

転生したら 兵士 だった?!

tensei shitara heishi datta?!

akai shinigami to
yobareta otoko

師裏劍

イラスト・白味噲

赤い死神と呼ばれた男

1



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Chapter 1: My Life in a Different World

I suddenly felt a strong blow to the back of my head as my consciousness faded away...

"Hey! Are you alive? Pat?!" **Voice**

Pat? Who is Pat?

Wait, I sort of think my name is Pat? But I thought I was named Jin? I seem to have memories of being both Jin and Pat??

Am I Pat now? Why do I have memories of living as a person named Jin? Was it a dream? No, it was too long and detailed to be a dream, right?

Is this some sort of previous life's memories? No, that's just impossible.

At the moment, I am sure that the back of my head hurts. Also, the person yelling at me is named Wayne, who is a fellow soldier of the same age. Let's start with that and leave the hard questions for when I'm out of this life-and-death situation.



"Wayne, I'm still alive." **Patrick**

"You are? Then pick up your sword and help us!" **Wayne**

"You're so rough on your fellow soldier." **Patrick**

"If you don't get moving, you're not going to be moving ever again!" **Wayne**

"Got it!" **Patrick**

After that, I grabbed my sword, sized up the situation and started running towards the orc

that was attacking my allies.



"Die! Orc bastard!" **Patrick**

I used my cheap two-handed sword to slash the back of the orc's head with all my strength. The orc's head cracks open, blood and brain matter splatter out, some onto me.

I'm on the front line of a battlefield.

After the fighting died down, I took a deep breath and collected my thoughts. I couldn't tell

you how many orcs I slew (there were plenty), but I know that the back of my head is still throbbing.

I looked at the corpse of an orc lying on the ground, right next to the corpse of one of my fellow soldiers. While the original group of orcs had been annihilated, it seems fate wasn't done with me for today.

A new orc, three meters tall, emerged from the distance holding a large axe like a lumberjack.

"An orc king..." **Soldier** mutters in despair



"Archers! Fire arrows at the big orc!" **Unit Captain** shouts

The archers hurriedly nock arrows and fire, but even though the arrows hit the orc king, they bounce off without a mark.

"What? You've gotta be kidding me! How tough is the bastard?" **Soldier**

"Keep firing, we've got to do something!" **Unit Captain**

The orc king walks over slowly but steadily, then swings his axe overhead and slams it down on a soldier. The soldier attempted to block the axe with his sword, but the sword fails to even slow the axe and the soldier's head exploded like an overripe fruit.

It was a scene straight out of a horror movie. The orc king swings to the right and another soldier is flattened while the rest of the soldiers scatter.

"Eyes! Aim at the eyes!" **Unit Captain**

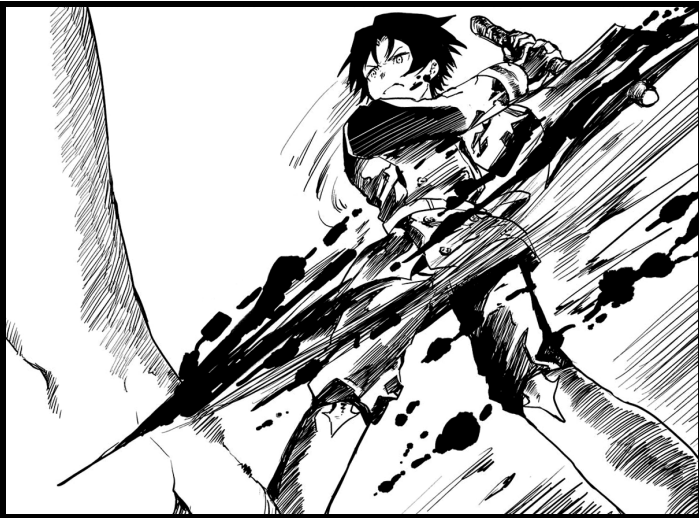
The archers and spearmen follow the captain's command, but the Orc King is tall and tough to injure.

"Well, is there anything I can use? There must be something!" **Patrick**

I look around the battlefield while spouting lines that belong in a soliloquy. I spy an axe on the ground that was carried previously by a large orc. I rush over to it, then sneak behind the final orc.

I've got to hope that this Achilles tendon isn't too tough! And that anatomy of human-shaped beings holds true...

I swing at the left ankle of the orc king like I'm teeing off with a golf club.



"Augh!" **Orc King**

The orc king screams in pain and drops his left knee to the ground.

"It worked!" **Patrick** shouts

I couldn't help but exclaim something after my success.

"Pat, get away!" **Wayne** shouts

Before I could move, the axe of the orc king is flying straight towards me.

What? I thought I was behind him? When did he swing around!

Without another second to think, I rush toward the orc king. I succeeded in missing the blade of the axe, but instead I took the handle right in my side. I fly away to crumble at the

foot of a tree, but before darkness claims me, I can see my fellow soldiers piercing the orc king's eyes with their spears.

"Where am I?" **Patrick**

I can't stop myself from asking that question.

"You're in a medic station for wounded soldiers. I'm glad you're awake, how's the pain?"

Wayne

My compatriot Wayne responds, his full name is Wayne Kimble. 15 years old, same as me. 185 centimeters (6 ft) tall with blue eyes and long blonde hair that sways in the wind.



"Oh, Wayne! My side hurts like hell." **Patrick**

"I bet, even though you got hit by some hard wood, it beats being bisected by an orc king!" **Wayne** quips with a smile

"What happened to the orc king?" **Patrick**

"After your stunt, I managed to get it right in the eye, then we all ganged up on it and put it out of its misery. It's amazing that you made it out." **Wayne**

"That's great! Looks like you are getting a lot of recognition!" **Patrick**

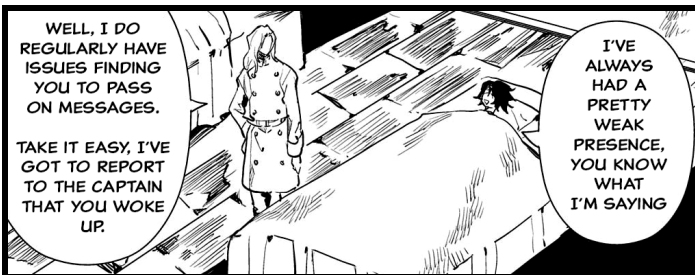
"No, it's mostly you. Without your attack, my spear couldn't have reached anything. Shouldn't you get all the praise?" **Wayne**

"Wait, the guy who got blown away and spent the fight unconscious? That's not cool, I wish I had your kind of panache" **Patrick**

"I'm not sure what you mean by panache, but do you seriously think you don't deserve any praise? Personally, I think it's pretty amazing you were able to sneak behind that orc king." **Wayne**

I don't want to get caught up in the troubles of handsome guys!

"I've just always had a weak presence!" **Patrick**



"Well, I have regularly had trouble figuring out where you are, Pat." **Wayne**

"Right?" **Patrick**

We both laugh, but I start to wince from the pain.

"Aiyiyiyi" **Patrick**

"Take it easy, I've got to report to the captain that you woke up." **Wayne**

As I look around, I spot quite a few injured soldiers also lying in beds, as well as soldiers covered with blankets in the far end of the room. How many soldiers were injured or killed in this operation?

When a herd of orcs was discovered by an adventurer, a sortie order was issued to the 3rd battalion of the Kingdom's 1st Army, that's us. We then proceeded to subdue the orcs. This was all to prevent the orcs from attacking the villages of the Kingdom's populace.

