived life by the second was an exaggeration, but he certainly lived by the minute. General Duran had wasted twenty minutes of his precious time. It made sense why he would have opted for something less friendly than pleasantries. Considering the circumstances, he couldn't complain.

Alexis is the one who will make my dream come true, after all.

Spiegel'd had a certain dream for a long time, yet had repressed it. His

ambition began when he received land in the kingdom's southern region and was burdened with the title of Duke Spiegel, even though his younger brother was the king. Yet it was an ambition he had given up on.

Prime Minister Spiegel was lost in thought when General Duran began speaking.

"The previous Marinelle general was rather talented, yet you believe Lady Ecclesia has already exceeded that. She showed me her plans for mobilizing the troops. They were perfect. This lessened my workload, making things a little easier for me. Her work is incredible. If I didn't have those plans of hers, organizing the army would have taken much longer." That was a sincere compliment. Or rather, it would have been more accurate to say it was high praise.

Prime Minister Spiegel was shocked at General Duran's words. *Oh, to think such an esteemed person is talking so highly of her.*

Someone as experienced as General Duran could have done nearly all of the work himself—and probably would have done an above-average job of it too. Thus, General Duran wasn't in the habit of bestowing compliments. When dealing with a subordinate's flawed work, he wasn't the type to use violence or violent words to rebuke them. Instead, he would simply correct the parts that needed improvement himself. While he was a talented and reliable person, from the perspective of his subordinates, he was a boss that made them nervous. It was incredibly rare for General Duran to give an off-the-cuff compliment like that.

That was slightly surprising... Although Prime Minister Spiegel was surprised, he deeply nodded in response to General Duran.

Prime Minister Spiegel responded, "That's right... She showed me her plans the other day, and I found no flaws. The delay in her plan was not due to the plan itself, but rather that we could not decide who would carry it out, you see..."

Ecclesia was undoubtedly a victim of this deep-rooted structural issue within the Kingdom of Myest. General Duran was well aware of it.

"Precisely... While she is from House Marinelle, a noble house that is very

well-off among the northern nobles, her being the daughter of King Phillip's sister makes it unavoidable that the nobles from the southern region of the kingdom are against her. They'll do anything to hold her back."

"Indeed. Although Lady Ecclesia seemed to have successfully negotiated with them, the process didn't come without hardships," said Prime Minister Spiegel.

General Duran snorted in response. "That's only natural. It doesn't matter how much time she spends trying to persuade them... They weren't interested in negotiating or cooperating in the first place. Thinking such antipathy can be solved with a conversation is nothing short of mad."

People often misunderstood this, but negotiation was only one of many options for problem-solving. The gods never ordained negotiation as the sole method, nor did they ever decree it was the best. Negotiation was fairly effective, as long as both sides could find common ground, assuring mutual benefit. But this wasn't always possible; there were serious downsides to compromising too much.

Putting aside the question of whether it was even possible to come to a solution, negotiations often took a lot of time. This was especially true when the problem itself stemmed from various historical conflicts and was a part of a highly charged situation. Solving such an issue would be considered a fool's errand. It was obvious that it would require a considerable amount of time and patience, and it was a very similar situation to untying a very complicated knot.

"Based on how urgent the situation is, letting them take their time and leisurely reach an agreement will prove fatal. We might miss our chance to win... Of course, I don't doubt any decision Lady Ecclesia wants to take. As a general who is uniting the entire nation's armed forces, I can't help but say she's going about it naively."

Prime Minister Spiegel felt a pang of doubt. He asked, "Does that mean you don't think Lady Ecclesia is fit as a general, your Excellency?"

However, General Duran shook his head and replied, "No, I can't say that for sure. There is no doubt that she's a skilled fighter. She is known as the 'Whirlwind,' after all. I emphasize that her combat proficiency doesn't make her fit to be a general who is in charge of the whole nation's affairs. Her youth

instills a sense of naivety—something that can't be helped. I wonder if she will lose her innocence after another decade of serving as a general."

This concept applied to wine and whiskey. Both were alcohol, and they benefited from aging in barrels to further deepen the flavor. As time passed, Lady Ecclesia's body would age, but her mind would further mature and ripen.

Upon hearing General Duran's words, Prime Minister Spiegel put his hand on his chin as he pondered deeply. He then cocked his head in confusion.

"I understand and agree that Lady Ecclesia is young... It's also true that she hasn't had much time. However, what specific measures should she have taken instead?" Such was a genuine doubt of his.

General Duran slowly closed his eyes in response. He then shrugged as he said, "Good question... If it were me, I would spread rumors in order to dampen the spirits of the opposing nobles."

"Hm... What kind of rumors...?" Prime minister Spiegel wasn't expecting that kind of suggestion.

He undoubtedly thought that General Duran would meet with the southern nobles directly and persuade them with his military strength. But Prime minister Spiegel struggled to hide his confusion as General Duran described his plans.

"Well, the quickest, most effective option would be to start a rumor that the nobles are colluding with the enemy nation and plotting a rebellion. Though it's clearly a rumor, it would pressure them to change their tune and be more cooperative to prove their loyalty. While we could get rid of two to three noble houses, they are still part of the kingdom—even if our opinions and standpoints differ. We needn't rely on such strong-arm methods. Plus, the southern nobles are mostly acting out of emotion, so making them run with their tails between their legs won't be hard."

Prime Minister Spiegel immediately picked up on General Duran's intentions. He also realized that the old man sitting before him wasn't simply a soldier; he was a monster who knew nobles all too well and had years of war experience.

I see... That will be effective just like he said...



It wasn't that important whether the rumor was true. Simply spreading a rumor like that would be enough to inflict a fatal wound on the nobles.

There is a small amount of truth in the rumors, since the nobles are impeding the mustering of armies and are holding everyone back... But the truthfulness of the rumor is not that important, mused Prime Minister Spiegel, knowing the nobles would be more focused on proving that they were not planning a revolt.

Of course, the nobles were not doing that at all, but they could not merely deny the rumors. They understood that if all they offered was words, it would amount to nothing. In a worst-case scenario, their protestation of innocence would simply make the situation worse. Even if their claim had validity or truth, they knew that no one would believe it.

No matter the explanation they provided, their refusal to dispatch their own soldiers made them lose all credibility. The more they tried to deny it, the more guilty they would look. People judged others based on their past actions. There was no denying that the longer they continued to refuse the nation's requests, the more people would see them as untrustworthy.

Even if some people believed them, they wouldn't openly support them and would reasonably believe that they were unable to do so. People who defended the southern nobles would endanger their own noble houses and families.

Spreading a rumor was a dangerous option to consider. If the other nobles supported the openly rebellious nobles, there was a chance that they would become the target of everyone's ire in Myest. Despite this, the nobles had no choice but to address the rumor. If they did nothing, people would assume the rumor was true.

It'd all end the same way... The only way for them to avoid it would be to proactively help and show they're sincere.

The only way they would survive would be to actively show their loyalty to the nation.

"So, we're essentially threatening them?" asked Spiegel.

"I guess... Ideally, a mere threat would suffice. In reality, most nobles would lay down their swords in order to preserve their family names." General Duran

then paused and looked toward Prime Minister Spiegel with a ferocious smile. The smile resembled that of a predator out for blood. “However, there will be some who continue to bitch and howl. Such naive people won’t do us much good on the battlefield... In that case, we’ll make that rumor come true.”

The prime minister couldn’t help but be taken aback that such a scenario was actually happening. Of course, the last-ditch measures General Duran spoke about were within the realms of Prime Minister Spiegel’s expectations. The Kingdom of Myest had entered a period of relative stability characterized by minimal bloodshed between nobles, and Owen Spiegel was still prime minister. He knew all too well the challenges of managing a country.

While he wasn’t fond of schemes and deceit, he didn’t lack knowledge of both. However, if a man of General Duran’s caliber were to say he would cast aside allies, then the situation changed drastically.

“Extreme situations call for extreme measures. You would show no mercy, even if they were nobles from your own country?” The words fell from Prime Minister Spiegel’s lips with a tone of hesitancy and doubt. In fact, he was relatively shocked when he heard what General Duran said.

General Duran paid it no mind and went on.

“Of course, it’s not my preferred method. But sometimes drastic measures are required. That is what it means to protect your country... It’s imperative that one does not hesitate. If one hesitates, they might miss their chance. Getting the timing wrong will make this plan of slandering the nobles ineffective, but it will also tighten the noose around my own neck. It’s important to ascertain the right moment and prepare to act on it. Without that, one will never gain anything.”

That was when Prime Minister Spiegel realized that while General Duran was talking about Ecclesia on the surface, he was also hinting at something else entirely.

“Are you saying I’m hesitating?” asked Prime Minister Spiegel.

“Yes... At least from my point of view, you are, a little. While you’re aware of it, you’re trying to ignore the issue, aren’t you?”

Prime Minister Spiegel fell silent. Although he had made up his mind, that didn't mean he was without doubts. He had recognized that and intentionally tried to turn a blind eye to it. But now General Duran had pointed it out, making Prime Minister Spiegel feel shocked and conflicted.

He remained silent for a while. His mind was fragmented, and he had nothing to respond with.

General Duran must have sensed as such, as he was the one who finally spoke.

"You can always turn back, you know?"

Prime Minister Spiegel, who had been looking down at the floor while he remained silent, hurriedly looked up at General Duran. He felt a weight lift off his shoulders at the surprising revelation. He had thought he wouldn't be able to stop the plan.

"Really?"

"Yes. Nothing has been made public yet, after all. We are gathering troops under the guise that we're sending reinforcements to Jermuk. All we have to do is continue sending reinforcements there as originally intended. If we frame the secret pact between Brittania and Tarja as a scheme to prevent the southern kingdoms from intervening, that could still serve as a plausible justification. Both countries will probably resent us more, and we'll need to modify our foreign policy. King Phillip may start questioning things, but it would be possible to stop the plan now."

Prime Minister Spiegel's face lit up with joy, equivalent to someone burning in the fires of hell seeing a rope dangle in front of them. Even if they didn't cancel the plan, there was a stark difference between being unable to do so and not choosing that option. It felt as if General Duran had brought Prime Minister Spiegel a lifeboat. However, that was not particularly General Duran's intention.

The real question was this: what really were his intentions?

The next words to come out of General Duran's voice smashed the small glimmer of hope Prime Minister Spiegel held in his heart.

"But are you really okay with that, Prime Minister? This is a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity. We won't have another chance like this again. It means giving up on your wish, the one you've harbored for so long. Do you really not mind?" The devil himself was tempting Spiegel.

Prime Minister Spiegel went pale with anguish. As if able to read the politician's mind, the devil—General Duran—continued to entice him.

"Do you want to become king of this nation? Wasn't that your mother's dearest wish? To then give up on that... If things continue as they are, you will soon have a crown upon your head, Prime Minister."

Spiegel's expression changed as General Duran spoke. No longer was it the expression of a handsome, wise man. Instead, he resembled a demon possessed by a deep desire. The devil then pressed the demon to come to a final decision.

"You should make a choice now. Will you become a magnificent leader who will reign supreme over the other kingdoms? Or will you succumb to your sympathy for your blood relative and live the rest of your life serving King Phillip as prime minister—just a simple handy tool?"

"You are correct, Your Excellency... I do wish to avenge my mother and become king of this nation. I can't simply give up on that dream..."

The devil Duran nodded with satisfaction, resisting the urge to laugh scornfully.

Around an hour later, Prime Minister Spiegel left General Duran's office. The general's plan had more or less gone ahead, but he had noticed that Prime Minister Spiegel's gait wasn't all that confident when he left the office. Spiegel didn't seem ready for rebellion; his heart and mind didn't agree. It was evidence that he was still ambivalent. On the one hand, he was elated that he would soon hold the highest position in the country as king, but on the other hand, he felt guilty that he would have to rebel against his half brother, Phillip.

To those who lived on Earth, the existence of a monarch was important.

General Duran let out a small sigh as he watched Prime Minister Spiegel leave the room.

"Ah, well... He'll eventually go for it, even if he doesn't want to. If he doesn't,

then it's simply a case of finding a different candidate," mumbled General Duran with a hint of sorrow. He didn't enjoy seeing people he had known for many years suddenly plunged into despair. Although he didn't particularly wish to throw people into that situation, he would do so without hesitation. Besides, he wasn't in a position to concern himself with Prime Minister Spiegel's feelings for long. *All right... Best move on to other tasks. No doubt he is also becoming impatient.*

Only Alexis Duran remained in the rather large office. Most of the furniture was placed up against the wall, making it difficult for anyone to hide anywhere—undoubtedly a tactic to deter assassins.

Once the door to the office had closed and Prime Minister Spiegel had been gone a while, General Duran began to speak.

"The coast is clear. You can come out now, Mr. Kusuda." His voice reverberated around the room. Suddenly, the bookcase leaning against the wall to his left began to spin silently, revealing a dark entrance that looked like an emergency exit.

A man walked out of it and entered the room. He was an Asian man in his thirties with black hair and rather masculine facial features.

"I see, so that's Owen Spiegel... Although he's the prime minister of a nation, he doesn't have much presence... Are you sure he's fit for the job?" remarked the man, shrugging his shoulders. He seemed exasperated and disdainful, yet he had toned down his reaction, aware that Spiegel was a prime minister.

It was plain to see what Kusuda really thought from his voice and expression. When referring to a person like Prime Minister Spiegel, such words and behavior were rather blunt and could easily be condemned as disrespectful. Kusuda, who was forcibly summoned to Earth from the parallel world known as Rearth, viewed everyone on Earth as barbaric primitives. From a psychological standpoint, he felt like a victim, and those on Earth were his kidnappers.

Naturally, there was no psychological phenomenon known as Stockholm syndrome—where a victim began to feel friendly toward or have deep affection for their kidnapper—on Earth. But that was merely such exceptions existing and couldn't always be applied to such a situation. In most cases, it was difficult for

a victim to respect or harbor any positive feelings toward a kidnapper and their accomplices.

Owen Spiegel was still the prime minister of a country, and he was also someone from the Kingdom of Myest—the very same country that General Duran was from. No one would be happy to hear someone insult a compatriot. Normally, they would raise their voice and get angry. However, General Duran simply smiled wryly in response to what Kusuda said. He either agreed with Kusuda, or he had no intentions of finding fault with the comment.

“Well, he has served as our nation’s prime minister for a very long time. If push comes to shove, he’ll bend... After all, he is expendable. If he can’t be used, we’ll simply get another.”

“That’s right... The royals in this world are all talentless imbeciles. However, they have plenty of children and relatives. We need only search among them to find a more suitable substitute, right?”

“Well, I would say that’s one of the few benefits this utterly savage, barbaric world offers. Those who lack culture and education have few pleasures outside of making more children. This is beyond their control,” said General Duran, letting out a roar of laughter.

His laugh conveyed a sense of disdain and ridicule toward uncivilized commoners who covered themselves with basic loincloths. He viewed himself as a man of culture, although his hatred for commoners knew no end as he looked down on them from his towering position. It was something that could not be helped. Alexis Duran was also a victim who had been forcibly summoned from Rearth to Earth.

“I heard that ‘poor households have many children’ was a proverb in your native country of Japan, Mr. Kusuda. That mirrors the situation here exactly.”

While General Duran was correct, his statement didn’t accurately depict the situation. Those suffering from financial hardship weren’t the only ones with many children. If anything, families doing exceptionally well financially tended to have more children.

This could have been because Earth still had underdeveloped medical practices as well as many monster threats that were beyond basic human

understanding. Plenty of perils could result in death. Hence, the people of Earth experienced death a lot more than those living in a modern-day society, meaning they followed their instinct of producing more offspring—all in order to ensure the continuation of the human race.

Thus, saying that people reproduced because they were poor or had nothing better to do was not an accurate statement. While it wasn't correct, it wasn't entirely incorrect either. However, Kusuda simply responded with a smirk.

“Mr. Duran, I see you know my native country well. But the saying ‘poor households have many children’ is used more positively, meaning that households that have more children will be happier. I believe it’s a little different from what you meant to say.”

The meaning of the same words could change over time. In the past, children were a sign of happiness; however, those in modern society viewed them as a heavy burden. The phrase’s differing meaning in each situation made sense due to the context. It was a discrepancy that most people wouldn’t notice. Even if they had realized that the meaning of the words had changed, they’d pay it no mind, and that would be it. There was no need for Kusuda to meticulously explain the difference as there was a high chance it would cause discord between him and Duran.

This reflected Kusuda’s attitude and fixation on superiority quite well. Most people might not have looked too kindly on how Kusuda flaunted his knowledge. He didn’t mean any harm, but he got on people’s nerves.

However, Alexis Duran shrugged off the juvenile fault-finding.

“Hm, is that so? Well, I learned something new. I’m just repeating what I heard from the people in the Organization... So really, it’s just superficial knowledge,” responded General Duran with a lighthearted smile, befitting a great commander of a nation’s army. He exuded the confidence of a man accustomed to dominating others. That aura did more to make people realize their mistakes than him shouting or reprimanding them. In fact, Kusuda then apologized to General Duran.

“My apologies. I didn’t mean to interject with such an insignificant matter.” Although Kusuda was a confident man who wanted to climb the social ladder

and liked to flaunt his knowledge, he was not foolish enough not to notice his own faults. General Duran returned a gentle smile.

“I don’t mind. We’re two warriors with the same ideals fighting for the same goal. You didn’t point out my error, so there is no need to worry about it. But there are some more difficult people within the Organization, so you might need to be more careful around them. It is wise to avoid making enemies over trivial things. The Organization has high expectations of you, Mr. Kusuda, as a new recruit. Mr. Sudou has nothing but good things to say about you. I look forward to hearing what you have in mind next time,” said General Duran, winking playfully. Even such a calm and majestic general had a more lighthearted side.

He appeared considerate toward Kusuda, choosing not to worry him more than needed. While he was both laid-back and friendly, he had still communicated what he wanted to say. His subordinates would have likely considered him an ideal boss if he were leading them in a modern society. It was a completely different attitude to the cold and overwhelming one he previously had projected. Kusuda didn’t seem surprised by it; in other words, he was aware that the side General Duran was currently showing was his real, usual self.

Kusuda deeply bowed his head and earnestly said, “It is an honor receiving so much unmerited recognition. I will never forget what the Organization did for me when they took me in. I was simply a man loitering around with no real place to go.” He owed the Organization his life. He wasn’t foolish or ungrateful enough to simply forget what they had done for him.

While I can’t say he’s without his faults, such as his overconfidence and pride, he is as Mr. Sudou described. He has a strong sense of duty and a good head on his shoulders. As expected, all we need to do is leave him with the next plans for battle, thought General Duran as he smiled with satisfaction. The young man before him reminded him of his own younger days.

After Tatsuhiro Kusuda met with General Duran, he made his way through the back alleys of the royal capital of Endesia alone. A thick cloud obscured the sparkle of the stars in the night sky. It felt like the perfect backdrop for a tragic

event to take place.

Kusuda looked up at the overcast sky and let out a small sigh at the impermanence of the world.

To think that I, a former police officer, would be caught up in terrorism... What irony, mused Kusuda.

Kusuda had spent most of his life as a police officer, so a plan that entailed assassinating the king of Myest and then supporting the usurper was nothing short of a criminal offense. From a modern point of view, it was rather difficult to defend such a plan. He would be subject to much criticism, and no one would dare celebrate him for such a deed.

However, in this crazy world, such modern values aren't worth a damn. They'd do more harm than good.

As someone from a modern society that valued human rights and respected people's lives, Kusuda found Earth's disregard for human life equivalent to hell. With no way to reverse the summoning or return to Rearth, there was nothing for Kusuda to do but try to live in this world of madness.



He had to understand the rules and values of this world, as well as respect them, in order to survive. The law of the jungle was one of the fundamental rules on Earth.

According to that law, there's no right or wrong, which is probably unnecessary to even mention... The real issue is whether I can follow that law.

For example, chess and its Japanese counterpart, shogi, were incredibly similar games despite not sharing a single rule. In shogi, once a player had successfully taken an enemy's piece, one could use it as their own, whereas that wasn't the case in chess. Likewise, in chess, there was a rule that allowed the player to swap the position of the king and a rook under certain conditions. This was known as castling; however, no such rule existed in shogi. If a professional shogi player participated in an official chess championship and his opponent used castling to gain an advantage and win the game, the professional shogi player wouldn't be able to complain that a difference in the rules of the games led to his loss. Such a complaint would fall on deaf ears.

The same would happen if a professional chess player entered a shogi championship. They would likely hear, "They are different games, so the rules are different. You should have read up on the rules before participating." People around them would give them cold stares if they complained like that at a championship. Acting in such a way in a public place could also mean the end of their career.

One could also draw a comparison to how cannabis was treated in different parts of Earth. Japan strictly prohibited the use, possession, sale, or purchase of cannabis; any of those acts could result in criminal punishment. But around the world, such as in the Netherlands and some parts of America, cannabis was legal for personal or medical use. Some parts of the world had no restrictions on its use.

Putting aside its legality or criminality, the use of cannabis in nations where it was illegal would lead to criminal prosecution—a logical outcome. In a place like America, where laws would differ from state to state, whether it was legal could change as soon as one crossed a state line. If a cancer patient wanted to use cannabis as a method of alleviating their pain, they would first have to confirm

the local laws. Failure to do so could result in them facing immediate criminal prosecution. If the criminal complained about it, the authorities would tell them, “It’s illegal in our state,” which would be the end of it.

Bringing modern-day values to this world was very similar to that. It wasn’t about whether those values were good or bad, but more about what made up a society and how one dealt with that in particular.

If I were in power, I could probably change the rules...

The laws in human society weren’t orders ordained by the gods themselves. It would prove difficult but not impossible to change them. Military might, political authority, and financial power could change laws and rules. In modern society, even people could use their power to change things. Realistically, it was easier to adjust oneself to their surroundings than to push through changes. If one were to break the law or the rules before they were changed, they would naturally face the associated penalties. That was true in offices, schools, and nations.

And if I can’t follow the rules or adapt to my surroundings here on Earth, it’ll mean my own death.

Ever since Kusuda was summoned to Earth, he had witnessed and heard of the tragedies that fell upon people living here. Many fixated on the notion of human rights and cared too much about the lives of others, which resulted in them or their friends and acquaintances dying.

Kusuda recalled everything that happened in the few years he had been here. He was summoned to Earth, and Koichiro Mikoshiba had helped him successfully escape from the Kingdom of Beldzevia’s royal palace. But Tachibana suffered an injury that left him immobile, so Kusuda searched for water in a forest. There, he found Rodney McKenna and others tending to the unconscious Asuka Kiryu. Kusuda decided to flee the area entirely. It was a bitter, painful memory for Kusuda.

I ran away leaving that girl and Mr. Tachibana. That’s the reality of it...

It was a difficult decision for him to make. He could devise many excuses for his actions, but they wouldn’t be simple lies or attempts to protect himself. If he could have saved someone, it would have been Asuka Kiryu. Although he had

been summoned to Earth and knew nothing, he maintained his sense of duty as a police officer and gratitude toward Koichiro Mikoshiba, who had stayed behind to ensure they could escape the palace.

Still, Kusuda was smart and knew he couldn't rescue Asuka. He would have to get past a unit of knights wearing armor. Even though he was a police officer and had received ample training, Kusuda wasn't so delusional that he thought he could take on a group of knights with a single extendable police baton.

If I had a gun, it would've been a different story...

That was why Kusuda chose to flee the area, while praying to the gods he would get another attempt to rescue Asuka.

Of course, Rodney McKenna and the knights looking after Asuka had only good intentions. Had Kusuda made himself known, they would have helped him along with Tachibana and Asuka. However, Kusuda only learned this after he joined the Organization. It was something he couldn't have known at the time. If Liu Daijin hadn't gathered information on Asuka Kiryu at Koichiro Mikoshiba's request, Kusuda would never have found out what happened to her and Tachibana.

So, I ended up fleeing and spending a few days wandering around the forest...

Kusuda had nowhere to go after he was summoned to Earth. He feared being captured by the locals and chose to avoid towns and villages, feeling that the monster-ridden forests were safer.

But the cost was a lot greater than expected, which was only natural.

He had been summoned right after visiting the Mikoshiba household as a police officer investigating Ryoma's disappearance. The jacket, white button-up shirt, and leather shoes he'd been wearing were suitable attire for an investigation as a police officer, but not for traversing a forest. In just a few hours, the leather of his shoes had been shredded and blood seeped out from various cuts on his feet.

Kusuda's ability to survive the forest and evade monsters in such a condition was probably due to his strong will, as well as blessings from a goddess. He was in a perilous situation when he was found by some Organization members

working as adventurers of the guild. Extreme hunger and dehydration plagued him, while cuts and bruises covered his entire body. He also had a large wound on his back he had suffered after running away from a monster. He was in bad shape, with a high fever making him delirious. However, he had been fortunate that the group of adventurers had contained members of the Organization.

They had recognized the clothing of an otherworlder and protected him.

Then the Organization used a very expensive secret remedy to get me back to full health... Because they saw me as one of them, I ended up joining the Organization.

He knew well enough they were doing it for their self-interest. But that didn't change the fact the Organization had saved him. The ideals and objectives of the Organization appealed to Kusuda, so he had no hesitation joining them.

Besides, Mr. Sudou values me. He ordered one of the Organization's most valuable undercover agents to go along with my plan.

Alexis Duran was a spy working for the Organization—a hidden poison. When Kusuda heard about it, he couldn't help but be shocked at how ambitious it was for an undercover operation. After all, General Duran had entered the Kingdom of Myest's army as a soldier almost sixty years ago. He currently was eighty, bordering on ninety. During that time he had acquired many honors, married into the Duran barony, and risen to the ranks of one of the three most respected generals within the kingdom. It had been a path filled with many dangers and threats to his life.

It mustn't have been an ordinary level of hardship...

Those summoned from Rearth considered Earth hell. Not only was it inferior in comparison to Rearth, but it was also a foreign land with a harsh culture and customs. When summoned, most people could understand this world's language because it was embedded into them, meaning they could talk, read, and write without issue. However, that didn't make living here day-to-day any easier.

In such an environment, it would have been incredibly difficult for Alexis Duran to rise to the rank of general on his ability and strength alone.

While he is closer to a monster than a man, the Organization clearly helped him along the way.

They wouldn't have only helped with financial affairs. They undoubtedly invested in human resources, probably costing a few people their lives.

And to think they've gotten such a valuable undercover agent to work with me...

Akitake Sudou had ordered it, which made Kusuda's heart roar with flames. In essence, Kusuda was still a rookie who only recently joined the Organization. Yet they had paired him up with one of their most valuable trump cards: this individual who had risen to be one of the most formidable people in the Kingdom of Myest, which was renowned as one of the major powers within the three eastern countries on the western continent.

I don't know why he's helping me this much. Is there even a clear reason for it? Or does he simply feel like it?

Kusuda didn't know Akitake Sudou very well, and he was particularly difficult to figure out as part of the already secretive Organization. From what he knew, Sudou was in the upper echelons of the Organization and influenced the entirety of the western continent at his discretion. He had only met Sudou when they got together to discuss their battle plans.

Even though Kusuda had met and exchanged words with Sudou, he was mystified by the man's bewitching presence. There was no way he wouldn't find himself motivated by such a man.

Plus, the way they're handling that man seems somewhat odd, thought Kusuda. It was clear that Ryoma Mikoshiba was the intended target of their plan.

The plan to lure Ryoma Mikoshiba to Jermuk included everything from Brittania and Tarja forming an alliance to the attack on the Kingdom of Myest and the triumphant return of Alexis Duran, who had been living outside the public eye.

Given the amount of effort and aces played, there was no denying that the Organization's goal was to eliminate Ryoma Mikoshiba.

However, Sudou technically never said to kill Ryoma Mikoshiba.

Only Sudou knew if he didn't say it because that wasn't his true objective, or because he felt that it was obvious enough that it went without saying. For some reason, Kusuda got the feeling Sudou didn't want Ryoma dead.

It's almost as if Sudou is enjoying seeing if Ryoma will die or if he'll cut his way through a dangerous situation and live to see another day, mused Kusuda. But he was likely overanalyzing Sudou's actions. Brittania and Tarja will reconvene and advance into Jermuk in a few days. Once that happens, the situation will change drastically.

The arrangements had been put in place, and Kusuda had played his part to the best of his ability.

"Well, I've done the best I can... I feel bad for Asuka Kiryu. She did so much to protect Tachibana," mumbled Kusuda. He then looked up at the sky, spotting a sparkling red star as he waited for the curtains to open on the next tragedy.

Chapter 3: Endesia's Revolution

It had been around ten days since Ecclesia Marinelle entered the fortress city of Jermuk along with three thousand soldiers and large amounts of supplies. In the early afternoon, everyone from the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, as well as Ryoma Mikoshiba and Ecclesia, known as the Whirlwind—one of the Kingdom of Myest's most powerful generals—gathered in a conference room on the second floor of a fortress in the center of Jermuk. They were listening to a report from the Igasaki clan, which had been spying in Endesia.

"Thus ends our report, Master," said one of the Igasaki clan's shinobi, bowing their head deeply toward Ryoma.

"Good work. Stay vigilant. If anything seems off, report it to me immediately," replied Ryoma.

The shinobi of the Igasaki clan bowed once more before hastily leaving the room. They understood they no longer needed to remain in the room where all the leaders had gathered once they'd completed their duty. After all, the report from the Igasaki clan hinted at an oncoming storm. A heavy silence filled the room after the shinobi left.

The first reason for this silence was the realization and fear that the nation's brief period of internal stability was about to end. The second reason was that the storm in Myest seemed like it was the beginning of something even greater.