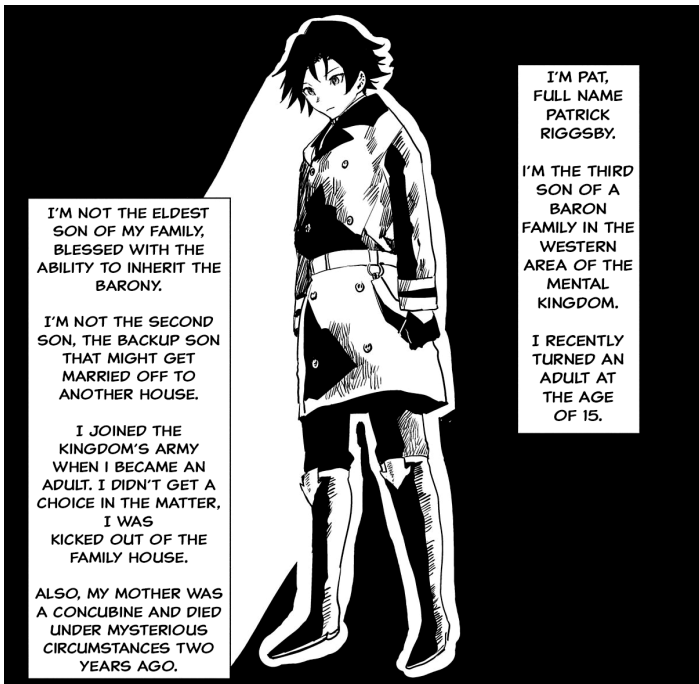
I closed my eyelids and nodded off from the satisfaction of a job well done.



I've got to collect my thoughts.

So, I'm a former Japanese person, I haven't heard anybody mention anything like an Achilles tendon in this world.

I'm Pat, full name Patrick Riggsby. Third son of a Baronial family in the western frontier of the Mental Kingdom. I recently became an adult at the age of 15, the normal age for this world.



I'm not the eldest son that inherits the territory, or the reserve son that might get married to another house. There are precious few houses that only have female heirs, so a third son of a Baron has no hope there. There's significant competition for those sorts of marriages.

So, I ended up joining the Kingdom's Army when I became an adult, a fairly common situation for an aristocrat's third son. In addition, I'm the son of a concubine, while the first two sons of the current Baron Riggsby are both sons of the legal wife. I can't say I was given a choice in joining the Kingdom Army, I was literally kicked out of the family house.

Also, my mother died of a mysterious illness two years ago, my father only thinks of increasing tax revenues from the territory, the eldest son is completely incompetent, the second son is a spineless coward, and the legal wife is a pig that only cares about amassing jewelry. Holy shit, my family is a mess.

I'm so happy that I'm in the army, where they just yell and swear at you.

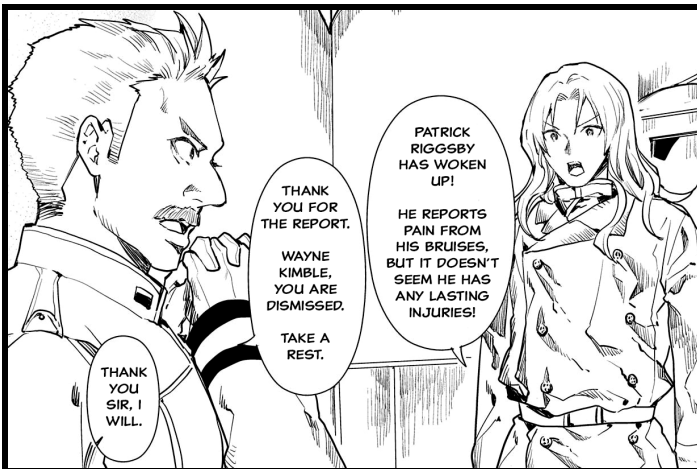
On top of all that, I'm the only member of the Riggsby family with black hair and black eyes, so that apparently makes me a devil's child who doesn't have the proper blood of the Riggsby's. Because I was a devil's child, I could be abused as much as they wanted. Which was pretty much daily, if not more. That's the house I grew up in, where my mother was stressed out to the point that she got sick and died.

Well, Japanese people are willing to move past things, so I'll do my best as a soldier and live at my own speed.



"Patrick Riggsby has woken up!" **Wayne** reports

"Thank you for the report, you are dismissed." **Unit Captain**



"Yes!" **Wayne** replies as he leaves the room

"Hmm, that recruit, Patrick Riggsby? He's got a lot of guts." **Deputy Captain**

"He's the third son of the Riggsby family? I wasn't expecting anything, but he's been a model recruit. I thought he would be worthless based on his family's reputation." **Unit Captain**

"Is it true that both the eldest son and the second son failed to make it to three months of service?" **Deputy Captain**

"The eldest only lasted a day past a month, while the second son managed to last almost two months." **Unit Captain**

"Doesn't the training period take more than a month?" **Deputy Captain**

"Yeah, during the field training, he deserted after we wouldn't give him a tent to sleep in. That was after he failed to set up the tent he was issued." **Unit Captain**

"How can I even respond to that?" **Deputy Captain**

"The second son managed to finish training, but he deserted right after he received his first orders." **Unit Captain**

"I don't think they're qualified to breath the same air of that third son." **Deputy Captain**

"Indeed" **Unit Captain**

"What are you planning to reward Patrick Riggsby with?" **Deputy Captain**

"Isn't he currently a sergeant?" **Unit Captain**

"Yes, since he was from an aristocratic family, he was given the sergeant rank at the end of training." **Deputy Captain**

"I think it's entirely appropriate to award him 5 gold coins and the master sergeant rank." **Unit Captain**

"Understood, I'll take care of it." **Deputy Captain**

"Also, Sergeant Wayne should be awarded 3 gold coins, and the rest of the soldiers get 10 silver coins." **Unit Captain**

"Right on it" **Deputy Captain**



"5 gold coins?" **Patrick**

When I returned to the barracks, I got to look at the contents of the bag I received at the

award ceremony. I couldn't stop my surprise at the generosity of the reward.

The currency of this world is decimalized gold, silver, and bronze coins. Each coin is worth 100 coins of the next lower metal coin and the lowest coin has about the same buying power as 100 Japanese yen.

In addition, there are intermediate denominations like large silver and bronze coins, those are worth 10 of their normal versions. Finally, there's small bronze coins, they're worth a quarter of a regular bronze coin. Many small items are purchasable in bundles for a small bronze coin.

A silver coin is 10,000 yen, and a single gold coin is 1 million yen. And I got 5 of them!

5 million yen!

I smiled involuntarily.

"Hey! What are you going to spend money on?" **Wayne**

While I was thinking, a handsome guy showed up.

"Wayne, didn't you get three gold coins?" **Patrick**

"Don't raise a fuss, Mr. 5 Gold Coins!" **Wayne**

We chuckle a bit.

"Let's visit the weapon shop!" **Pat & Wayne**

When you join the Kingdom Army, you are issued only basic armaments. A commoner recruit will get a spear, while a proficient soldier would get both a spear and a one-handed sword. Even then, the weapons aren't new or especially well-made.

For sergeants, which any aristocratic recruit would start out at, they're issued a spear and a two-handed sword, both used. Some are barely holding together. To be honest, my spear broke the first time it was used in battle. I had to fight with a two-handed sword against a orc club with a longer reach, leading to me getting clubbed in the back of the head.

"I don't want to keep getting hit with clubs." **Patrick**

Wayne laughs at my joke as we leave the barracks.



"A spear would be good" **Patrick**

I mutter as I browse the selection at the weapon shop. The most common weapon in battle is the spear in this world. The main reason is that it allows attacking monsters from a distance. Even in a human-on-human fight, a spear allows for more reach vs a sword.

Cheap examples start around 50 silver coins, but compared to a spear offered for a single gold coin, the more expensive version is clearly better, even to an amateur.

Weapons that are the difference between life and death are worth more than gold.

The preferences for weapons seem to vary person to person. Some will prioritize sharpness above all else, while others value durability, weight, or handling. There's even some that are most concerned with appearance.

"What about you, Wayne?" **Patrick**

"I'd like something pretty durable, moderate weight if possible." **Wayne**

"That's a good idea, but the heavier ones will do more damage, right?" **Shop Owner**

The shop owner brought out an all-iron spear for Wayne.

"Looks heavy" **Patrick**

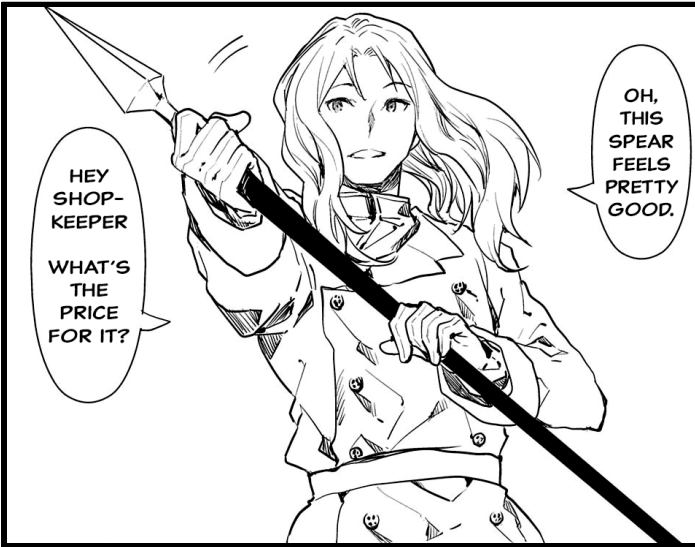
I couldn't stop my reaction, but the shop owner takes it in stride.

"The inside is hollow, so it's lighter than it looks." **Shop Owner**

Hmm, so it's like a pipe?

Wayne picks it up and gives it a test swing or two.

"How much is it?" **Wayne**



Looks like Wayne has taken a shine to the spear.

"2 gold coins" **Shop Owner**

"That's too expensive, what about a gold coin and 50 silver coins?" **Wayne**

"Can't do it, a good craftsman made that. How about 1 and 75?" **Shop Owner**

"That's better, I can do 1 and 65!" **Wayne**

"Lowest I can do, 1 and 70!" **Shop Owner**

"Deal!" **Wayne**

Hmm, that spear is worth 1.7 million yen?

"So what are you interested in?" **Shop Owner** asks Pat

"I'm interested in something light and sharp!" **Patrick**

"When it comes to that, I've got two options for you." **Shop Owner**

The clerk pulls out two spears from the back.

"This first one has a shorter-than-average handle, so it's lighter and easier to maneuver, all while having an excellent sharpness. This other one is a normal length, but the tip is small,

so it feels light. It's quite sharp as well." **Shop Owner**

I rub my left temple with my left middle finger, it's my habit when I'm thinking seriously.

The longer one had better reach than the short one, right?

"What about the one with the short tip? Isn't it pretty expensive?" **Patrick**

"I'll give you a special deal on it, only a single gold coin!" **Shop Owner**

"Oh!" **Pat & Wayne**

"Deal!" **Patrick**

"That's unfair!" **Wayne**

After the two had left, the wife of the shop owner came out.

"Why did you sell that spear for a single gold coin? Couldn't you have gotten a bit more?"

Shop Owner Wife

"What's the matter?" **Shop Owner**

"Stupid husband!" **Shop Owner Wife**

There were some angry sounds from inside the store, maybe a slap sound...

Sometimes it's better not to pry.



A soldier's day starts early.

Well, not only soldiers, most people in this world have early mornings. With no technology like electric lights, the only way to light up the night is candles or firewood. Candles get expensive quickly, so common folk often use firewood. Therefore, most people get up with the sun.

Soldiers, without exception, also wake with the sunrise. We start out by running as the sun rises. Then on to carrying heavy luggage on our backs while running around the training ground. Then we get breakfast: hard black bread and bean soup with bacon in it. That's all! I'm happy we at least get bacon. After eating, we start on our work.

There's a variety of work that soldiers undergo, but the most common activity is patrolling the royal capital to be ready to respond to trouble. Much like a modern police officer. The next most common is acting as the gatekeeper for the city. This discourages criminals and

the smuggling of illegal goods. We inspect the carriage contents and frame for secret compartments while checking for criminal persons.

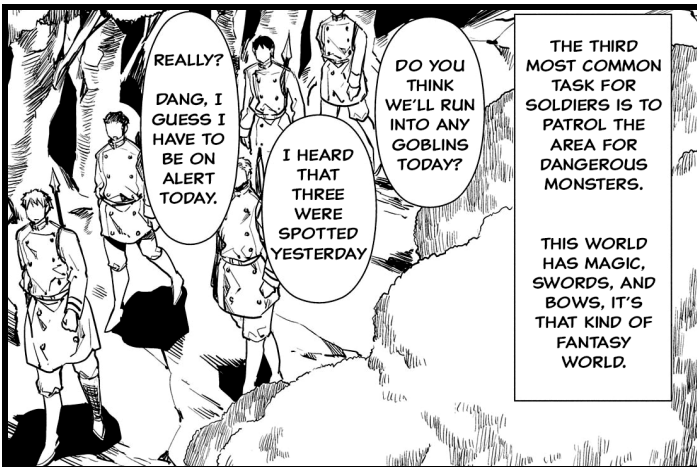
Finally, you could be assigned to patrol the land surrounding the capital. This world is what you might call a sword and bow fantasy world. Of course, there are orc-like monsters, as well as the classic goblin. Weak as individuals, but dangerous because of their propensity to form groups. Even more powerful is the ogre, which is stronger and smarter than an orc. There's also a variety of dragon and dragon-like creatures. Wyverns exist as well as the more classical styles of dragons, but I don't want to get too deep into the fauna of this world. Patrols work to discover and eliminate the aforementioned threats.

Adventurers will work odd jobs to defeat monsters or collect herbs. The orc herd mentioned at the beginning of this story was discovered by one of the top medicinal herb collectors during a job.

"Will we see any goblins today?" **Soldier A**

"It seems that three were spotted yesterday?" **Soldier B**

"Seriously? So we should expect to see some." **Soldier A**



The soldiers on patrol walk while complaining.

If you see one goblin, you'll always find a herd of 20 nearby. There's probably at least 3 three more within earshot that will come running when the one you saw yells out. Goblins live in herds and travel in groups of four or more.

"They may jump out anytime, so stay alert." **Wayne**

Wayne is currently serving as my platoon's deputy captain.

"Yes! I understand" **Soldier A**

"What's your take on the situation, captain?" **Wayne**

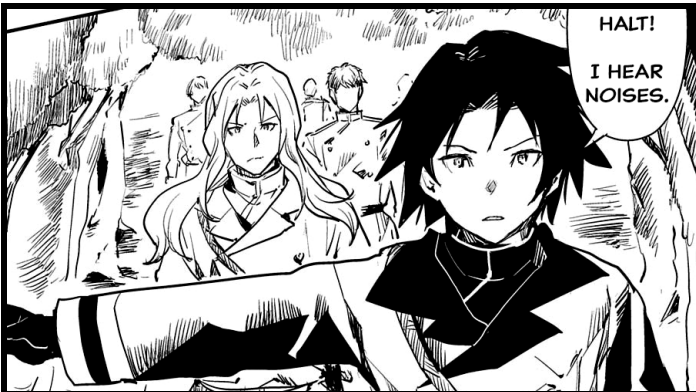
"The goblins were only spotted yesterday, I feel like they've got to be around here somewhere." **Patrick**

Since I was promoted to Master Sergeant, I was given a platoon. A platoon is three squads, each of which is made up of three soldiers. In addition to the squad members, the platoon leader makes up the tenth member. I'm a Master Sergeant, serving as platoon captain, Wayne is a Sergeant and the deputy captain, then two Corporals to command the other two squads, then Privates and Private First-Class to fill out the squads.

"Why don't we go a little further?" **Patrick** requests of the platoon

After 30 minutes spent walking deeper into the forest, I hear noises and calls from behind us.

"Stop! Sergeant Wayne's squad to the right, Corporal Tony's squad to the left, Corporal Mirko's squad to the center with me. Sound good?" **Patrick**



Everyone nods at my commands.

"Wayne and Tony's squad will push at the same time, five minutes after we move out." **Patrick**

I pull out a tool the size of my palm, it's a magical timepiece. Magical timepieces are expensive, but they are available to squad leaders and above as necessary for military purposes.

By the way, this world has 12 months, 360 days a year, 24 hours a day, and 60 minutes in an hour. One interesting item is that there are two moons making up the lunar calendar. No leap years, as far as I know.

"Then, commence!" **Patrick**

The other squads move to their positions and wait.

"Let's go" **Patrick** whispers

I motion to Corporal Mirko, who has short brown hair with blue eyes. He looks about 10 years older than me? He's a slender and astringent man. The other squad members follow slowly and quietly.

In an open clearing in front of us, five goblins are pawing at a fawn's corpse while eating the meat and organs.