But they knew that already. They had freed Jermuk from the siege held by the allied forces of Brittania and Tarja and pushed them back to the southern border. However, simply pushing back the enemy did not end the war. In fact, this struggle in Jermuk was wholly unexpected by Ryoma.

"I see... More than ten thousand enemy reinforcements are marching toward the southern border. That means they've finally finished their preparations," muttered Ryoma as he looked up, his arms crossed over his chest. His mind was racing as he tried to come up with their next move.

Leonard Orglen sensed the excitement and joy in Ryoma's voice and thought, *He's so young, yet so calm.*

The Igasaki clan had reported the enemy's forces being close to twice that of theirs. There was no telling when the reinforcements from the Kingdom of Myest would arrive. Comparing the two sides, Jermuk's defenders were at a huge disadvantage. Leonard Orglen was a Rhoadserian noble with ample experience in battle, yet it required a lot of effort from him to remain calm in such a situation. But he sensed no such disturbance in his newly appointed leader. There was no sorrow in Ryoma's voice. He wore a confident smile, as if eagerly awaiting the impending war.

Well, that's to be expected. Ryoma Mikoshiba is a monster who triumphed in the civil war between the nobles of Rhoadseria. After using his power to crush the northern subjugation led by Queen Lupis, he backed Queen Radine and put her on the throne... He truly thrives in war. He clearly expected this from the enemy forces.

Leonard Orglen was aware of the person Ryoma Mikoshiba was and had set aside his pride as a Rhoadserian noble to become a vassal of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. While the Orglen family remained viscounts within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, their status change from direct vassals of the crown to subordinate vassals of another noble could have been considered a kind of demotion.

In modern terms, it was similar to an office worker working at the main company transferring to work at an umbrella company, or a full-time employee becoming a subcontractor. Either way, many people would refer to it as a humiliating downgrade. Few people would wish for such a thing to happen to them...but that didn't mean there were exceptions to that fact.

There is a high possibility the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy will further expand its influence. This could include the absorption of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria in the process. Such is especially true if Ryoma, the mastermind, is leading the way...

The law of the jungle was one of the main laws on Earth. There was no denying that fact. To deny it, one had no choice but to become the strongest.

This is due to the inevitability of the strong consuming the weak. We should

reduce our losses and be absorbed on favorable terms.

Based on these ideas, Leonard had begun working for the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. If his own country of Rhoadseria were to be attacked, they could use the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's power to reduce their losses. The young leader was seemingly living up to his vassal's expectations. Ryoma kept his arms crossed as he looked up at the ceiling, opening his mouth to speak.

"In that case, we should gather more information on the enemy's forces... There's something I wish I could try before the battle. Well, as it's one of Nelcius's creations, I doubt there'll be any issues."

However, no one in the room knew what Ryoma was talking about. That was evident from the expressions of even the Malfist twins, who sat on either side of Ryoma.

"By gathering more information, do you mean the Igasaki clan infiltrated their ranks? While I'm sure they'll be able to do just that, they also have a lot of work on their plates. I'm a little worried our information-gathering network could become overextended," said Laura, looking at Ryoma. Her eyes were filled with conviction, and her doubts were natural. She knew that her master understood this danger already, but she was also curious who they would use to gather information if not the Igasaki clan. Even the newcomer, Leonard, had the same thoughts as Chris Morgan, who sat next to him.

Of course, the Igasaki clan Ryoma employs are incredibly skilled. There's no mistaking that his sudden rise to power was thanks in part to their organization.

Leonard was well aware of that. Ryoma was a talented strategist, but that alone wasn't enough to explain his achievements. By gathering information, he could put together more appropriate plans. For that reason, having the correct information was essential.

It's not only the Igasaki clan who were gathering information. For example, Count Elnan Zeleph spearheaded information gathering on the nobles of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Simone Christoph, the leader of the Christoph company, focused on the movements and financial developments of foreign countries.

But Count Zeleph and the Christoph Company could not gather information on military affairs. The Igasaki clan, led by Gennou and Sakuya, was picking up

the slack. Leonard had yet to speak with members of the Igasaki clan directly, though he knew everything he needed to about them.

If information regarding the enemy forces was needed, there would be no other option than to send the Igasaki clan to infiltrate the foe.

Even though they're skilled at what they do, they have their limits. Besides working on counterintelligence operations in the Wortenia Peninsula, they accompanied Lady Lione to the Kingdom of Xarooda. A simple calculation would reveal his lordship only has about one-third of the Igasaki clan left at his disposal. They're not only gathering information on Endesia but also guarding our army against enemy agents. Considering the current situation, it'd be considered quite a feat if they could notify us of the enemy army's movements in advance.

The issue wasn't with the Igasaki clan's ability. It was quite literally an issue with not having enough personnel.

Suddenly, Ecclesia realized something from Ryoma's words and asked, "Are you perchance referring to all that luggage we brought?"

Ryoma wore a mischievous smile as he responded, "Oh yes. I'm sure you'll be surprised. After all, it's one of my secret weapons... It'll take some time to prepare, so I ask that you all look forward to tomorrow." He laughed aloud.

On the evening of the next day, an experiment was taking place in the courtyard of Jermuk—the first of its kind on Earth. Ryoma was attempting to have a hot air balloon take flight with people aboard. Many would have viewed it as a significant scientific development. It could quite reasonably be called a historical event. It was a moment on par with the first steps of American astronaut Neil Armstrong on the moon or the Wright brothers first airplane flight.

People from the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, including Laura and Sara, surrounded Ryoma. The bystanders watched with great interest.

From the average person's point of view it's a huge first step. But in reality, it isn't even half a step forward, thought Ryoma.

Anyone who had been exposed to the knowledge and benefits of modern society would feel that way. While Ryoma Mikoshiba watched soldiers of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy attach a basket to the balloon envelope, he couldn't help but smirk. Unlike the excitement and curiosity of those around him, he maintained a slightly calmer demeanor.

However, it was different for those native to Earth. They had yet to harness the capabilities of science, so what was happening here today was close to a miracle from the gods to them.

They probably never even imagined people could soar through the sky.

That said, the first instance of flight had already taken place in this world. During the recent northern subjugation, Sakuya Igasaki and her subordinates had achieved flight in their mission to the fortress city of Epirus.

Though that much is kept secret. No one else knew about it apart from Lady Helena. This means that our first official reveal of flight is today. Well, it was to be expected. I wanted to keep this trump card of mine hidden away, just like the binoculars.

A weapon referred to as a trump card could be employed in a couple different ways. One of these was concealing its existence and using it out of the public eye. That was more for a type of weapon that one didn't want anyone to have any knowledge of. One could equate this to a chemical or biological weapon in modern times. Usually, people kept these weapons a secret until they were ready to use them.

In contrast to that approach, one could also leverage a new weapon by proactively announcing and demonstrating what one had.

A modern example of this would be nuclear weapons. Instead of using them, one would flaunt them and show them off, aiming to intimidate their opponents and lower their morale. It was essentially a weapon whose value lay more in its ability to threaten others, rather than its functionality on the battlefield. The exact workings of the technology might be a secret, but the weapon's existence was something to be actively publicized.

In short, the qualities and uses of powerful new weapons varied significantly. In this case, Ryoma's trump card had been something that he didn't want to

show off to others.

Showing off this technology creates a risk of others learning to copy it.

Earth was behind in technology compared to Rearth. The average level of civilization here wasn't quite worthy of being called "primitive." Rather, they were barely medieval, perhaps close to the tenth century. In comparison, people in modern developing countries lived relatively civilized lives.

However, that doesn't mean all of Rearth is far behind Earth.

A prime example of this would be the art known as thaumaturgy, a general term that encompassed three types: martial, verbal, and endowed. Among those, Ryoma felt that verbal thaumaturgy had the hidden potential to revolutionize the way of life in this world from the ground up. However, only creativity and imagination could unlock this hidden potential. The best way to evoke such qualities was to combine two different objects. So, the combination of a person from Earth and a person from Rearth was a good opportunity for a huge technological development.

If we proceed without restraint, the technology may be leaked to our enemies. Since we won't be able to monopolize the technology, we'll just have to prepare countermeasures.

Modern society strongly prioritized information disclosure and collaborative development of technology. Companies working together to widen their business operations were a result of this trend. Similarly, in the IT world, there was open-source software. Programmers would share their source code, which led to further developments. Famous chefs would also share their prized recipes in cookbooks too.

It was undeniable that revealing once-hidden techniques and the like would lead to a healthy rivalry, contributing to further technological advancements. Keeping technology hidden away wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but it wasn't necessarily good either. It was truly a multifaceted issue.

Just like every light had its shadow, good things were accompanied by bad things.

Ryoma didn't think that revealing all information was beneficial. At the very

least, he didn't think he should have to reveal everything unconditionally.

Although people talk of freedom of information in modern society, the reality of the situation is that only a small fraction of information is readily available.

Freedom of information led to healthy competition, which resulted in superior products. However, there were also technologies that were also technology sectors that didn't publicly share their data. Information regarding security was a perfect example of this. No company would willingly reveal the inner workings of their locks, because they wanted to make locks that criminals couldn't pick.

If such a company did share all their secrets, people would question their sanity, and in a worst-case scenario, they would be viewed as accomplices to criminals. The same applied to independent locksmiths. Anyone would naturally worry that sharing locksmithing secrets would spark a rapid increase in robberies and breakins, and this would take priority over the possibility that sharing that information could lead to advancements in lock technology.

Such logic applied to martial thaumaturgy too.

Secret skills are paramount to war. If you want to defeat the enemy and survive, teaching your techniques to many people is dangerous.

In Chinese martial arts, there was a system known as baishi, in which a disciple underwent a ritual in order to have a pseudofilial relationship with their master. The relationship differed from that of a regular disciple, not only with how they were trained but also the techniques they were taught.

During the Edo period, Japan was divided into various provinces, each governed separately. Within those provinces, there were martial arts schools known as goryu or "secret styles." These were exclusive to each province and were only passed down within the province. It was forbidden to show the school's techniques to outsiders or spread its teachings beyond the provincial border.

Contests between different martial arts schools were outright banned. They practiced isshisoden, which ensured techniques were only taught to one successor. This was the ultimate outcome of prioritizing keeping such techniques secret.

Why were techniques not shown to outsiders and spread beyond the border? It was to prevent enemies from learning their skills. If the main goal was to defeat the enemy and ensure one's survival, information had to be kept strictly hidden away. On the other hand, advertising themselves and showcasing their techniques was necessary if martial artists wanted to bring in a lot of students and generate income. This method of promotion would then generate interest from others.

Conversely, sports that generated revenue as a form of entertainment had to be widely publicized to attract spectators. This was true of combat sports like boxing as well as martial arts such as judo and karate.

Of course, it wasn't about which was good or bad. For-profit sports simply followed a different thought process than martial arts. Current combat sports and martial arts were incredibly similar, but they differed incredibly in their end goals.

From that point of view, showing off the technology we have is a bad move. Lady Ecclesia is a general of the alliance, but she is still a person from another country.

Members of the alliance were allies for now. There was a possibility they would remain friendly for a hundred or a thousand years. But it was also possible that they'd become enemies tomorrow.

I may be overthinking this, though.

Had Ryoma and his allies simply thought sharing their technology was fine and gone ahead with everything, they would be unable to recover if it backfired. That applied to leading a country as well as the everyday operations of an office.

That said, I can't really use the balloon without making it known. It might even be more impactful if I publicly announce it.

If Ecclesia believed the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy should be feared, then that was all the better.

"Master, the preparations are completed," said one of the soldiers, updating Ryoma on the status of the hot-air balloon.

Ryoma nodded, then turned his gaze to the Malfist sisters. “All right. Laura, Sara, are you both ready?”

The twins nodded in response.

“Yes, I have a good understanding of how the burner works.”

“All good here. I’ve already connected to my sister’s Wezalié’s Whisper.”

Ryoma nodded in approval and bellowed, “Then let us begin!”

Laura and two specially selected soldiers made their way onto the gondola, then approached a box that resembled a chimney in the middle of it. They put their hands near it and activated the mechanism. The hot-air balloon took around ten minutes to build up enough lift, at which point the gondola slowly began to rise into the air.

“Oh, it’s really flying...” said Ecclesia, awestruck at the sight before her. Ryoma grinned when he saw her expression.

I expected she’d react like this...

The envelope contained the hot air. A contraption in the center had been charged with endowed thaumaturgy, making it produce hot air in the place of a conventional burner and giving the hot-air balloon its buoyancy. It began to gradually rise higher and higher.

After a while, the hot-air balloon finally pushed through the clouds. It was around one thousand meters high in the sky. The hot-air balloon also had endowed thaumaturgy that made it blend in with its surroundings. To the naked eyes of Ryoma and the others, it now looked like a smudge on the blank canvas they called the sky.

“So, how is it? Any issues?” Ryoma asked.

“No issues, I have a clear connection to them up there,” Sara answered.

Ryoma nodded in response.

Sara then focused on the Wezalié’s Whisper she was wearing and said, “Sis, can you hear me? Yes... I can hear you perfectly fine too... Loud and clear.”

There was no speaker function on Wezalié’s Whisper, so only Sara could hear

her conversation with Laura, which was a little inconvenient. But requesting such a helpful feature at that point would be unreasonable.

It definitely has room for improvement. Even so, it's a valuable piece of equipment that puts us ahead of our enemies. No other device on Earth functions like Wezalié's Whisper, allowing us to communicate with others over great distances.

Ecclesia's expression conveyed unmistakable surprise as she watched Sara communicate with Laura, who was soaring through the air in the hot-air balloon. Ryoma ignored Ecclesia's reaction as she shifted her gaze at the trump card above.

We won't need to worry about enemies noticing us at that high altitude.

Naturally, there was no anti-aircraft technology on Earth. The only way their enemies could attack the hot-air balloon was to either fire arrows or use verbal thaumaturgy. Though, it was best to never say never.

There have been times where people successfully landed long-distance attacks...

Ryoma was not the negligent type. His caution made sense, especially as he had never once expected to be shot from a distance with a *gun*. That incident was a painful lesson in understanding that nothing was truly impossible. Consequently, the hot-air balloon was made of materials gathered from the monsters that resided in the Wortenia Peninsula. The materials were so strong and durable that they could repel bullets, but Ryoma knew that didn't guarantee the balloon was invincible.

The chances are low, but a missile on the level of an FIM-92 Stinger has turned up somewhere on Earth.

Even if such technology had wound up on Earth, there was also a low chance that anyone could use it effectively. Still, Ryoma knew to avoid needless risks. Worrying too much about a hypothetical situation was also foolish.

"I see... All right, begin scouting. What can you see?" Ryoma asked via Sara.

"Enemies far south," Laura answered.

“How far?”

Laura took out her binoculars as well as a measuring instrument to swiftly calculate the distance and relayed it to Sara.

“Approximately thirty kilometers away, there’s around one hundred thousand soldiers. In addition, they seem to have siege weapons among their ranks.”

A hundred thousand soldiers...? Ryoma thought as he clicked his tongue. So they were waiting for reinforcements...including siege weapons.