"Prepare to fire..." **Patrick**

Everyone carefully pulls back on their bow, it's a classic opening to a goblin hunt.

"Fire!" **Patrick**

The center squad fires their arrows with a hum, followed an instant later by the flanking squads.

Guga, Gege, Piga cry three goblins as they fall to the ground. They aren't dead, but they're badly injured.

"For the second volley, fire as you line them up, don't rush it." **Patrick**

I shout so the other squads can hear me.

Soon arrows fly and take down the remaining two goblins.

"Platoon, it's time to take them out for good, but stay alert!" **Patrick**

"Got it" **Soldier A**

"Yes!" **Soldier B**

Now, the platoon members move from their cover in the trees. Everyone has swapped from a bow to their spear, which they use to stab the goblin's neck or heart.

Soon, there's five completely silent goblins lying on the ground.

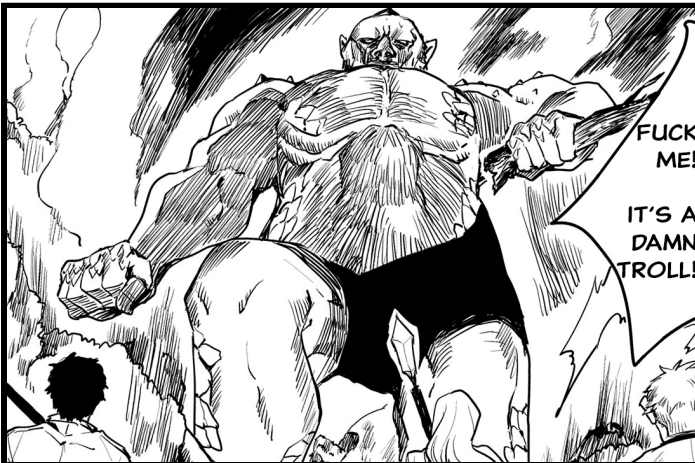
"Slice through the neck! If we leave them as is, they could become a zombie! Take the nose for subjugation verification!" **Wayne**

Wayne and the platoon had not yet noticed the other presence watching their fight...

Goblins are monsters at the bottom of the bipedal monster hierarchy. In other words, they're often hunted by the stronger members of that hierarchy. Above them are monsters like orcs, ogres, trolls, and cyclopes. The monsters usually found preying on goblins are orcs and...

When Wayne hears the cracking sounds from trees, he spins around.

"Troll, a Troll?! What the fuck is it doing here?" **Wayne**



The troll, a four meter tall monster known for its strength, luckily it has low intelligence and terrible agility.

"Everyone, prepare for battle! Grab a bow and shoot at your discretion!" **Patrick**

Platoon members grab a bow and fire, multiple arrows stick, but the troll isn't showing any signs of pain as it continues to approach.

"Keep shooting!" **Patrick**

The flying arrows pierce the troll's belly, but they can't reach the internal organs due to the thick fat layer.

"Soldiers, switch to spears!" **Patrick**

We can't keep fiddling around with bows at this range, we must switch to spears. The troll moves closer to Wayne, it must have identified him as the biggest threat. It's holding a large log it picked up somewhere in its hand.

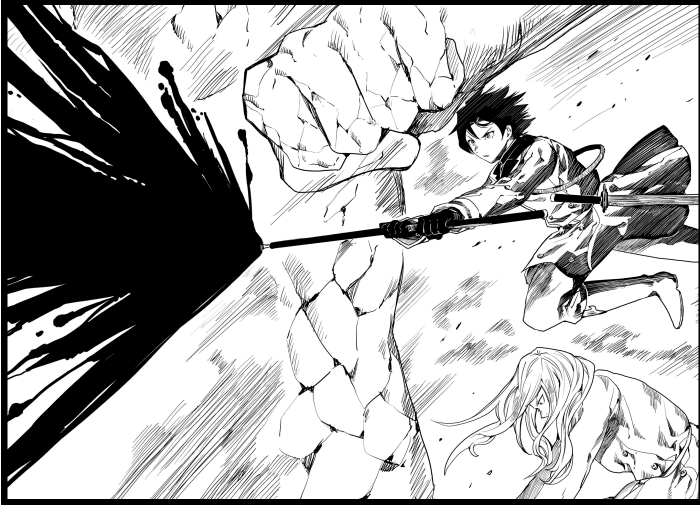
Thump!

The log makes a noise as it's swung around, but Wayne manages to dodge it. He stabs the troll to depths of tens of centimeters, but his spear gets stuck. The troll can still swing the log without any problems.

Wayne jumps back without his spear to dodge the log. Other members attempt to stab the troll, but their slashes only penetrate a few millimeters. Is it the weapon quality or the arm quality?

Wayne swaps to his two-handed sword and uses it to deflect the log and create an opening to slash at the troll's belly. He manages to slash in tens of centimeters again, but the troll has yet to weaken.

"Wayne! Crouch!" **Patrick**



Wayne crouches down as I rush in while holding my spear at my waist. I manage to stab into the same wound that Wayne's sword had just opened.

The troll cries out in pain. Finally!

Wayne grabs the haft of my spear and we both slam the spear deep into the troll's body. As the troll screams louder, its chin lifts and Wayne takes advantage of the mistake to slash at the throat. Both Wayne and I are drenched in the bright red blood that erupts from the troll's neck. A second later, the troll falls down onto its back.

"Tony, decapitate the troll" **Patrick** orders in a tired voice

"On it!" **Tony**

Tony pulls out his sword and chops at the troll's neck. After a few swings, the neck separates from the torso.

"Is anyone injured?" **Patrick**

"No serious injuries, just scratches and bruises." **Soldier A**

"Wayne, are you still with us?" **Patrick**

"Oh, I'm still here, thanks for the assist, platoon leader!" **Wayne** responds with a short chuckle.

"What kind of luck must we have to come across a troll this near the royal capital?"

Patrick

Everyone nods at my observation.

"For now, we'll need to take the troll's head back and report! Prepare to withdraw."

Patrick

"Roger" **Soldier A**



"That concludes my report! Colonel!" **Patrick**

"That was some hard work! Command will continue to investigate, you can go and take a rest." **Colonel Reedon**

The colonel is a man with a bald head and blue eyes, built like a barrel.

"Hah! Excuse me." **Patrick** responds as he leaves.

"What is a troll doing in that forest? What are your thoughts?" **Officer A**

"I don't like it, if it is only a random stray, that would be great. But I wouldn't want to bet on that outcome. What do you think Colonel Reedon?" **Officer B**

"Again, a stray would be tolerable, but it would turn awkward if there are more. Trolls are usually found in groups of three, so we could be looking at two more lurking around."

Colonel Reedon

"How long would it take for a survey?" **Officer B**

"We should send a company with a mobile ballista, I'll leave it to you to pick the company." **Colonel Reedon**

"Huh! Immediately!" **Officer A**



After filing my report and verifying the receipt of the troll's head, I went straight to bed and slept like a log.

The next day, I woke up to a buzzing barracks.

"Bring a stretcher, quickly!" **Medic A**

"Have you brought the bandages yet? I need them now!" **Medic B**

"Stay strong! Stay with me! Don't fall asleep!" **Medic C**

There's yelling and running footsteps all over.

As I leave my private room and head for the ruckus, I spy a soldier on a stretcher heading for the medical room.

"Hey, what happened?" **Patrick** asks a nearby soldier

"The company in charge of the investigation encountered two trolls and managed to eliminate them, but 15 soldiers were injured, additionally, three more were seriously injured. I just got back from that nightmare." **Soldier**

If they went to investigate immediately after my report, were they fighting during the night? A night battle against trolls? Who is the commander? It doesn't matter how weak the troll is, a night battle is a terrible lapse of judgement. Against two of them? What insanity is that?

Even if a troll is slow, humans moving through an unfamiliar forest at night are far from fast. If they hurry, they'll trip and sprain an ankle on stones or branches. A troll has a wider stride and won't get caught like a human. Normal tactics are to always fight in the daytime in forests.

This is part of basic military doctrine, was someone too impatient? Maybe the camp was attacked? What happened?

In Colonel Reedon's office, a tense meeting was being held...

"What exactly has happened?" **Officer A**

"What has happened, Colonel Reedon?" **Officer B**

"Well, it was fine until I ordered a company to investigate, but what was Second Lieutenant Scott thinking when he ordered a forest assault at night?

Normal doctrine is to camp in front of the forest and investigate at sunrise the next morning. Who would enter? A night battle in a dark forest? Tantamount to suicide. Bring me his service history." **Colonel Reedon**

"This is all goblins... it was a different company that took out the orcs. Did he think trolls were just large goblins?" **Officer A**

"Sorry, was it my fault to give him a sortie order?" **Officer B**

"No, you just looked for the first available company. Rather, the bigger issue is how was he promoted to Second Lieutenant with his dearth of intelligence. Well, we should move on to

interviewing some of the soldiers that were present." **Colonel Reedon**

"Maybe he misunderstood the priority?" **Officer A**

First Soldier's Testimony

"The Second Lieutenant said that since a single platoon could defeat a troll, then a company with a ballista couldn't lose, even against two!" **Soldier**

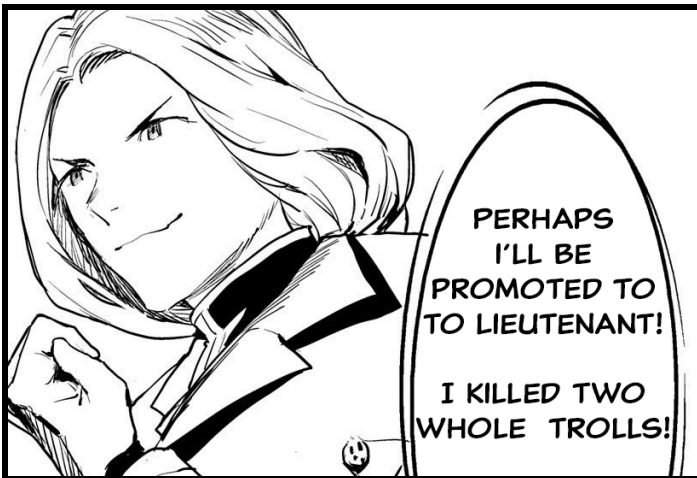
Second Soldier's Testimony

"When I asked, 'Are you serious about starting a night battle in a forest?' he replied 'They're just big, slow bastards! Anyone can just outrun them! How can the ballista miss a target so big and slow! It's easier than an all-you-can-eat buffet!'" **Soldier**

Colonel Reedon rubs his forehead while listening to the testimonies.

Outside the Colonel's office, a slender man with long golden hair and green eyes, dressed in an immaculate military uniform, walks down the hall. Second Lieutenant Scott Pagenou has an arrogant expression as he walks to hear the good news from his Colonel.

"Perhaps, I'll be promoted to Lieutenant" **2nd Lt. Scott** smiles to himself



Last night, he annihilated two trolls, sure some of his soldiers were injured, but that's normal for a battle, right?

"Second Lieutenant Scott Pagenou! What have you to say for yourself?" **Colonel Reedon**

Second Lieutenant Scott looks taken aback.

"But I defeated the enemy?" **2nd Lt. Scott**

"You're a blithering idiot! How can you say that with 15 injured and three dead. Why are you acting like you couldn't help that?!" **Colonel Reedon** yells

It seems the seriously injured did not survive.

"Injuries and deaths happen regularly when fighting monsters! The most critical part is dispatching monsters quickly!" **2nd Lt. Scott**

"Where did you learn to rush into battles without a strategy? Don't act a fool! Your orders were suicide!" **Colonel Reedon**

"They were just green soldiers who were inexperienced, I can't be held responsible! Those injured people, they were stupid soldiers who couldn't keep their footing and fell! They need more training!" **2nd Lt. Scott**

"If you fight in a forest at night, obviously soldiers are going to slip and fall. That's why you should have the presence of mind to not start a night battle in a forest!" **Colonel Reedon**

"But I didn't fall, I remembered my training." **2nd Lt. Scott**

"You just happened to be lucky!" **Colonel Reedon**

"No, I made sure not to fall so I wouldn't get injured or die!" **2nd Lt. Scott**

"Stop talking! Get out of my sight!" **Colonel Reedon**

The Second Lieutenant is chased out of the Colonel's office.

"So, who recommended that idiot to be a Second Lieutenant?" **Colonel Reedon**

"Ah, Major General Jonathan Newgarden. It seems Scott is a relative of the general's." **Officer A**

"That pig is a Major General?" **Officer B**

"What are you going to do?" **Officer A**

"Contact Lieutenant General Penske and have him handle the demotion. If we continue with that idiot, we'll run out of soldiers! Demote him to sergeant!" **Colonel Reedon**

Outside the office, the soon-to-be-demoted Scott Pagenou rages to himself.

"Damn! What's with that Colonel! Even if he wasn't there, it looked great! Such useless

subordinates, who cares how many die or are injured? Even if the soldiers are a few less today, we can find more soon, commoners are everywhere! How dare they hold me back, someone who is fated to become a Major General!" **Sergeant Scott**

On the following day, Wanye and I were called to a meeting in the commander's office where we received an announcement.

"Master Sergeant Patrick Riggsby has been promoted to Second Lieutenant, five gold coins will be awarded."

"Sergeant Wayne Kimble is promoted to Master Sergeant, three gold coins will be awarded."

"Second Lieutenant Scott Pagenou is demoted to Sergeant"

Wayne's Perspective

My name is Wayne, Wayne Kimble.

I started out as a sergeant in the army, the lowest rank for an aristocratic soldier. I volunteered for the army, joined the Kingdom Army after passing training, then met a certain man. He was named Patrick, and was from another aristocratic family. He had unusual black hair and eyes, an unremarkable face and a slender build with a below-average height. He seemed to be the picture of mediocrity.

That being said, I often have trouble locating where he is, it's like his presence is nonexistent, rather than what you might call weak. When I go to the cafeteria to eat, if I'm not with Patrick, I'll never be able to find him, even if he is in the room.

If we were in the woods, I could hear him, but I can't spot him until he gets right next to me. He's scared me badly several times by doing that unintentionally.

His martial skills are average, at least against other soldiers. When it comes to monsters, he excels. I wonder if it's a conscience issue?

I really think it was my friendship with Patrick that has benefited me so much. I've experienced actual battles, yet I'm still around. If he hadn't made that breakthrough against that orc king, I would be gone from this world.

I don't want to lose to him! I wish I could improve myself by hard training or something...

He was just here, now where did he go?

Has he disappeared behind a tree again...

Corporal Mirko's Perspective

My name is Mirko, I'm a Corporal of the Kingdom Army. I'm a commoner, so I enlisted in the army and started as a Private. Well, it was pretty easy to make it to Private First Class, I just needed to survive two battles.

That being said, many people get injured in those first two battles and are discharged.

It's been ten years since I enlisted, I made sure to be careful so I can survive. I was finally promoted to Corporal, so I'm a squad leader now. Squad leaders have two subordinate privates.

Our platoon leader is Second Lieutenant Patrick Riggsby, a member of a noble family. He's a young, average-looking, short man with a weak presence, but he's got a crazy side. When the going gets tough, he turns into something special.

Another person of note in my platoon is Master Sergeant Wayne Kimble, another squad leader of the platoon. He's another aristocrat, and you can really tell. He's a tall blonde, blue-eyed man, who even other men will admit is handsome. It feels like he's got an aura around him.

He's strong, fast and easy to rely on. The battle against the troll was won by those two people, without them I would just be a corpse in the forest.

I must be lucky to be in this platoon.

Now, where did the platoon leader go this time? Do I need to spend 30 minutes looking again?

Oh, the Master Sergeant recommends looking around the back of trees?

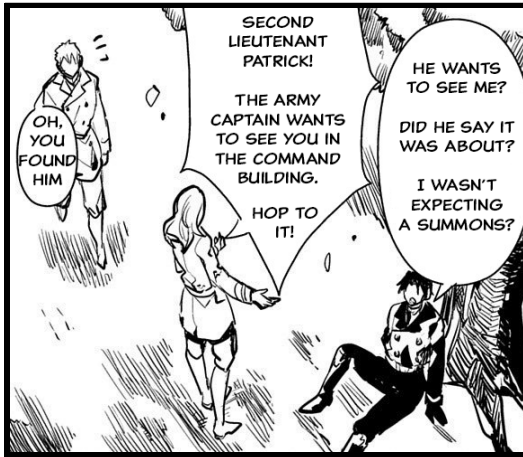
Ah, I finally found the platoon leader.