Siege weapons came in a variety of forms, ranging from battering rams designed to knock down gates to ladders intended to help soldiers scale walls. There was a siege weapon for every purpose.

There is a high chance that they’ll use the battering ram to break down the gates, then storm the fortress.

Regardless of type, all siege weapons required a huge amount of resources and money. In other words, it was plain to see the enemy’s objective with all the siege weaponry they brought.

They have more soldiers than what we can see, so they may have another fifty thousand soldiers taking up the rear, putting their numbers to one hundred and fifty thousand. Worst-case scenario, there’s a possibility they have up to two hundred thousand soldiers.

That was a rough estimate of Ryoma’s as he had no idea of the exact number. The enemy general was no fool, however. If anything, it was more accurate to consider them as very sharp and good at their job. The defenders of Jermuk would need to be ready for the enemy’s next attempt to capture the fortress city.

The Brittania-Tarja force is the type to orchestrate a siege on Jermuk to act as bait, wait for their reinforcements to arrive, and attack their enemies on an open field.

In the end, Ryoma’s outlandish scheme had succeeded, evening the playing field. If it had gone wrong, it could have easily resulted in the enemy forces eliminating Ryoma’s forces and winning the battle. Of course, their strategist wouldn’t have had all the information he needed on Ryoma’s forces.

Despite the Igasaki clan's talents, they could not prevent all information from leaking. Even if the enemy forces didn't have the exact number of Ryoma's soldiers, they still had a passably accurate rough estimate.

With me breaking through their encampment and entering the castle, they should know that the Jermuk forces are around forty thousand soldiers stronger now.

If so, the enemy would presume that the Jermuk forces were now over fifty thousand, a huge jump from the initial twenty thousand soldiers.

In addition to that, Brittania and Tarja should have also added the reinforcements from the Kingdom of Myest into their equations. If they plan to capture Jermuk, they'd probably act before the rest of Myest's reinforcements arrive. If they're hoping to defeat us on an open field, they are probably preparing for a large-scale battle. That is a little hard to imagine, and I doubt they have much leeway in their logistics.

Nearly three months had passed since the war started. In that time, the campaign against Jermuk had consumed a lot of war matériel and rations. That wasn't a trivial matter to Brittania and Tarja. Although they were two of the strongest of the southern nations, they were originally rather poor countries.

Myest depends on resources imported from other countries. According to Simone's reports, there was no sign of Brittania and Tarja doing so. There is a high chance that they've imported relevant goods in secret, which is impressive considering it's nearly impossible to slip through her information network unnoticed.

Myest wouldn't immediately run out of resources, but they also didn't have much leeway. The enemy general ideally wouldn't wish for a long campaign.

If Myest mobilizes more soldiers for a long struggle, that'll mean more resources will be needed, thought Ryoma. It might be better for him to stay huddled in the fortress city than to appear on the open field. According to Ecclesia, Alexis Duran will soon arrive with reinforcements... We should be able to hold it out until then with the Fire Drake's Breath I brought.

That was his formula for victory, constructed using several sources of information. At the very least, he felt it was the best option they had. Ryoma

Mikoshiba—a mere mortal, not a god—had no idea that within a week it would turn out to have been the worst option he could have chosen.

The sun was nearing its apogee. Gentle rays rained down on the ground, generously bestowing the blessings of the sun upon all life. White clouds lazily drifted across the clear blue sky. It was a peaceful, calm day, perfect to pass the time by lying in the fields and enjoying the cool, comfortable breeze.

However, the tragedy about to take place on this day in the Kingdom of Myest belied the apparent calm and peacefulness present.

“Your Majesty, His Excellency the prime minister requests an audience with you,” announced the lone soldier guarding the office door. King Phillip, the monarch of the Kingdom of Myest, was sitting at his desk working through some documents. He stopped writing, looked up, and stared at the clock on his desk.

“Oh, it’s that time already... That’s fine, bring him through,” responded King Phillip.

The door to the office opened soon after, and a man came into the room.

“You’re here, Prime Minister Spiegel,” said Phillip, standing up from his chair to welcome his vassal.

It was fair to say it was a rather excessive gesture, especially as his guest was just a prime minister. However, they were in the king’s personal office. This wasn’t a formal meeting with nobles in attendance, so he was relatively free to do what he wished. He looked at his half brother and nodded to himself.

“Owen... I owe you so much. As the king and your brother, I am incredibly pleased with your achievements.” King Phillip’s words expressed heartfelt praise and gratitude. Yet, Prime Minister Spiegel calmly refused such compliments from his half brother.

“Please, Your Majesty... I have done nothing of note. Ecclesia Marinelle and General Duran are the ones deserving of your praise. She put together the army mobilization plans, and he saw them through. You need not compliment me, but rather those two,” remarked Spiegel.

Organizing reinforcements for Jermuk had proved to be a difficult task. The

conflict among the nobles due to financial discrepancies between the northern and southern nobles posed a danger that could shake the very foundations of the nation. Arranging for reinforcements from the southern nobles required a great amount of bargaining ability.

Because Ecclesia was a noble of House Marinelle, a viscount family based in the northern part of Myest, there was a lot of backlash from the southern nobles. Thus, it took some time to gather reinforcements to send to Jermuk. It was also true that General Duran, who took over for Ecclesia and carried on the plan, had also yielded incredibly successful results.

No matter how brilliant a plan Ecclesia had put together, it would have been an entirely different story if it had gone ahead without Alexis Duran. Prime Minister Spiegel was correct in insisting that the two of them receive praise for their work. However, Phillip calmly shook his head in response to his half brother.

“What are you saying? I know that you have done a lot during this national crisis. Securing supplies for the soldiers heading to Jermuk must have been difficult. Not to mention, it must have been quite a feat getting General Duran to return to his duties... While I understand that Ecclesia and General Duran have achieved a lot, I don’t think that means I have to reject your own achievements. Have more confidence, my dear brother... I will bestow you with a most suitable gift to match your achievements once this is all over. You can count on that,” said Phillip, opening both arms wide and pulling his beloved brother into an embrace.

There was a sense of both sadness and pity in Phillip’s words. In reality, his half brother Owen Spiegel was a beloved family member to him, but in a different sense to his niece Ecclesia.

Until now, Owen has always been in a difficult position as the child of a concubine... As a result of his mother’s family losing a political battle with the northern nobles, their family wasn’t well-off, so he rarely had any support from his family, thought Phillip.

Despite both being the sons of a king, there was a distinct and undeniable difference between them, namely the power of their mothers’ families, which

significantly shaped their upbringing. The nature and frequency of gifts sent from their families differed greatly, as did the number of nobles who sought a connection with each prince. As a result, it was common for royal children who had no support from their mother's family to lose their place in the line of succession.

Of course, the child's ability and personality also played a huge part in the outcome of the struggle for the throne. The king wasn't the feeble-minded eldest son; it was, in fact, the talented youngest son who had inherited the throne. However, it was true that situations involving a great disparity in ability were incredibly rare. Since royal children all received the same education, it was inevitable that their abilities would be largely similar.

That meant that when deciding the next candidate in the line of succession, the influence and power of their mothers' family would be a huge deciding factor. Although Owen Spiegel was a royal family member and in the line of succession, because he didn't receive any support from his mother's side of the family, other nobles saw no value or potential in him. It was only natural for them to want to take the side of the obvious winner. As a result, Spiegel had a strange childhood in which nobles publicly ridiculed and insulted him.

That was why I chose Owen as my prime minister. I tried my best to properly acknowledge him... However, he's always felt rather reserved and a little unfriendly.

Phillip never once thought he had made a mistake making Owen Spiegel prime minister. He was well aware that because Owen was the son of a concubine, the nobles often spoke behind his back, half out of jealousy for his position and half from distaste for his background. Regardless, Prime Minister Spiegel had performed well at his tasks. Phillip had no complaints regarding his aptitude for politics, nor did he doubt the prime minister's loyalty. However, King Phillip couldn't help but feel that even though Spiegel shared the same blood, he held himself somewhat aloof at all times.

I've tried to reward him countless times, but he always refuses. I wonder if it's to avoid criticism from those around him?

Owen Spiegel held this avoidance of criticism as one of his main worldly

wisdoms. Phillip was painfully aware of that fact, causing him to feel sadness and pity for Spiegel. His brother was forced to prioritize his image and to restrain himself where possible.

But today, Prime Minister Spiegel responded differently.

“Is that so? Well, Your Majesty... No, I mean, brother. May I be so rude to ask for a reward? It’s something only you can give me.”

When Phillip heard those words, he felt an inexplicable chill run through him, causing him to thrust prime minister Spiegel to one side, out of his embrace. However, Phillip felt a cold object thrust into his left side. He then sensed it turn inside of him, his organs twisting along with the cold, sharp object. All the strength left his body as his vision began to blur. He was only barely able to make out the twisted, evil expression his half brother wore.

“Why...? Wh-Why...?” mumbled the king of Myest as his body slumped to the floor. His half brother, Spiegel, looked down as he stood over him.

“And with that, I accept your gift... The title of king...” said Spiegel, dropping the dagger on the floor close to Phillip’s dead body. He then took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the blood off his hands.

“I see the job is done,” a man’s voice came from behind Spiegel.

“Yes, as you can see. I killed my brother, the king, with my own hands...” said Spiegel, turning around to face Alexis Duran. Blood, clearly from the guard outside the office door, coated the sword Alexis was holding.

“Now, we’ll proceed as planned.”

“Yes... Hurry up and get it over with.” Prime Minister Spiegel closed his eyes. He was prepared for what was to come next, and all that was left was for him to play his role.

“Relax... It’s fine!” General Duran casually swung his sword.

A moment later, he glanced at Prime Minister Spiegel lying on top of Phillip’s corpse, then kicked the windows wide open and began to raise the alarm.

“Impostor! Someone has attacked His Majesty and His Excellency the Prime Minister!” The words acted as a cue. Soon, fires blazed throughout the royal

palace, engulfing the royal capital, Endesia, in a whirlwind of chaos and madness.

That night, the fortress of Jermuk was in uproar, like a beehive that had been disturbed.

“What’s going on?! What do you mean, the king was killed?” Word from Endesia had reached the soldiers. The king had been assassinated, and Owen Spiegel was to take the throne immediately.



The king suddenly dying while they were at war was startling news. Additionally, they heard that several fires had broken out across the royal palace and in the city around the same time. None of the soldiers could keep their composure; they chattered anxiously among themselves, comparing theories and trying to deduce what had happened. While they had no idea what was happening, people were afraid to keep their mouths shut and remain quiet. Each time they spoke about something they had very little knowledge of, the lines between reality and hearsay continued to blur, which only fueled new rumors and speculation.

“What do you mean he was assassinated?!”

“I find it hard to believe too, but a messenger just announced a new king will be appointed a moment ago. I wouldn’t make a joke about something as serious as that! A capital crime of all things!”

The soldiers nearby were left speechless. No one would lie about the death of a monarch. In fact, it was more accurate to say that no one *could* do such a thing. Contrary to the modern world, speaking ill of or criticizing someone above oneself in a hierarchy was incredibly dangerous, and could result in one losing their own life. Criticizing the country’s politics was a surefire way to put one’s life on the line.

Everyone had an inclination to play critic of the government sometimes, such as complaining about taxes while having a drink at the bar, but even that in itself was dangerous. At the very least, complaining while at the tavern would usually be overlooked. The government knew it was the commoners’ way of letting off steam. However, in areas where the nobles were particularly strict, one could face imprisonment for voicing the very same complaints. Hence, it was dangerous to let such thoughts slip. Joking or gossiping about one’s monarch dying was simply not a laughing matter. Others could misconstrue such a thing as a sign of disloyalty.

If someone were to overhear such a rumor, the person who started it would be tried as a traitor and face execution by hanging or decapitation. The perpetrator would be lucky to even get a trial, and in most cases, before one could stand trial, they were often tortured to death. However, it wouldn’t end

with the main culprit being punished. One's friends and family could be ordered to work as slaves or, in some cases, would also face the death penalty. It made no difference if they were young or old, women or men. It was a heavy price to pay for such a minor slip of the tongue. Strangely, the gravity of this crime was compelling evidence that the messenger from Endesia had spoken only the truth. The common soldiers were filled with uncertainty. Given the news of their king's death and Owen Spiegel replacing him, the soldiers naturally hesitated to carry on with their duties as if things were normal. Understandably, they were eager to seek the culprit.

"Who was behind it?!"

"No one knows... There's a high chance it was either Brittania or Tarja, but it could have also been the O'ltormea Empire."

"Well, I heard it was an assassin sent by the northern nobles."

"Don't be stupid. Do you really think they'd aim for the king's life at a time like this?"

The soldiers continued to share baseless speculations. But the longer they spoke, the more it sounded like the truth to them. The soldiers were well aware of the wealth disparities and strife between the northern and southern nobles within the Kingdom of Myest. Regardless, they found it difficult to imagine that someone from within the nation would stage an assassination while Myest was at war with Brittania and Tarja. Even a child should have been able to work out the logic behind the assassination, yet the soldiers struggled to understand this obvious logic for some reason.

Putting the bickering of the soldiers aside, Ryoma Mikoshiba was lost in his thoughts within the fortress city of Jermuk. The Malfist sisters, who were often by his side, were nowhere to be seen.

"They finally made their move... While I don't know who orchestrated it, they finally went ahead and caused political chaos within Endesia," said Ryoma. "It'll probably take a few days for Ecclesia to calm down. I've nothing to do but come up with a counterplan."

The events had deeply unsettled Ecclesia, so she locked herself in her room

after hearing the news. Phillip was not only her beloved sovereign but also her uncle. They were more than just lord and vassal; they were family, and it was a real bond, not a matter of blood alone. When Ecclesia's father passed and she took over House Marinelle, her uncle Phillip looked after her, caring for her every need. His death was basically the same as losing her father again. Because she lost someone so close to her, the valiant woman known as the Whirlwind could not maintain her composure.

It's understandable, considering she learned a loved one had passed. Rumors are even spreading that this was done by none other than the northern nobles.

Whether that was true, it was still hurtful for Ecclesia, who owned land in the northern territories of the Kingdom of Myest, to know that such rumors were circulating among the soldiers. And that serious blow she suffered could also undermine Ryoma's meticulously put-together plan.

Ryoma scratched his head as he recalled Ecclesia's reaction to the news. It was a rare sight and a sign that he was irritated. However, it was a reasonable response. The Kingdom of Myest's politics would change depending on who carried out the assassination.

And just how will that turn out? Worst-case scenario, the Kingdom of Myest chooses to leave the four-kingdom alliance...

At this point, that was just conjecture. There was also a chance that nothing would actually change. It was possible the people of the Kingdom of Myest would be so outraged over the assassination of their monarch that they would quickly unite under their new king. There was no particular reason to assume they would leave the four-country alliance spearheaded by the Kingdom of Helnesgoula, nor that they would change their approach to dealing with the O'ltormea Empire.

Ryoma had little information on Owen Spiegel, the man who was reportedly assuming the throne of the Kingdom of Myest. Moreover, he had other pressing matters at hand.