A month after the troll subjugation incident, I was resting behind a tree at the edge of the training ground. This particular tree has a wonderful breeze.

"Second Lieutenant Patrick! The Army captain wants to see you." **Wayne**

"Wants to see me? What did I do?" **Patrick**



"I was not informed, I was told to locate you and give you the order." **Wayne**

"Second Lieutenant Patrick! The Colonel wishes for you to appear immediately." **Corporal Mirko**

"The captain is aware that you're difficult to find, so he sent two messengers, just in case." **Wayne** quips while Corporal Mirko sniggers

"I wasn't trying to hide" **Patrick** retorts as he gets up

"If he doesn't mean to hide, why was he behind a tree?" **Corporal Mirko**

"If he intended to hide, I don't think I could find him." **Wayne** mutters



"So we are clearing the road?" **Patrick**

"Yes! Ten days from now, The Crown Prince will be visiting the Marquis of Dixon to the south. Before that, we must clean up the dangerous bandits and monsters. This is an order." **Colonel Reedon** commands as he hands me some paper

Maintaining Order: A very important responsibility of the Kingdom's military.

Since I'm now a Second Lieutenant, I was given command of a company. Three platoons of 10 soldiers each were gathered together to form the company. When you include the ten person logistics unit, my company comprises 40 people, plus myself to make a headcount

of 41.

I've convened a meeting of my platoon leaders to plan out the company's strategy.

"Where do you think we would encounter issues when cleaning up the main road? What do you think, Wayne?" **Patrick**

"Our biggest issue would be that bandit group, assuming there aren't any abnormal monsters." **Wayne**



Bandits are outlaws who lurk near highways to attack the carriages of merchants and rob them. Women and children are kidnapped while the men are killed in the attacks. Recently, there's allegedly a large group numbering more than 50, they've apparently been raiding merchants as well as aristocratic carriages.

In those cases, the captured aristocrats are held for ransom. The aristocratic houses try to keep the situation secret, since, given the chance, the kingdom would take control of the exchange in the hopes of capturing the bandits.

Recently, a baron's son was kidnapped, and the outcome was not good. It seems the baron didn't have the ransom money, so he asked for assistance from the kingdom. When the bandits arrived at the exchange location, they discovered the trap and escaped. The next morning, the baron's son's head was sitting in the royal capital's square. Since then, the

military has been attempting various operations to root out and eliminate the bandit group, but it has all been for naught.

"What has the military done to investigate?" **Patrick**

"It seems they will send a company to patrol along the road, so the bandits make sure to stay hidden those days." **Wayne**

"So they aren't foolish." **Patrick**

"Why would they take on the Kingdom's Army when there is nothing to steal that's worth the cost?" **Wayne**

"Even if they take the weapons, it wouldn't make up for the trouble." **Patrick**

We continue discussing the situation for a while. After a while, our discussion wraps up.

"I think we're ready to begin the operation. Tomorrow we'll prepare our supplies, then we'll leave early the day after. Make sure to get yourself and your platoon ready!" **Patrick**



With those words, I ended the meeting. Each platoon leader starts on their assigned preparations.



Five carriages are traveling down a certain highway. Any luggage has been covered by large tarps, but with several guards per carriage, it looked expensive. Normal bandit groups would have steered clear, but this group had a full 53 members, so the caravan guards were badly outnumbered. In addition, the guards would have to protect both the merchants and the cargo.

The bandit group's head grinned at the lookout's report.

"Bastards, let's get to work!" **Bandit Leader**

The carriages are approaching a bend in the road as the highway winds through some woods, just before it enters the marquis's territory. It would be a convenient ambush spot, the curve hides any enemies ahead...

Suddenly, an arrow pierces the lead carriage, the enemy attack has begun!

"Enemy Attack!" **Lead Carriage Guard**

The guards, who appear to be adventurers, pull out their swords and scan the area. Other guards that were armed with bows nock arrows and fire in the direction of the attack. There are a few cries of pain as a large group of bandits appear, shouting to inspire themselves and discourage the guards.

The guards fight with the bandits, fighting a losing battle as men from both sides fall to the ground. When the bandit leader sees the battle starting to turn, he charges from the forest with the rest of his men, yelling and screaming encouragement. Just as the bandit reinforcements arrive, the carriages have their tarps thrown aside and new well-armed guards emerge.

"Augh? What?" **Bandit Leader**

The bandit leader has yet to comprehend the danger of the additional guards, but the additional guards quickly turn the tide of battle.

Two Days Ago During the Planning Meeting

"So we'll disguise ourselves as a merchant caravan, then hide soldiers in each carriage, with the rest walking alongside. And we just wait to be attacked?" **Wayne**

"Yeah, if there are too many guards, the bandits will just hide out and not attack, right? If they can only see half of us, they'll be more likely to attack. In addition, if we get out too early, we won't get all of them. Whoever we miss can then inform the rest, and they'll escape to cause more trouble." **Patrick**

"Most bandits are failed farmers or disgraced adventurers, so we don't need to worry too much about their planning skills. We'll hold out until they feel sure of their victory, so all of them fall into the trap, then we counterattack and exterminate them." **Patrick**

My plan has gone well, the number of bandits that can still fight is dwindling quickly. Soon, the bandit leader starts looking around for an escape route. At that point, he shivers and turns around. An angry man with a head of black hair is swinging a sword with a grimace. That was the last thing the bandit leader Kashira saw.

"Report! Enemy, 51 bandits eliminated! 1 bandit captured! Allies, two people killed in action and three wounded. That's all!" **Platoon Leader**

"Who were the two killed?" **Patrick**

"Private First-Class Ed, Private Carter" **Platoon Leader**

"Ok, what about the three injured?" **Patrick**

"They have cuts on their arms, none are life-threatening or career-ending. All have been properly treated." **Platoon Leader**

"Then, send Kyle's squad to escort one carriage with the two killed in action and the three wounded back to the royal capital. The rest should stay to search the bandit's stronghold after I question the captured bandit. They may have captured citizens to be liberated."

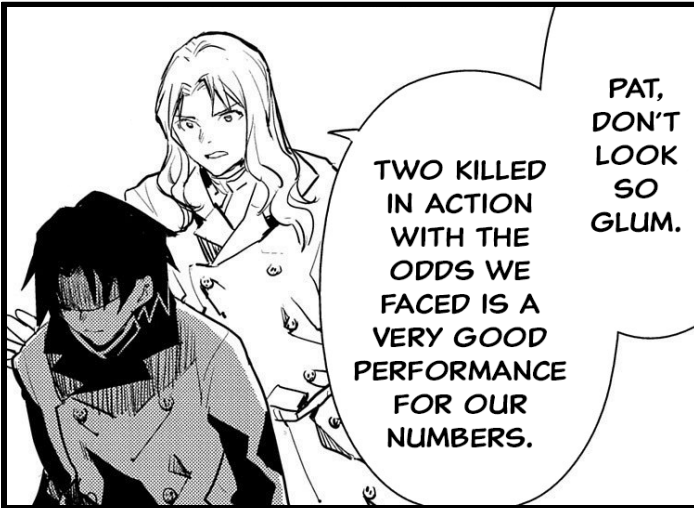
Patrick

"Ha!" **Platoon Leader**

Wayne approached me with a worried look on his face.

"Pat, don't be so disheartened. Two killed in action with those odds is well above average."

Wayne



"Wayne, I know. That being said, I still think that perhaps I could have done better. I feel bad for the two families." **Patrick**

Wayne pats me on the shoulder with a bitter look, then returns to the carriages.

The heads of the bandits were also piled into the returning carriage, to serve as a proof of subjugation. The heads will be exhibited at a certain area of the royal capital. None of the platoon soldiers noticed the tall bandit with brown hair fleeing deeper into the forest at full speed.

"So, where's your hideout?" **Soldier**

"No, I won't say it! You're just going to kill me, whether I tell you or not! Have fun trying to find it!" **Bandit**

I came over to check on the interrogation.