I planned to wage war from the safety of Jermuk's walls, but that's now impossible.

Before proceeding, it was necessary to resolve several issues. These included

the following: securing provisions, weapons, and other supplies for the army; shoring up and repairing the city's defenses; and confirming when reinforcements would arrive. Indeed, there were too many pressing matters to count. If Ryoma were asked which of those were the most important, he would confidently answer that it was the morale of the soldiers.

Even if people were starving, we had no weapons, and there were no reinforcements coming, we would be able to continue to fight. As long as their resolve to defeat the enemy didn't waver...

That said, it gave people a sense of security to have weapons and resources piled high in storage, and they would hold out if they knew that reinforcements would be coming eventually. Knowing relief was in sight did wonders for a person's state of mind. Simply put, what faced Ryoma now was a question of how best to keep the soldiers motivated. While the availability of resources and the promise of reinforcements were important, those weren't enough to keep a soldier's morale high. Ryoma could meet all their material needs, but if he couldn't keep their morale up, it would be impossible to fight successfully.

Morale is currently at its worst right now. The bad news shook and horrified Jermuk's original garrison and the three thousand reinforcements Ecclesia brought.

Nothing could come of battling right now. Ryoma had to consider the possibility that deserters from Jermuk would leak information to their enemies in order to save themselves. Even if the soldiers did no such thing, Ryoma still had to keep the possibility of that happening in the back of his mind. It was akin to fighting an enemy but always having to watch your back. Under such circumstances, while they could use the fortress to protect themselves, there was no way they could match an opponent whose army was almost three times the size of theirs.

Moreover, I have no idea what's happening with further reinforcements from Endesia.

Were they still going to deploy? If they did, when would they arrive? Ryoma had no answer for either question.

In any case, we should be getting more official news from the capital soon.

Once I combine that with a report from the Igasaki clan lurking in Endesia, I should have a better picture of the situation.

Ryoma hadn't anticipated any of this happening. He had seemingly made the right choice in sending some of the Igasaki clan to keep an eye on things in the royal capital.

We can't do anything if Myest doesn't send reinforcements. They'll prioritize getting the nation back on its feet after having their monarch assassinated. Regardless of whether the rumors circulating that the northern nobles were behind the attack are true, the new king will want to keep his soldiers nearby...

Even if the government dispatched reinforcements to Jermuk, it would probably be a much smaller force than originally anticipated.

According to Ecclesia, they had around one hundred thousand soldiers ready to deploy. I'd be happy to get half of that... But I imagine we'll probably get around three thousand in a worst-case scenario.

In order to completely rout the enemy, Ryoma would need around one hundred thousand men. If the objective was to stay within the walls of Jermuk and endure a siege, waiting for the enemy's resources to run out would be fundamental. It wouldn't be impossible to calculate if that fight could be done with about eighty thousand men in addition to the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's numbers.

But if Alexis Duran decides to send the majority of the assembled forces our way... Then there's a high chance my intuition was correct.

Ryoma was thinking about the worst-case scenario among the possibilities he'd envisioned. During his planning, he considered it a fairly ridiculous possibility. At this stage, it was no longer so far-fetched a prospect.

It's not like all these thoughts are just a misunderstanding of mine, nor is it a trap simply to make me think that.

Trusting people too much was a bad move, but unfairly doubting them was equally bad. What was important was ascertaining whether someone could be trusted.

I need hard evidence, otherwise I won't be able to get Lady Ecclesia to

cooperate with me. Plus, if I am completely wrong about this, it'll open up an irreparable rift between me and the Kingdom of Myest.

He needed to decide what course of action to take fast, yet in the realm of diplomacy, he couldn't always prioritize speed. If he went full speed ahead and made a decision without all the information, it could lead to a meaningless war.

But I must prepare.

Ryoma Mikoshiba would need to make a clear decision soon. The question was, when exactly would that day come, and what decision would he make? If he mistook the timing, it could lead to Ryoma dying in Jermuk.

He *holds the key*, thought Ryoma as he pictured the face of a particular man.

Chapter 4: The Thunderous Warlord

Three days later, a messenger arrived in Jermuk with word that Alexis Duran was heading toward the fortress city with an army of over one hundred and thirty thousand men. The soldiers and inhabitants of Jermuk were overjoyed; all wore expressions of relief. Alexis Duran was a successful and powerful man, so knowing that he was on the way encouraged everyone. It wouldn't have been an overstatement to say that it was for precisely this moment that the Jermuk garrison soldiers had continued to fight. However, it also meant that Ryoma Mikoshiba's prediction had been correct.

That night, a man sat at his desk looking over some documents as the pale white moon in the sky shone through the window. The peaceful, serene light felt as if the moon goddess herself were lamenting the battle that would soon follow.

So they left around five thousand men in the royal capital, Endesia. None of the neighboring nobles have sent any reinforcements, and Alexis Duran is spearheading the reinforcements to Jermuk. Then it's confirmed... Though I do not know who orchestrated any of this, it is clear that Alexis Duran is working with the enemy.

Ryoma sighed deeply as he read the report from the Igasaki clan operatives hiding in the royal capital Endesia. He could hear the excited, welcoming cheers outside. This meant the preconditions Ryoma had set up before he would head to the Kingdom of Xarooda had been overturned.

"I need to speak with Lady Ecclesia immediately. I would like to give her more time to herself, but..." he mumbled as he rang the bell on his desk, readying himself to carve his one last path of survival out of this situation.

The next day, Ryoma had gathered his best soldiers, Ecclesia Marinelle, the battalion commander of the border defense garrison, and Hans Randall—the leader of Jermuk's garrison until Ryoma had arrived—all together in his room.

All his guests took their seats at a large round table, capable of seating around twenty people, that occupied the center of the room. He had gathered all the leaders of Jermuk's defense forces together. It was now just after three in the afternoon. They had begun their meeting right after lunch and talked for around two hours. Ryoma had just finished listening to everyone's individual reports when he spoke up.

"Now that we've all heard everyone's reports, we need to decide what to do from here on out. But what do you all think we should do? Personally, I believe we should wait until Alexis Duran's forces arrive and launch a counterattack."

Ecclesia Marinelle tilted her head slightly to the side in confusion.

"Does that mean we'll stay holed up in the castle to fight?" Her voice was tense but filled with determination. Ecclesia had spent some time locked in her room after learning about the death of her uncle, King Phillip, though it seemed she had gotten her feelings under control. Compared to her exhausted look a few days ago, she appeared to have improved. It was probably the result of her finding a newfound resolve rather than her improving psychologically. A cold, ghastly fire burned within her eyes. She faced Ryoma directly, looking right at him. Ryoma remained calm as he responded.

"Yes. We confirmed that the allied enemy forces have over one hundred thousand troops while scouting yesterday. With my own forces of approximately forty thousand, Ecclesia's unit of around three thousand, and the Jermuk garrison of roughly ten thousand men, we have a total force of nearly fifty-five thousand soldiers. It would put us in a difficult situation if we were to meet the superior enemy force on the open field. If we stay inside Jermuk, we have a better chance of victory."

Of course, taking the battle to an open field wasn't an entirely bad option, but with the promise of more reinforcements and supplies, taking a more cautious approach seemed best. Ultimately, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy forces were only allied reinforcements sent to the Kingdom of Myest. Treating them as the main party here would lead to problems. But the Kingdom of Myest, which was supposed to play a prominent role in deciding strategy, had faced delays with organizing its own forces. Thus there was no other course of action available for Ryoma.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the organization of Ryoma's forces would greatly affect the settlement after the war, mainly regarding who would receive a reward for their efforts. Up to this point, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, which belonged to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, had achieved more than Myest's own forces. So it made sense to wait for the arrival of the brave general of the Kingdom of Myest.

"That much is true, given that General Duran is marching south with reinforcements," said Ecclesia as she crossed her arms, nodding deeply. Considering the current situation, waiting might not have been an ideal strategy, but it was the best option available. The other leaders in attendance had no counterarguments. Hans Randall looked around before chuckling.

I guess that's all we can do... We've fallen right into General Duran's trap, thought Hans.

Hans's smile resembled that of a hunter observing prey caught in a trap. Ironically, he failed to notice something even long after the meeting ended. Someone had been keeping their eye on him all along.

That same night, at around 2 a.m., Hans Randall was climbing the stairs that led to the northern wall of the fortress city of Jermuk. If someone were to see him, they would never assume that it was the same man who was the battalion commander of the border garrison. After all, he wasn't dressed in his usual armor. He was wearing a black robe with a hood pulled over his eyes, and he was holding a basket with his right hand. Most importantly, his gait was decisively different from how it usually was. He moved like a seasoned warrior, filled with the grace and agility of a large feline. In addition, he completely erased his own presence, going undetected by others.

Seeing how he moved, it was plain to see that he was well-versed in espionage. Under his hood, he still wore a grin after learning about Ryoma Mikoshiba's plan to wage war from inside the fortress of Jermuk earlier in the afternoon.

While he may be the Devil of Heraklion or Supreme Ruler, he is still very much wet behind the ears... He has yet to realize how much he has dug himself into a

hole, mused Hans.

From Hans's point of view, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy choosing to remain in the fortress city of Jermuk and invite a siege was akin to them simply jumping to their own death. It felt as if he were reading a story with an ending he already knew.

I heard he was a dangerous foe, so I prepared accordingly. But he hasn't once doubted my intentions. Well, my title is just battalion commander of the border garrison. It's nothing worth suspecting. He would never dream that members of the Organization would have infiltrated Myest this deeply...

The Organization had sent many of its members to the Kingdom of Myest to support General Duran's climb through the ranks, as well as to help with gathering information. Hans was one of those members. He had been working as a member of the Jermuk border garrison for many years now, doing an adequate job while gathering information on the southern nobles. Recently, the Organization had given him two new tasks. One was to stay close to Ryoma Mikoshiba and his forces, while the other was to report all of Ryoma's movements to General Duran. However, it seemed his role was soon coming to an end.

There's no way young Ryoma will be able to see through this scheme, after all... General Duran has a reputation of loyalty and achievements built up over sixty years. It'd be difficult to suspect that he would betray his own country.

General Duran had served the Kingdom of Myest at the order of the Organization, and the Organization had helped him climb the ranks and become general. As a result, it was correct to say that Alexis Duran would have never gotten as far as he did if he were alone—it was all with the assistance of the Organization. Though, that was not to say that all of his achievements while serving the Kingdom of Myest were falsehoods. At the very least, his victories, leadership ability, and martial superiority were all real.

All of us supporting him understand. There would be no reason for a general sent from a neighboring country with reinforcements to ever question the general's character.

If one didn't know about the Organization, explaining General Duran's actions

would have been impossible. Even if Ryoma Mikoshiba was suspicious of General Duran, seeing his sixty years of service to the kingdom—countless achievements and victories in battle—would quickly silence any doubts. That was exactly what the Organization wanted from General Duran, and it was why they had supported him financially for many years and had him infiltrate the Kingdom of Myest in the first place.

Everything is going exactly as planned. I just need to complete my role in all of this.

Eventually, Hans reached his destination.

I feel somewhat sorry for all my brethren who were summoned from the same planet as me only to meet cruel deaths. Just accept it as fate... It was all your own fault for being in the way.

Hans retrieved a single bird from the basket he was holding. The bird had a small cylinder attached to its feet, which contained information regarding the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's chosen tactics for the ongoing war. He double-checked that the cylinder was securely attached before lifting the bird with both hands.

"Now, fly," said Hans as he hurled the bird up into the air, nodding with satisfaction as it made its way to the north. *The general should receive that report by tomorrow.*

By the time General Duran arrived at Jermuk, the Kingdom of Myest would enter peace talks with Brittania and Tarja. Myest would then enter an alliance with the other two nations, giving birth to a new Myest that exercised hegemony over the southeastern region of the western continent.

Once that happens, this continent will fall further into chaos...

That was their intention—the vision they sought to bring about. With the power of the Organization, anything was possible—or impossible, if they desired to make it so.

I don't mind if it takes years until that point... My loyalty will always be to the Organization. Even if I were to fall, someone would take my place and carry on our work in my stead.

That was the only reason Hans had left to live for—to see the Organization’s vision become a reality. In that respect, many people in the Organization were similar to Hans. They didn’t care if they were sacrificial goats, as long as their sacrifices were used to achieve the Organization’s goals.

If I can finally die, I can be with my daughter... But until that day, I must kill as many people in this world as I can. And to do that, I need for you to disappear, young Ryoma.

Hans displayed a smile filled with conviction—a belief that he had already won. However, at that moment, Hans felt something cold press up against his throat.

What?! Impossible... I didn’t sense anything.

The God of Death swung down his sickle. Han’s consciousness faded to black, and his lifeless body collapsed atop the stone wall. Blood soaked through the robes he wore.

“Master... It is done.”

Two shadows appeared from a watchtower.

“Great work. Sort out the body later.”

Sakuya Igasaki disappeared into the darkness, understanding that Ryoma had asked her to take her leave.

“Well, what would you know? It’s exactly as I said, Lady Ecclesia,” Ryoma said.

Ecclesia let out a deep sigh.

“I guess I had to see it with my own eyes to believe it,” replied Ecclesia.

The bird was headed north, toward Endesia. If Hans had been working with Brittania or Tarja, he would have had no reason to send a bird in the direction of Endesia. In other words, someone in Endesia had been investigating Ryoma Mikoshiba’s movements. At that point in time, there was only one logical suspect.

“So, when did you realize General Duran was a traitor?” Ecclesia asked.

“I had a funny feeling around the time it was announced he was returning to duty. The timing was simply *too* perfect. What really sealed the deal was learning that he’d be bringing the vast majority of Myest’s forces here with him,” responded Ryoma, shrugging.

Ecclesia carefully brought her finger up to her chin as she thought about it. She then nodded, as if she’d come up with the answer she was looking for.

“I see... It doesn’t make sense for him to send nearly all of Myest’s forces here, especially with rumors that the northern nobles were behind His Majesty Phillip’s death.”

“Exactly. I had also determined from the Igasaki clan’s report that none of the nobles from Endesia had mobilized any of their troops either. The northern nobles being behind the king’s murder was probably just a plain rumor. Unless you actually *were* the person behind the assassination, you couldn’t be one hundred percent sure who was responsible. If whoever’s calling the shots aimed to finish this war quickly by sending the majority of Myest’s forces here, they would have called you back to the royal capital or they’d have asked Cassandra Hellner, who is in Pherzaad, to join them.”

Not doing any of that and then coming directly to Jermuk with nearly all available troops was something General Duran wouldn’t be able to do unless there was no danger of Endesia coming under attack. And there was just one reason for him to possess such confidence. Only the person responsible for the assassination would have certainty that there was no further threat to the capital, allowing them to proceed with this bold deployment.

Listening to Ryoma’s explanation, Ecclesia let out an even deeper sigh.

“So, what do we do now? We can’t stay holed up inside Jermuk at a time like this...”