"So, how goes it? Did he spit it out?" **Patrick**

"No, no answers. Even if I hit him, he just curses and refuses to give it up." **Soldier**

"Would you like me to give it a try?" **Patrick** asks with a chuckle

"Do you really think you can do anything?" **Soldier**

"If I say something, I die. If I don't say anything, I still die. So I won't say nothing!" **Bandit**

"Ah, that's right. Then just keep your mouth closed. I'll take care of the speaking."

Patrick

I take a needle in my hand, then stick it beneath the bandit's fingernails, all while smiling at him.

"I won't talk with just this!" **Bandit**

I move on to tearing off fingernails and toenails with pliers, then I use the pliers to crush the finger bones, one by one. Next, I take a hammer and smash the destroyed fingers for a while.

Finally, I move on to breaking the shins, elbows, knees, and about that time the bandit faints, but I just smack his face until he comes to. I'm very careful to not go too far and kill him, that would be an unsuccessful interrogation.

The bandit was defiant at the beginning, but now he just trembles in a puddle of shame. A few of my soldiers are looking nervously in my direction.

"I'll talk, I'll talk" **Bandit**

"No, no, don't say it yet! I want to keep going and hurt you even more! I'm taking such care so you don't expire or bleed out! There's so much more you're due!" **Patrick**



I pull out a bottle while keeping my manic expression on my face. The bottle has a potion inside of it.

Potions are a medicine made in complete secrecy by the elves that heals wounds instantly when consumed. For some reason, it won't heal fatal wounds, even if the person has yet to expire. One theory is that fatal wounds are damaging to both body and spirit, and the potion cannot heal the spirit. Another rumor is that the elves dilute the potions before export or only sell the lower quality potions. A final theory is that the potion limitations are in place to protect the demand for elven recovery magic.

My three wounded subordinates have already been treated with potions, but there were more in the platoon's stock. So I'm free to force open the bandit's mouth and pour a potion down his throat. Soon, the injuries I inflicted had healed.

"Well, I think it's time for Round 2" **Patrick**

"I'll talk, please let me talk!" **Bandit**

After noting down the information from the bandit, I walked away from the interrogation area and Wayne took the chance to come over for a chat.

"Pat, did you go a bit too far? Don't the soldiers look spooked?" **Wayne**

"Really? I took it pretty easy on him, I thought?" **Patrick**

"All of that?" **Wayne**

"That was just a short session." **Patrick**

Compared to what I had to experience in the past, at least

"Are you sure? Most people get nervous or feel sick after killing bandits, but you look fine, right?" **Wayne**

"I look normal, don't I?" **Patrick**

"The first time I killed a bandit, I wasn't able to sleep that night." **Wayne**

"Softy!" **Patrick**

"Well, I may have been a bit weak..." **Wayne**

"Sorry, that was just a joke." **Patrick**

"Why aren't you bothered?" **Wayne**

"Huh? Well, they're just bandits? Weren't they trying to kill us? Do you really get nervous after killing someone try to murder you? Bandits are like cockroaches." **Patrick**

"So they're at the same level as cockroaches..." **Wayne**

I don't want to get into it here, but yes, to me, bandits have the same worth as cockroaches.

After a while hiking through the woods, we came near a cave.

"There?" **Patrick** asks the captured bandit

"Yeah, that's it." **Bandit**

"Ok, Wayne's platoon and my platoon are going in, the rest of you stay on lookout for any stragglers. I'm going in!" **Patrick**

Of course, I'm bringing the captured bandit along, so I can get some directions. I pick up a candle from the entrance, then we enter the cave.

There's a larder, a smaller area for other consumables (alcohol), an armory, a loot area, and further in...

"They they are, three of them, just like I said." **Bandit**

There's three prisoners in a makeshift jail area. The first is an old man, around 70 years old, with all white hair, blue eyes, and average height. There's also a young man, looks like a wolf beastman.

Finally, there's a boy of around 10 years old. He has shoulder-length blonde hair and green eyes. I wondered for a second if he was a girl, but the clothes were clearly tailored for a boy, so they must be a guy.



The three of them are looking at us.

"I am Second Lieutenant Patrick Riggsby of the Kingdom's First Army. Earlier today, my army company defeated a bandit group, and when we learned they had taken hostages, my group rushed here to liberate them. I understand you are part of the nobility, so may I please have your name." **Patrick**

"The Kingdom's Army! Thank you! I'm Carlos, the guard is named Mark, and we were escorting Kevin Dixon, the third son of the Marquis." **Carlos**

So... Dixon? Marquis family?

"What?" **Patrick**

I didn't expect someone from a Marquis house to be captured by bandits, even if they were a group of such size.

"I will free you from your prison shortly, so please move away from the bars." **Patrick**

Once the three had moved away, I swing my sword twice. Several iron bars fall to the ground with a crash.

"Thank you for your assistance. We are most appreciative." **Carlos**

"I just happened to be in the area on assignment." **Patrick**

"No, I must report your actions properly to my lord." **Carlos**

"But I was only carrying out my duty." **Patrick**

"Did you say your family name was Riggsby?" **Carlos**

Right, I'm not a noted member of my family, I'm essentially disowned.

"Yes, the Riggsby family, I'm afraid to say. My name is Patrick, the third son. Well, the family cut ties with me, so no consideration needs to be paid to them." **Patrick**

I must make my situation clear.

"Then, I will just thank Patrick, who is here now." **Carlos**

"But, I was only carrying out my duty." **Patrick**

The Dixon boy hasn't said anything yet, but he chooses to speak up now.

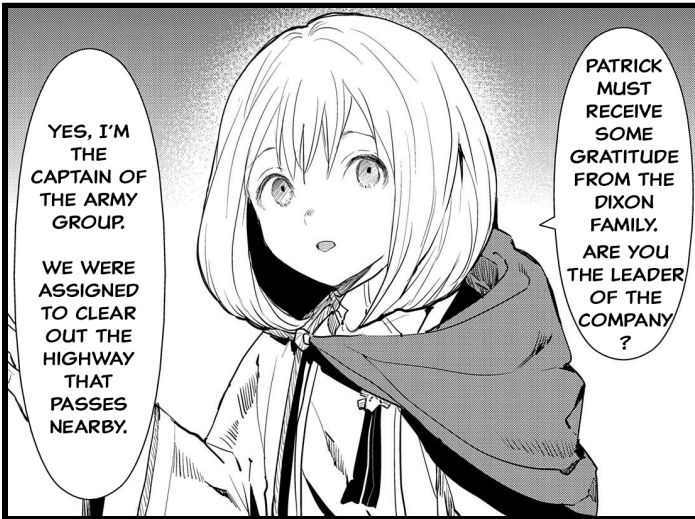
"If Patrick does not receive some gratitude from the Marquis family, it will shame the savior of a family member. Are you the commander of the company." **Kevin Dixon**

So, he's a quiet and clever boy. I guess it makes sense for a Marquis family. I can definitely tell he's a boy now that he spoke up.

"For the time being, I'm the leader of the company." **Patrick**

"For your young age, you're doing well for yourself." **Carlos**

"In that case, I'll have to make sure you receive a proper amount of gratitude. Even though you were only following your orders, the fact that I was saved remains!" **Kevin Dixon**



I can't keep refusing, any further would be rude.

"I understand, for the moment, let's get moving." **Patrick** concedes with a bow

"Ok, let's get back to the road! We'll confiscate their weapons and plunder, so pack it up to carry it back. Wayne, take charge of the packing!" **Patrick**

"Understood, Second Lieutenant Patrick!" **Wayne**

It seems that we're both a little overly formal in front of a Marquis family member, I flashed a cheeky grin at Wayne.

We returned to the road without any real trouble. I put the three formerly captured people on a single carriage, then filled the other two with loot. As we moved down the road to the Marquis territory, the cargo carriages were filled up with proofs of subjugation for goblins and orcs, plus boar carcasses and bear pelts from the animals we encountered.