With General Duran leading an army of “reinforcements” that were actually enemies, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was sandwiched between threats from the north and south.

Not to mention, both sides combined means they have around two hundred thousand men, mused Ryoma.

This indicated that the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy was short by one hundred and sixty thousand men. Even if they remained holed up in Jermuk, it would be a difficult battle because the enemy would have roughly five times as many troops as Ryoma's army.

We can't even use the three thousand soldiers that Lady Ecclesia brought with her or the city's garrison, as they may also be in on General Duran's plan. That means I have to do what I can entirely with my own soldiers.

However, that would suggest there was a larger gap in numbers. In terms of military strength, it resembled the strength Ryoma's forces had when they engaged with the northern subjugation army led by the former Queen Lupis. Now, they were at a far worse disadvantage.

General Alexis Duran is a far more capable general than Lady Ecclesia, and he's the one leading the army from the north. In addition, the general of Brittania's and Tarja's troops is a force to be reckoned with.

It would be impossible for even Ryoma Mikoshiba to achieve victory against an army of two hundred thousand men led by formidable, talented commanders. Ryoma was aware of this and realized the best thing to do was to minimize their losses by retreating to the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

"Well, in a situation like this, there's not a lot we can do. Our only viable option is to fall back and regroup."

Ecclesia's eyes opened wide with shock. It was a rather absurd statement for Ryoma to make, considering their situation.

"Can we even manage that much?" Ecclesia asked.

"Yes, though it will be rather difficult... But if we act now, it's not entirely impossible," Ryoma responded.

"If we act now... I see. They've not completely surrounded us yet...which means we can meet the southern forces out on the battlefield, give them a good fight, and then retreat. But what if Duran's forces arrive from the north during that? They'll attack us from behind and completely wipe us out."

Ecclesia naturally harbored this worry. General Duran might mistakenly think that Ryoma had chosen to stay within Jermuk and fight from there based on the

information from Hans, but that didn't mean he would slow down his march to Jermuk. It also wouldn't make him hurry any more than he was. However, Ryoma simply shrugged as he responded to Ecclesia.

"We have the people of Jermuk for that."

"You plan to send them to the royal capital as refugees...? That does make sense. If they're taking up the roads, then General Duran's army will be forced to slow down... After all, there's no way they'd run down their own people."

"That's the idea, anyway. We can tell the commoners that there are spies within the castle, making it hard for us to fight from inside. That should make for a decent enough excuse. In fact, with Hans actually being a spy, that excuse isn't even a lie. There probably are more spies, though that's not certain."

For those who were aware of the situation, there was no better excuse. To those who weren't aware, it was enough. It was a genuine case of "the ends justify the means." After he decided what he would do from here on out, he turned to Ecclesia.

"So, what are your plans? You're better off sending your troops back to Endesia with the commoners, but I also think it's best if you return to Rhoadseria with me. Well, that is if you're prepared to fight their new king, Owen."

Ecclesia was in a bit of a strange spot. As King Phillip was her uncle, that meant Owen Spiegel was too. Therefore, returning to Endesia would likely spare her from the death penalty. Given her close relationship with Phillip, there was also the possibility that Owen would have her committed to house arrest. That, or she would be married off to some noble family and stripped of her military duties. At this stage, either of these outcomes was possible for her, but it went without saying that neither was desirable. Owen probably wouldn't want to have Ecclesia, someone who had been close to Phillip, serving as a general in the future. Ecclesia understood that.

"Yeah... I think I'll go with you," said Ecclesia with a sad smile, as if lamenting that she both had to leave her own nation and kill another uncle.

Three days had passed. The Lubua Plains stretched out to the south of the

fortress city or Jermuk. Somewhere on a low hill on the plains, the eagle flag of Brittania and the wolf flag of Tarja fluttered in the wind. It was likely the main camp of the allied forces' commander. The forces gathered on that low hill were preparing to march toward Jermuk. Outside the city walls, Ryoma Mikoshiba looked out over the plains with a pair of binoculars, watching the advancing troops.

"Looks like they've finally made their move. The vanguard seems to be around seventy to eighty thousand men strong."

It had been more than ten days since Ryoma scouted ahead and checked on the enemy forces with a hot air balloon. One could say they had rather leisurely prepared themselves for the next battle.

The enemy must have been waiting for word from Endesia, thought Ryoma.

Coordination between two units was necessary when orchestrating a pincer attack in war. They were more than likely using messenger birds or messengers to deliver reports and determine the best time to march. As Ryoma was more or less certain the allied forces and General Duran were working together, it was only natural that he thought that way.

Well, it gave us enough time to prepare, so I'm thankful in a way...

Since they knew it could have been lethal if Laura had been spotted while doing reconnaissance in the hot-air balloon, they were able to prepare accordingly. And it seemed that the enemy general was using his trump card right away. When Ryoma noticed something, he unconsciously smirked.

A group of soldiers was mounted on four-legged monsters.

There were around one hundred of them, which seemed small compared to the tens of thousands of soldiers Ryoma and his allies boasted. In terms of strength, this unit of monster cavalry was probably worth around ten thousand average soldiers.

So that's the enemy general's trump card... Those horns make them look like dinosaurs.

The creatures had tough hides and horns that resembled those of a triceratops. They also had long noses; biologically, they seemed like a type of

elephant, or at least a close relative to one. However, they were only *similar* in appearance to the elephants on Rearth. The creatures' size easily exceeded that of a medium-sized four-ton truck. They weren't as big as ten-ton trucks, but they were much larger than the Indian or African war elephants that Ryoma knew about from Rearth's history.

There was a basket on their backs where soldiers armed with throwing spears and bows could sit, along with the drivers who controlled the beasts.

I see... Though they look a little different, they are war elephants. So they plan to charge us with those first.

The Igasaki clan had reported as much when they were in the hot-air balloon, so Ryoma and the others knew of them already, but it was a very different feeling seeing them in the flesh.

At the very least, I know kids wouldn't call these elephants cute.

They'd probably be frozen with fear and begin to cry.

The Igasaki clan made a note of it before, but now it makes sense. These beasts allowed the people living outside any nation's laws to maintain their independence and resist the rule of the southern kingdoms. Ordinary soldiers wouldn't stand a chance... They'd be crushed flat.

Individuals who had mastered martial thaumaturgy, or those who had transcended human limits, faced a distinct challenge. If Ryoma released Kikoku, he would make quick work of them, regardless of their numbers. Even skilled soldiers could not stand in the way of the giant monsters. It was physically possible to do so, but actually mustering up the courage to do it would be incredibly difficult.



It was akin to standing in front of a truck with nothing but one's bare body; the sheer force and terror of the oncoming threat would be beyond imagination.

The soldiers I trained might be able to hold their ground. But even with a generous estimate, the odds of them being successful would be less than fifty percent.

After all, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy heavy infantry consisted of elite soldiers skilled in martial thaumaturgy, and they wore armor enchanted by the dark elves' verbal thaumaturgy. Their talent and equipment might have allowed them to withstand the monsters' charge once or twice. Plus, there was little chance of them losing their morale. If Ryoma ordered them to withstand the onslaught until death, they would do exactly that. However, it was clear that their formation would break sooner or later. The enemy wouldn't stop at one attack.

The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's heavy infantry obviously wouldn't be able to withstand repeated attacks from the enemy's giant monsters. And as for the ordinary soldiers of the Kingdom of Myest, who were only one step above being amateurs, they simply wouldn't stand a chance.

If the enemy forces have control over those giants, they'll be a formidable threat.

Charging monsters would trample and crush opposing soldiers. It was clear that the infantry would be scattered about without putting up much of a fight.

However, that's only if we take them head-on, thought Ryoma. He already had an idea on how to deal with the ferocious creatures. The conventional approach would be similar to dealing with actual elephants. We would either have to trap them in a pitfall or use a net to reduce their mobility before killing them.

That was how primitive people had hunted back when mammoths roamed the lands, and it was similar to methods used historically to deal with war elephants.

But that's a little boring... There has to be a more interesting way—one that would also deal a blow to the enemy's morale.

The preparations were already in place for the two armies to clash on the Lubua Plains. The unit of war elephants charged forward, kicking up dust as they moved. Behind them were the enemy's infantry units. It was a wave of oppression. The average untrained conscript would break formation immediately in the face of such a threat.

I didn't expect them to use their trump card right out of the gate. I had the enemy general pegged as someone who knew their stuff, but this bold move caught me off guard. If they plan to use these monsters, it makes sense they would deploy them when our formations are still intact rather than later. They're trying to throw our lines into chaos.

While somewhat startled by the enemy general's bold tactics, Ryoma barked out the orders for a counterattack.

"Heavy infantry! Split to the left and right, then form an oblique formation, then fend off the enemy charge!"

The heavy infantry followed the order, falling into a V formation. To the enemy, it would appear like their initial charge had caused Ryoma's line to collapse under the pressure. And it probably would have collapsed under the pressure *if* it were composed of mere amateur units. These disciplined units, however, followed Ryoma Mikoshiba's firm, clear orders.

This concept was similar to *hua jin*, which could be seen in Tai Chi and other martial arts. Rather than take a direct attack from the front, one would deflect it to fend off the enemy's attack.

The war elephants tore through the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's forces. Or rather, it would be more correct to say that the army skillfully deflected and maneuvered their way around the elephants' charge.

"Huh?!" One of the riders atop the war elephant cried out. It was plain to see he felt he had fallen into some kind of trap. However, the monster he rode paid him no mind and continued to charge forward. The elephants were not intelligent like humans; they were still animals. Because of that, once the animals started their rampage, there was no stopping them. Or rather, their riders had given them the order to charge, and nothing could stop them now. All they could do was continue to rush forward, even if their riders suspected it

was a direct path to death.

Finally, the time had come.

The front line of the war elephant unit had begun to push through the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's main formation. This was the moment Ryoma Mikoshiba had been waiting for.

"Now! Laura! Sara!" Ryoma bellowed through Wezalié's Whisper, firing off his order to the twins watching over the battle from atop the walls of Jermuk. The reason they were not at their general's side was for this moment.

Following their masters orders, the twins began to chant, producing prana as they did so. Prana flowed through their bodies, creating a surge of power and causing their chakras to spin, granting the twins superhuman powers beyond those of ordinary people.

When their chakras began to rotate from muladhara at the perineum, the energy flowed upward along their central axis, heading toward the crowns of their heads. Eventually, the prana reached their Anja chakra, located between their eyebrows, causing it to activate. This was one of the highest-level verbal thaumaturgy spells designed for mass destruction. Even though the Malfist twins were highly skilled thaumaturgy users, they were unable to cast this spell by themselves.

This was only natural.

After all, they were about to activate a combined thaumaturgy spell that would cause mass annihilation over a large area. Having multiple thaumaturgists cast this type of spell could strengthen its power and effective radius. At first glance, it seemed like an incredibly useful spell if done correctly.

Unfortunately, reality wasn't so ideal.

On Earth, where the norm was to practice hand-to-hand combat using enhanced physical abilities, there were relatively few verbal thaumaturgists of any skill level, and the number of fully trained verbal thaumaturgists was even lower. In addition, to use a spell like this, one would need verbal thaumaturgists who were all on a similar power level and could chant along with one another perfectly, which was difficult to achieve. The compatibility among the

thaumaturgists affected the synchronization of their chants.

Synchronizing their thoughts and breathing sounded easy enough, but pulling it off was a lot harder. As a result, it was a technique rarely used in actual battle. But as always, exceptional talent or painstaking training could achieve a miracle. Laura and Sara were both exceptionally talented, and they shared the same genes, blood, and mentality, meaning it was incredibly easy for them to synchronize. Their connection verged on being telepathy.

“Father of the gods who rule the skies! The embodiment of the raging elements, adorned in thunder and lightning! Hear our plea, and join our pact! Shatter the earth with your fury!” Two beautiful goddesses had spoken a requiem, bringing about death to their pitiful prey. Then, their peach-colored lips delivered the final activation. “Lightning Hammer.”

Suddenly, the skies were filled with thick, black clouds. Along with a loud crash of thunder, an enormous streak of lightning flew toward the earth. It was an imposing scene, one that matched the fury of the gods themselves. Anything hit by the lightning bolt would have been burned to a crisp. Of course, it was a spell cast by humans; no matter how strong the Malfist sisters were, they had their limits. The radius of the area of effect was around fifty meters. The girls had expanded the spell around three times its usual radius, which was impressive. All this wasn't enough to completely wipe out the monsters, and the soldiers that had followed behind the monsters' charge were still rushing toward the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's forces.

However, Ryoma understood that very well. He laughed as he watched the enemy forces run straight toward their deaths. It was a laugh that resembled a carnivore successfully capturing his prey.

Of course, the war elephants marching toward us posed a threat. But I already knew about it, so I was able to come up with a counterattack.

Everything went silent after the thunderclap that followed the lightning bolt. Next came the roar of flames as fireballs consumed both the monsters and their riders. The force of the blast hit everything in its vicinity, and the high temperatures burned and destroyed everything in its path. There was no living thing that could survive such an attack; it was an inevitable death. The Malfist

sisters' Lightning Hammer ignited the Fire Drake's Breath that had seeped into the ground.



Once the shock wave and dust had dispersed, all that remained on the plains south of Jermuk was a crater. It looked as if the land had been hit with a meteorite. Everyone had forgotten how to move; all stood as still as statues, no doubt trying to process what they had just witnessed. The general of the Kingdom of Brittania's forces and the allied forces' overall commander—both possessing extensive military experience—each instinctively responded to the unexpected event. The former, Bruno Accordo, was commanding his entire army from the center of their forces when he witnessed what happened.

“Are they insane...?” the ferocious general known as the Man-Eating Bear asked. “That light just now was verbal thaumaturgy... Lightning Hammer? But not even the most talented verbal thaumaturgist could pull something off on that scale...”

Bruno Accordo, the captain of the Griffon Knights of the Kingdom of Brittania, who boasted many military achievements, considered verbal thaumaturgy lesser than martial thaumaturgy. That said, it was impossible for him to know nothing about verbal thaumaturgy. He had enough knowledge to recognize the verbal thaumaturgy “Lighting Hammer” when he saw the huge lightning bolt hit the ground. He also knew that verbal thaumaturgy had its limits.

“Did they cast it together? There aren't not many thaumaturgists who can do that, let alone on that scale.”

The black clouds that had formed before the massive lightning strike were three to five times larger than what he knew Lightning Hammer could achieve. The attack's power was also significantly higher than anything Bruno had heard of before.

“Maybe an extra unit of verbal thaumaturgists? But that's impossible. They were all tightly packed together... If anything had gone wrong, they would have lost many of their own... However, the real question is that explosion afterward... Just what was that?”

All he could understand was that it wasn't simply a thaumaturgy attack. The tragedy that occurred before his very eyes would have been impossible with verbal thaumaturgy alone.

“If that were simply the result of a Lightning Hammer spell strengthened by people casting it together, then I have no way of explaining the following explosion. Not to mention, the blast itself came from the earth... It was like a volcano exploding.”

Naturally, Bruno had no expertise in geology or volcanoes. In fact, there weren't many people on Earth who had knowledge of such things in general, but they at least knew about the existence of volcanoes. After all, they had erupted countless times throughout Earth's history.

Judging from Bruno's limited information on volcanoes, the explosion earlier didn't seem like a volcanic eruption.

The plains south of Jermuk consist of flatland and forest. There are no mountains.

Volcanic eruptions could happen in a plain formed within a caldera, like the Phlegraean Fields in Italy, or near a mountainous area. But it was safe to say that the chances of that were astronomically low. At least, to Bruno who lived on Earth, it sounded outside the realm of possibility.

What should we do? I need to restore order in our ranks... But how? Do we advance? Retreat? What do I even do?!

Normally, it would be best to advance. If they were still at a distance from the enemy forces, that would be one thing, but the enemy had enveloped many of his troops when they formed a V formation. The enemy would attack the allied forces' backs if they attempted to retreat, making them even more vulnerable. If they chose to advance, they would be attacked all the same; altering their course of action would only shorten the duration of their defenselessness.

By charging ahead through the gaps opened by the monsters, we might be able to get behind the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's forces and turn the tide of this battle around.

Although Bruno was aware of that, he couldn't bring himself to command his forces to advance. No matter how much the odds were against Bruno, he could usually motivate his army and order them to push on. However, this time, he lacked the confidence to give such an order. He was unsure if the troops would heed such an order under these circumstances. In truth, there was little chance

of that happening, because there were no soldiers in the Brittania army who disobeyed an order from Bruno Accordo; he had both the military achievements and prowess to ensure as much. But that inexplicable explosion from before had shaken him to the core, dashing his confidence.

If I have them advance, I'd basically be asking them to march right onto the explosive land... Would they even follow such an order?

That was a risk that only a seasoned warrior and an exceptional strategist like Bruno could have realized. If he were a foolish general with a misplaced reputation, he might have completely ignored the thoughts and feelings of his soldiers, forcing them to march forward or retreat. But now Bruno realized that he could not give the order.

Knowing there was a trap and simply plunging into it without any preparation wasn't courage, it was plain foolishness. However, this situation called for such foolishness. Being able to see ahead was a vital ability for a leader, but sometimes it was a double-edged sword, especially when being able to see too far ahead. As a result, Bruno's hesitation tipped the scales in Ryoma Mikoshiba's favor.

Luckily, the enemies themselves seem confused... Well, that makes sense. After seeing an explosion on that scale, they won't be able to tell their troops to advance either.

The blast wave and the sound of the explosion would have been enough to dampen the spirit of the enemy soldiers who were lucky enough to not be hit.

If Mikoshiba tries to make them advance, many will probably choose to flee the battlefield. In a worst-case scenario, there's a chance they might even revolt against him.

No soldier would casually comply with an order telling them to advance onto a field that was obviously loaded with mines. Soldiers frequently faced situations where they had to put their lives on the line and fight, but those moments often came with a good reason. They fought and met their deaths if they were unlucky. To charge into a situation where death was certain, they would need a compelling reason to give up their lives.

After all, no one wants to die a meaningless death.

That wasn't to say it was impossible. Only after extensive training could a unit composed of highly motivated soldiers driven by a strong sense of their mission carry out a desperate attack. Such a case was like the one made by soldiers at Hill 203 during the Russo-Japanese War, where they charged toward enemy lines under heavy fire.

However, humans were living creatures that feared entities beyond human understanding, and the unknown in general. The explosion that had just taken place was one such unknown force.

That fear of the unknown binds soldiers' hearts and lowers their morale. There's no way they could fight effectively.

It was exactly as Ryoma Mikoshiba had planned.

"All right, now for the finishing touches! Chris, Leonard! Surround the enemies and attack them from both sides, cutting right through their forces! And take no prisoners. Kill them all! Carve the might of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy into their soldiers' chests! This will soon be their graveyard!"

Ryoma Mikoshiba gave out his final order using Wezalié's Whisper, reaching both Chris Morgan and Leonard Orglen, who had been holding the flanks of the V formation with their forces, almost instantly. The Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's formation began to change shape into something resembling a snake, devouring the enemy forces within and moving onto the final moments of the battle.

Epilogue

While Ryoma Mikoshiba battled to the death against the allied forces of Brittania and Tarja, a mountain of documents surrounded an old man embroiled in his own struggle far to the north in the demon-infested Wortenia Peninsula.

A gentle, warm ray of sun shone through the window from outside. Just how nice would it be, dozing under the shade of a tree, facing up toward the sky? It was the essence of the perfect day. There was no better way to pass the time than to lie in a park and nap on the grass.

Such a peaceful life was unknown to this old man, though. The man's tied-back white hair and the wrinkles on his face showed he was around eighty. It was safe to say he was old. But he sat straight, and his skin was still plump and resilient. Moreover, his intense, sharp gaze indicated he was no ordinary person. He was a veteran. His clothes were rather odd for the western continent.



Few people dressed like him on the western continent. To put it simply, he was wearing Japanese-style clothing. It wasn't a casual kimono or a hakama with his family crest on it like one would see in period dramas on TV. He had clothes similar to what monks wore, ones that he had custom-made. The man looked good in the tailored clothes, woven from pure silk dyed deep blue. That said, his attire was a little odd when contrasted with the room, with its chandelier and red velvet rug.

Japanese and Western styles somehow appeared to work in harmony due to the strong aura the man emanated, leaving no room for questioning. The work in front of the old man, the owner of the room, was more important to him than anything else. In the room, the second hand of the clock on the wall ticked with a steady rhythm, accompanied by the sound of the old man's quill dancing across the paper. How long had he been working? He had been doing so since morning, and midafternoon was fast approaching.

Finally, the old man's hand stopped. The documents that had been piled high in a box labeled "pending" were now all transferred to one labeled "completed." The old man had seemingly reached a stopping point in his work.

"Hmm... That should do it," muttered the old man, rubbing his chin as he nodded. He then pressed his fingers to the corner of his eyes to rub them as he slowly moved his neck around. The sound of a sharp crack reverberated in the room. "Looks like I've got stiff shoulders."

Even a human being who had reached a level of transcendence was prone to stiff shoulders after working on documents for a long time. It showed that although he was incredibly skilled in battle, he was still human and thus was held back by some inherent restraints. If he were a monster or something otherworldly, he wouldn't be bogged down by such trifling human matters.

The old man was Koichiro Mikoshiba.

He was the grandfather of the young ruler who controlled the city of Sirius, the demon-infested Wortenia Peninsula, and the region formerly known as the northern part of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria. Koichiro was the man who had been left the unfortunate task of overseeing everything while the young ruler was absent on a foreign campaign. Yet Koichiro believed it wasn't such a bad

job.

“Well, time to take a break,” he said as he opened a drawer in the desk, pulling out his beloved tobacco container and smoking pipe.

The Japanese smoking pipe, just like his monk clothing, was made by the Christoph Company and was one of his most beloved possessions. He probably held them in the same esteem as his two beloved swords, Ouka and Kikka. That was how special the tobacco container and smoking pipe were to Koichiro.

He had been a heavy smoker back on Rearth. Since being summoned to Earth, he rarely got to indulge the habit, which made it even more special to him.

People view tobacco as a high-value commodity here on Earth, and there's not really a smoking culture to promote things like enjoying a smoking pipe.

The western continent had never cultivated tobacco because imports from the central or southern continents satisfied existing demand. In fact, out of the goods the Kristof Company imported from the central continent, tobacco was one of the most popular luxury goods alongside tea. Tobacco imports also served as an important source of revenue for the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. The need for ships to cross stormy seas and reach other continents justified a high retail price. As a result, tobacco was only accessible to the wealthy. It wasn't nearly as accessible here as it was in modern Japan, where one could get tobacco from a vending machine or a convenience store with relative ease.

Paper cigarettes and cigars were the most common ways of consuming tobacco on Earth, although pipes, chewing tobacco, and hookah also existed. But on the western continent, when people referred to tobacco, they usually meant cigarettes or cigars. Smoking tobacco in any other way was typically reserved for true connoisseurs with refined tastes. This would have been impossible without having a lot of money or strong connections with powerful merchants. Koichiro particularly enjoyed an unusual type of finely chopped tobacco leaves known as “fine-cut tobacco.” It was generally smoked through a pipe, which was a unique form of enjoying tobacco characteristic to Japan.

I'll just have to make do with what I can get my hands on...

Koichiro knew this. Aside from using a smoking pipe, he didn't like the other ways of smoking tobacco. This might not have made much sense to those who

didn't smoke. But to Koichiro, who had been smoking with pipes for a long time, it was something he wasn't willing to compromise on.

I've tried ordinary pipes, but the taste is different. The only way I can smoke tobacco is by using fine-cut tobacco in a Japanese smoking pipe.

Koichiro reached into the drawer of the tobacco tray and took out a handful of finely cut tobacco leaves, which had been brought from the southern continent. He rolled them into a small ball using his fingertips before packing them into the small sphere-shaped holder on his smoking pipe. Then he lit the pipe using verbal thaumaturgy he had stored in his index finger, brought the pipe up to his mouth, and lightly inhaled.

He cast the verbal thaumaturgy without any chant; it was a completely silent cast where even the final incantation was left out. Of course, the amount of flame produced was the same as a lighter. It wasn't very powerful, but the fact that Koichiro could produce even that much so easily was a testament to his abilities as a thaumaturgist. Although using such an advanced technique just to light his smoking pipe might have seemed like a waste, Koichiro didn't mind it in the least.

"I'd heard that tobacco from Basrabad was satisfying to smoke, and it is rather nice... I can see why Lord Nelcius so fervently recommended it," noted Koichiro as he held the smoke in his mouth, savoring the taste. He nodded with satisfaction. *It was worth all the trouble.*

In a world where cigarettes and cigars were the norm, if one wanted to enjoy a kiseru—a Japanese smoking pipe—they would have to craft it. The only other option would have been to hope that someone had a smoking pipe with them when they were summoned to Earth and that he could somehow obtain it. But that would depend on sheer luck.

Regardless, it feels a little awkward to worry about making Japanese smoking pipes when we don't even know if Asuka is safe.

Even if Koichiro had gone to great lengths to obtain a smoking pipe, no one would have criticized him for it. Surviving in this world required one to enjoy their hobbies for the sake of their mental health. Minds and bodies were unable to stay fit and healthy after witnessing battle after battle, carnage upon more

carnage. It wouldn't make sense for someone who had experienced the pleasures of a modern, comfortable, and affluent life in Japan to endure without such comforts, unlike a native of this world who didn't know how to enjoy life properly.

If there is no other option, man can endure... Well, I could have also asked Chuken too...

Koichiro had plenty of excuses he could make. With his position, it wouldn't be that difficult for him to get his hands on a Japanese smoking pipe. Although they weren't common, getting one at a store wasn't the only way. It would have been difficult for an ordinary person to obtain, but Koichiro was one of the leaders of the Organization. Liu Da Ren, also known as Liu Chuken, was one of the elders of the Organization who secretly managed the region from their base in the city of Lentencia in the southwestern part of the western continent. He also had a close relationship with Koichiro.

Had Koichiro asked him for help, he would have used all of the Organization's power across the entire continent to look for a smoking pipe. If that proved fruitless, he would have asked a skilled craftsman to make one. However, Koichiro couldn't allow that. After all, Asuka Kiryu had only recently been rescued from the clutches of the Church of Meneos. Before then, although the Organization's spies had confirmed she was still alive, Koichiro had no way of determining if Asuka was safe with his own eyes.

For Koichiro, who deeply understood the true nature and the danger of the Church of Meneos, he could not remain calm knowing that a group resembling a terrorist organization or a mafia was holding Asuka captive. Of course, Koichiro knew that in a bizarre twist of fate, Rodney McKenna, a man of import in the Church of Meneos, and his half sister Menea Norberg had taken Asuka into their care and were looking after her.

However, Koichiro knew all too well that he couldn't say Asuka was one hundred percent safe; he recognized the true nature of this world. Thus, he was not motivated to fully enjoy his hobbies. He knew he was the cause behind it all. The situation had changed entirely with the rescue of Asuka from the Church of Meneos and Koichiro being left in charge of Sirius. To put it simply, he had a newfound lease to enjoy his hobbies.

Lady Simone has introduced me to a good craftsman, it would seem, thought Koichiro. Monks' clothing and a Japanese smoking pipe were essential items to Koichiro. He needed them in his daily life. The craftsman did a real good job on these.

He inhaled and savored the smoke again, looking at the pipe. It was a high-quality piece of craftsmanship. The bowl and the mouthpiece were made of pure silver, and the connecting pipe, also known as the *rau*, was crafted from ebony rather than the usual bamboo. From those materials alone, it could be regarded as a high-quality item. In addition to that, the pipe itself reflected the craftsman's aesthetic sensibility, giving it a distinct flavor and making it a unique piece. Koichiro also liked the lively shape of a dragon carved into the gooseneck of the pipe.

Of course, a Japanese smoking pipe made by a craftsman here on Earth would be a notch or two below one of the highest quality pipes Koichiro owned back in Japan. Despite the decline in the production of Japanese smoking pipes in recent years, there was still some presence as people carried on the craft and tradition passed down all the way from Japan's Edo period. It had become difficult for craftsmen to hone their skills when there were few manufacturing locations. Since this was the first item that Koichiro had commissioned, it was only natural that he was attached to it.

I'll try recommending this to Lord Nelcius when I see him next. If I commission the craftsman who made it, they'll probably be able to make something nice for him.

The scenario was similar to an otaku recommending their favorite anime to a friend. Hobbyists were all the same, regardless of age, race, or gender. One could argue it was a case of spreading the gospel of one's passion.

Nelcius and Koichiro had become drinking buddies, and after the war in Rhoadseria, they enjoyed drinking together in the Wortenia Peninsula. As it turned out, military men had a lot in common.

Koichiro thought to himself as he reached for the stack of documents in the "completed" box. He felt relaxed after a few puffs of his pipe and was ready to work again. He quickly glanced over his own signature on the document and

sighed deeply.

“But Ryoma, he asks too much of me... I understand it’s difficult to order the people of this world around. He has me, an amateur, doing things like urban development, taking command of troops in battles, organizing funds and supplies for reinforcements and the like... I’d much rather be told to lead a full army into war and annihilate our enemies.”

Most people would probably laugh at the idea that a man his age would find destroying an enemy nation an easier job than paperwork. They might even put it down to him muttering nonsense in his old age. If they were to hear the truth about this old man, with his white hair tied behind his head as well as his history and achievements, they would be shamed into silence.

No other general in the entire continent could match up to Koichiro Mikoshiba’s past and experience on the battlefield. If one were to look for a suitable candidate in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, one might suggest Helena Steiner, the Ivory Goddess of War, as a suitable comparison. Koichiro was precisely the kind of person who deserved the title God of War.

Hence, it felt unnatural for Koichiro to be stuck in Sirius, in a manor built by Ryoma Mikoshiba, trapped at a table and working through documents. It wouldn’t be strange if he complained about the situation he was in. Whether such complaints reflected Koichiro’s innermost feelings was indefinite, making the situation somewhat complicated. The words Koichiro muttered before were more accurately understood as grumbling toward those close to him rather than an actual expression of dissatisfaction or complaints.

Koichiro apparently had his own thoughts and feelings about the situation, but there was a certain hint of joy on his face due to his beloved granddaughter’s reliance on him. Such was a showcase of the mysterious subtleties of the human heart.

At the same time, he had mixed feelings about his own work. While he took pride in handling matters appropriately, there remained a conflicting feeling that he wasn’t doing his best, something he couldn’t completely erase from his mind. When Koichiro really didn’t want to do something, he wouldn’t take a roundabout approach and complain about it. If he said no to a request, then

there was little that would change his mind.

That was the essence of Kochiro Mikoshiba—he would even draw his sword from his sheath to assert his will. He was a man with the power to stubbornly impose his will. The only way to make a man of such strength change his mind would be to persuade him with sincerity.

Well, as Ryoma puts it, I understand that there is no one else available for these jobs besides me...

Koichiro understood that, which was why he reluctantly took on the role of administrator. In fact, most of the retainers who served the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy were military types. They weren't all muscleheads, but there were very few who could handle supporting the army or urban development within the dukedom. Not to mention, those who could handle it weren't currently available.

For personnel skilled in internal affairs within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, one would first think of the names Count Bergstone and his brother-in-law, Count Zeleph.

Both men had extensive experience as lords and were among the few involved with internal affairs within the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. Although they had only begun serving the Mikoshiba family fairly recently, their relationship with Ryoma Mikoshiba went back a long way. They had known Ryoma since the civil war started by the late Viscount Gelhart, making them some of his longest known associates after the Malfist twins and Lione. Ryoma trusted the two men a lot.

When it came to advancing the development of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy's main base, the Wortenia Peninsula, there were no two better fit for the job than Bergstone and Zeleph. Naturally, Ryoma and Koichiro preferred entrusting the task to those two if possible.

However, the recently annexed northern region of Rhoadseria is under the administration of Count Bergstone. Count Zeleph is occupied with monitoring noble society within Rhoadseria.

Considering both their aptitude and experience, entrusting the development of the whole Mikoshiba domain to either of them would have been ideal. Since

the northern part of Rhoadseria had only recently become a formal part of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, it was best to have Count Bergstone, who had the most experience in territorial management among Ryoma's retainers, take charge.

Count Zeleph had been tasked with the important job of monitoring the nobles within the Kingdom of Rhoadseria.

After all, the Rhoadserian nobles who managed to keep their family lines alive—such as Charlotte Halcyon—were rather cunning. They seem to have sworn loyalty to Ryoma, but if the tides were to change, who knows what they might do? One must be wary of those quick to seize opportunities.

Still, Koichiro didn't see Charlotte and the others as traitors. Despite the strong presence of male chauvinism in the Kingdom of Rhoadseria, Charlotte and the others had maintained their influence within the royal court for many years, even while others whispered behind their back about them being women.

While Charlotte and the others learned martial arts to the extent expected of noblewomen, they were by no means warriors. On the contrary, they were skilled in internal affairs, strategy, logistics, and administrative tasks.

Indeed, they could be considered key assets for future development of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy. At least Ryoma's assessment of them is accurate. However, that doesn't mean there aren't any issues at all.

The answer to whether Charlotte and her group were as trustworthy as the Malfist sisters or Lione would most likely be no. Ultimately, trust was built on the accumulation of past achievements and the ability to predict the future based on those past outcomes. Trusting Charlotte and her group unconditionally would be nothing short of foolish without that foundation of past achievements.

Even if Charlotte and the others kept the Rhoadserian nobles in line, it was necessary to have an overseer to ensure proper conduct. Within the unique class system of noble society, proper intelligence gathering couldn't rely solely on forces like the Igasaki clan.

Information from someone within nobility itself was essential.

There was only one suitable candidate among those in the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy: Count Zeleph. He had a wide range of connections and relationships. Regardless of how skilled Koichiro was in intelligence work, or how extensive his experience was, Count Zeleph remained the better man for this job.

Even taking all of this into account, Ryoma Mikoshiba's decision to assign his grandfather, Koichiro, the role of administrator was a difficult one. But it was also the best choice to make at the time being.

That said, just because that was the best option at the moment didn't mean that it would always be the best option. And the person who understood that the most right now was Koichiro Mikoshiba.

Bringing the mouthpiece of the pipe to his lips, Koichiro took a light draw, slowly exhaling the smoke toward the ceiling.

"Well, as long as there aren't any other suitable candidates, I suppose I'll look after things for a while... Having an amateur like me handle government affairs indefinitely is not without its problems... While I'm managing for now, it won't be long before flaws in this setup begin to show. Especially considering that whether Ryoma likes it or not, the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy will be bound to expand in the future..."

Deciding if it was appropriate for Koichiro to be involved in the administration of the city of Sirius was a delicate matter. Given the current options, it could be considered as a wise decision. Even with Koichiro's military strength and ability to command troops, placing him in a position in the shadows might have felt like a bit of a waste.

His involvement was akin to using a universal cure that could treat any disease or a simple cold. Or hiring a Michelin-star chef to work as a part-timer in a family restaurant. The final outcome wouldn't be bad in either case. In the former case, the cold symptoms would be cured. But the latter scenario wouldn't require extensive training for the chef, meaning they'd be a valuable asset from the get-go.

If Koichiro were asked whether the potential and rarity of each asset in those scenarios were fully utilized, the answer would be no. While it wouldn't be appropriate to call the outcomes of those scenarios a complete waste, it would

be fitting to say that it was a case of being “underutilized.”

And that was similar to the decision to not place Koichiro Mikoshiba at the forefront of the battlefield.

Koichiro Mikoshiba was a rare individual, someone who not only was a master of martial arts but could also serve as a general leading an army. This extraordinary combination was uncommon among modern people.

This rare combination was a result of him being summoned to this world, and by a strange twist of fate, forced to survive countless battlefields. During his time with the Organization, he was involved in everything from solo assassinations of high-profile targets to commanding guerrilla operations with small units and even leading thousands of troops. And in each of those instances, he achieved victory.

No one knew the full extent of his battle history. And that probably wouldn't change, even if one were to ask Koichiro Mikoshiba himself.

Unlike modern society, the means of communication in this world are extremely limited.

If one were an important merchant or a noble, they might have the option of sending messages via specially trained birds, but people usually transmitted information by hand.

However, that came with its own dangers.

Outside of the cities, monsters roamed, and bandits preyed on travelers. The world wasn't very safe.

Knights regularly patrolled areas near the royal capital or around powerful lords' strongholds, making them somewhat safe. But this was only true for a limited number of regions. Generally speaking, sending a letter from one town to the other was an ordeal in this world.

The only exception might be using thaumaturgy to tap into the ley lines that crisscross the western continent to communicate. However, it's unlike the internet in that anyone can use it as long as it's paid for.

If a highly skilled thaumaturgist made even a slight mistake, the flow of the

ley lines could sweep away their consciousness, leading to their disintegration. They could end up either as shells of their former selves, or even dead. The ley lines weren't something that couldn't be used casually on a daily basis.

In a world with limited methods, recounting every minor skirmish involving dozens of people or guerrilla warfare aimed at disrupting an army's rear would have been impractical. Doing so might have been worth it for battles involving thousands, but not for smaller battles.

Because of the unique circumstances of this world, even Koichiro didn't have an accurate count, but he was almost certain that the number of his victories didn't fall below a hundred.

In that sense, he could have been considered as a versatile commander, skilled in leading small-scale battles and commanding large-scale engagements.

Although he was a versatile general, he lacked experience as a politician or a bureaucrat. He also had no experience in logistics, such as procuring supplies and sending them to the front lines, or any experience in military administration. The elders who ruled the Organization way back in the day must have thought it would be a waste to assign someone with Koichiro's level of combat and command to do simple paperwork. Compared to the locals of this world who lacked knowledge, Koichiro was still able to manage the tasks adequately.

For example, Simone Christoph and her company led the merchant guild alliance in the northern region of the Kingdom of Rhoadseria that was solely responsible for providing the duchy's food supplies. Dark elf artisans and verbal thaumaturgists residing in the Wortenia Peninsula produced weapons and medicines, so there were no issues with those supplies either.

What was crucial was having a clear, overarching view of the whole situation and ensuring that supply lines were not disrupted.

As long as one understands that much, this job is manageable.

Moreover, Koichiro Mikoshiba didn't lack the aptitude or talent for such logistical support or behind-the-scenes work. The real issue lay more in his practical experience and his own motivation for such tasks.

If it's a short-term infiltration mission, I have experience with that.

But that experience was from missions aimed at assassination and sabotage, not intelligence gathering. During some of those missions, he had temporarily served as a soldier of the Kingdom of Helnesgoula.

Although infiltrating enemy territory was the same, the purpose was entirely different. Besides, Koichiro had only enlisted as a foot soldier. Naturally, assigning such a recruit any paperwork was out of the question.

Maintaining close relations with key figures in a country while setting up schemes, like Akitake Sudou does, is a highly exceptional ability. It's incredibly dangerous, and above all, it heavily depends on the individual's skill and qualities.

Not all people from Rearth summoned to this world were as accustomed to rough work or intelligence operations as Koichiro. In fact, those who were used to it were exceedingly rare.

Most were ordinary people who had never even butchered livestock, let alone killed anyone with their own hands.

Well, the exception might occur when the Organization secretly removes the control seals from Rearth's dominated people and use them as sleeper agents.

Some of the people who were summoned had actually worked in intelligence, and there were also individuals whose talents or personality made them suited for such covert work. Given that the summoning to this world involved people from Rearth who hailed from all walks of life, this was only natural.

However, summoning such exceptional individuals was admittedly an unlikely event. To be frank, infiltrating enemy territory to conduct intelligence gathering or espionage was an exceedingly dangerous job.

This type of intelligence gathering involved assuming a false identity and revealing oneself to those around, which would be classified as *yojutsu* in ninjutsu terms.

Compared to *injutsu*, where one infiltrated enemy territory in a stereotypical ninja outfit as people generally imagined, this method was somewhat less dangerous. But it didn't mean there was no danger at all.

Intelligence gathering activities were such that if one's cover was blown, there was a high probability of either death or torture. To put it bluntly, those who engaged in espionage were essentially expendable, akin to sacrificial pawns.

That being said, it's a job that someone has to do.

The real issue was whether someone as skilled as Koichiro needed to take on such a dangerous job himself.

After all, Koichiro was a formidable warrior who had reached a realm beyond that of a mere master. He had stepped into the domain of a transcendent being, pushing the limits of human capability in this world.

Using such a valuable person for rear support or intelligence work rather than on the front lines was akin to using a butcher's knife to cut a chicken.

It was a sheer waste of talent.

For these reasons, Koichiro had never acquired any experience with clerical work like logistical support.

Considering the current situation of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, there was little room for taking Koichiro's personal feelings into account.

Moreover, if there were no more suitable knives available, using a butcher's knife to cut a chicken might be unavoidable. One could even use it to cut fish or vegetables if necessary.

Back in the day, Chuken handled all these kinds of tasks. That guy was exceptionally good at managing people.

Liu Zhongjian—also known as Master Liu—served as an elder of the Organization and operated out of the city of Lentencia in the southwestern part of the western continent. Even back in the day, he was a figure highly regarded within the Organization as a warrior comparable to Koichiro. At the same time, he had also accumulated experience in logistical support, such as procuring supplies for the front lines and raising operational funds for the Organization.

Additionally, he was skilled in intelligence work. Without Master Liu's support, about half of Koichiro's victories might have ended in a stalemate. This was

likely related to the fact that Master Liu's family was a wealthy merchant house that ran a trading business in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. No other type of person was more conscious of human connections and more understanding of the power of money than a merchant.

While family environment greatly influenced a person's character and abilities, one couldn't ignore individual temperament and disposition. Nevertheless, this was a path that Koichiro deliberately chose to avoid in his younger days. At over eighty years old, the bill for avoiding that path had come due in an unexpected way.

Maybe it's pointless to say this now, but if things were going to turn out like this, should I have involved myself a bit more in the Organization's operations? Chuken and Kuze would have taught me as much as I wanted if I had asked.

Yet that was nothing more than the grumbling of an old man who could do nothing about it now. No matter how much Koichiro had surpassed human limits to become a transcendent being, he couldn't reverse the flow of time.

It seems I've become rather soft... No, maybe it's just that I've gotten old.

With such thoughts, Koichiro took a light drag from his Japanese smoking pipe, finished his smoke, tapped the bowl against the edge of the ashtray to clear it of ash, and lightly blew into the mouthpiece to remove any remaining ash. Then he checked the position of the clock hands on the wall. It was already approaching 1 p.m.

Today, there's a meeting with Nelcius in the third-floor conference room starting at 2 p.m. I suppose lunch will have to wait until after that... Nothing I can do about it.

For the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy, the demi-human races living in the Wortenia Peninsula were of great importance. Among them, the Dark Elf tribe held the key to the prosperity of House Mikoshiba. Therefore, a meeting with Nelcius, the leader of the Dark Elf tribe, was as important as Koichiro's clerical work. Naturally, that work took precedence over Koichiro's need to eat lunch.

Having been working since early in the morning, Koichiro had no choice but to attend the meeting with an empty stomach. That said, if he had given up his smoke break, he could have at least eaten a sandwich. In this case, it was fair to

say this was a consequence of Koichiro's choices.

Don't I need to find someone I can delegate at least the clerical work to?

This was an impossible wish for the moment, a hope that seems unlikely. There was no chance that a capable and trustworthy person would just fall from the sky out of nowhere. And yet, it remained a lingering desire and an unshakable hope.

I suppose it's just a lingering regret, thought Koichiro, sighing deeply.

After returning the smoking set to the drawer, Koichiro rose from his chair and left his office.

However, a few days later, a single report delivered to Koichiro would change everything.

The trading fleet of the Christoph Trading Company, which had been conducting trade on the northern continent, had captured a pirate ship. Soon, the fate of the Mikoshiba Grand Duchy would reach a new turning point thanks to one person who had been chained as a slave.

Afterword

Though I don't think this applies to anyone anymore, it's nice to meet you if you're picking up *Record of Wortenia War* for the first time. For those who have been with me since volume one, it's nice to see you again. It's been around five months since the last volume. I'm the author, Ryota Hori. Though there were a lot of unexpected events, I've managed to write volume twenty-six. I'm really, really glad I got this out... I feel so relieved writing this afterword.

Well, I've been an author for a long time now, so I imagined there'd be a time when I'd say something like this, but I sincerely apologize to the readers who have been waiting for this. Lastly, I would like to thank all those who made this volume possible, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to those who picked it up.

I'll continue to do my best writing *Record of Wortenia War*.











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Record of Wortenia War: Volume 26

by Ryota Hori

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