"The Kingdom Army is amazing. So they can just instantly kill an orc or a green bear?" **Kevin Dixon**

"Wayne is a good soldier!" **Patrick**

"It's true that Wayne is quite skilled! But Patrick defeated just as many as him, right?" **Carlos**

"Both our company commander and platoon leader are strong! Especially the company commander." **Soldier A**

"A message! From the lead carriage, a large-scale force of armed people ahead!" **Soldier B**

"How many?" **Patrick**

"It is over a hundred!" **Soldier B**

"Are they bandits?" **Patrick**

"No, they are carrying a flag!" **Soldier B**

"Flag? Hmm, I bet I know who they are. They're most likely soldiers of the Marquis family! Stop the troops! Raise our flag!" **Patrick**

"Sound right to you?" **Patrick** asks Carlos

"Around two days after our abduction? Makes too much sense. I wouldn't bet against it." **Carlos**

Captain Rahal's Perspective

"Captain Rahal! There are several carriages and adventurers ahead!" **Soldier**

"Is it a merchant caravan?" **Rahal**

I don't have the time to deal with merchants right now. Two days have passed since the master's son was expected to return to the territory. There have been rumors of a bandit group in the area, but an investigation had been stalled due to lack of manpower. The territory's army was busy with an outbreak of monsters and was unable to patrol the main road.

I never expected the bandits would send a letter to the Marquis. A ransom letter was delivered to the Marquis by a merchant. It seems the merchant had been robbed of all his goods, but was allowed to leave with his life in exchange for delivering the letter.

"If they are just merchants, ignore them!" **Rahal** ordered

"Oh, it seems they've raised a flag! They're part of the Kingdom Army!" **Soldier**

"Send the lead cavalryman to check on them!" **Rahal**

"Ha, understood!" **Soldier**



I spot a rider heading over to my company.

"Are you the Kingdom Army? I'm a cavalryman of the Rahal unit under Marquis Dixon, Letterman! I wish to talk with the commander of the unit!" **Letterman**



"I'm Second Lieutenant Patrick Riggsby of the First Army of the Kingdom. I'm in command of this company!" **Patrick**

The short, red-haired and blue-eyed man who named himself as Letterman dismounts his horse.

"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, for what purpose is your unit deployed?" **Letterman**

"Under military orders, I was practicing a cleanup of dangerous monsters and bandits from the highway, but located a son of Marquis Dixon while clearing a bandit hideout. I was taking him and his escorts back to safety, when I encountered your force." **Patrick**

"Are you serious?!" **Letterman**

"Let me take you to them, please follow me!" **Patrick**

I take the cavalryman over to the carriage where the three people were located.

"Letterman, here they are!" **Patrick** responds as he pulls back the carriage covering.

"Letterman! All three of us are safe!" **Kevin Dixon** smiles

"Oh! Kevin! Carlos and Mark! I'll report this to the captain immediately! Second Lieutenant Riggsby! Please excuse me to report this to my captain and the unit, I'll be right back." **Letterman** requests with a short bow to Patrick

"Understood, Letterman." **Patrick**

Letterman hurriedly mounted his horse and rode back to his unit.

"I was able to confirm Kevin's safety! It seems he was rescued by a unit from the Kingdom Army." **Letterman**

After hearing the report, Rahal strokes his chin.

"All troops, form up with the Kingdom Army!" **Rahal**

"Thank you very much for this, I'm not really sure how to thank you. My name is Rahal, military command for the Marquis territory." **Rahal** says as he bows his head

"Rahal, please raise your head. My name is Patrick Riggsby of the Kingdom Army. I was simply fortunate that I was able to assist in this situation." **Patrick**

"Let me guide you to Kevin, this way, please." **Patrick**

"Oh! Rahal! I'm safe!" **Kevin**

"Oh, Master Kevin! This Rahal has let you fall into such an unpleasant situation through no fault of your own, and I will undergo any punishment you deem necessary. At least let me ensure you make it back to the mansion safely!" **Rahal**

"Rahal had no responsibility for my incident. Though I will ask that you escort me to the mansion!" **Kevin**

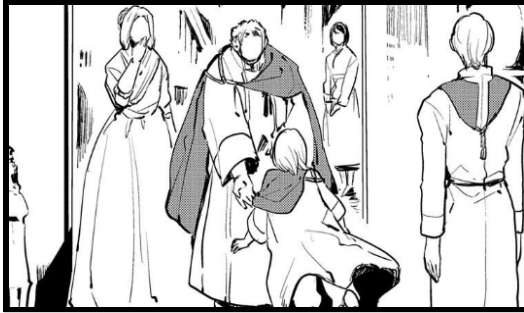
"As you wish!" **Rahal**

"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, please come along with us to the mansion!" **Rahal**

"Ah! I'll gladly take you up on your offer." **Patrick**

The militia led the way to the Marquis's mansion, with my company following close behind. I saw two cavalry gallop away, most likely riding to the mansion to report. I hope I can get some compliments and space for my soldiers to rest in the Marquis territory. That much would be allowable as a gift for a military officer, right?

We've made it safely to Marquis Dixon's mansion. After joining up with Rahal's unit, we encountered no more incidents on the way. I got to witness a moving reunion between Marquis Dixon and his son Kevin.



After that I received various words of gratitude, then a dinner was set up for myself and the soldiers with the Marquis family. I received further thanks from the Marquis, after the dinner wrapped, then I was caught by the Marquis while the rest of the unit left.

"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, do you have a moment?" **Marquis Dixon**

There's no way to decline, so I nod.

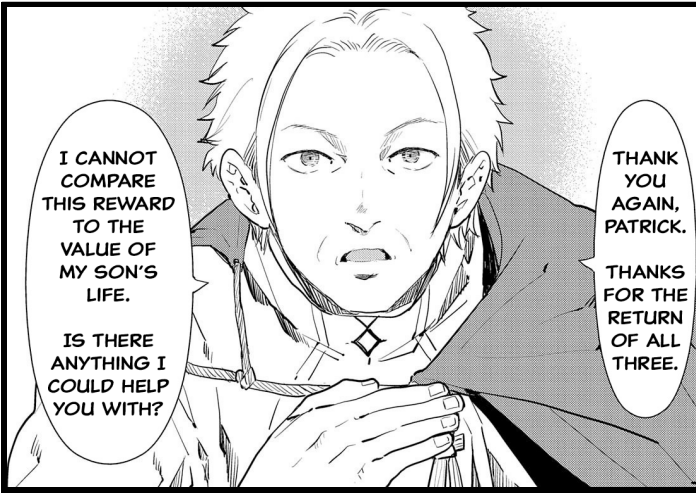
"Thank you again. Thank you not only for the return of Kevin, but also the two escorts as well." **Marquis Dixon** states as he slightly lowers his head.

"I've very happy that we were able to rescue your son, we are all grateful for your kindness during our mission." **Patrick**

The Marquis rewarded each soldier with a gold coin, and I was given ten coins. If you turned that into Japanese yen is would be somewhere around 50 million (\$625,000) the Marquis spent.

"No, I can't compare your reward to my son's life." **Marquis Dixon**

While we received a generous reward, it isn't a particularly large amount for a Marquis. The more significant action is him bowing his head to a soldier, one who is an insignificant third son of a failing Baron family. It seems Marquis Dixon is a humble man.



"My son is safe, and I avoided the humiliation of being held to ransom by bandits. I feel like I'm unable to convey my gratitude. Patrick Riggsby, is there something you are interested in? A Marquis has a lot of connections." **Marquis Dixon**

Can I even take something? I'm here under the orders of the Kingdom Army?

"If you can't think of anything right now, then when you encounter a problem in the future, feel free to consult me." **Marquis Dixon**

I nodded to that offer.

I slept soundly in a soft bed under a roof tonight, and woke up feeling quite refreshed. This is so much better than a tent or carriage. I had breakfast and chatted with the refreshed soldiers of my company.

"Then, Marquis, Kevin, we will be returning to the royal capital." **Patrick**

After salutations, the company left to patrol the road back to the capital. We encountered a few orcs on the way back, but no more bandits. It seems the large bandit group must have absorbed or pushed out any other bandit groups in the area.

"The cleanup mission for monsters and bandits has been completed with all reasonable speed." **Patrick**

I'm reporting the situation to my commander, though I'm keeping Kevin a secret. It's a matter of saving face for the Marquis. The gold coins count as part reward and part hush money. It's an unwritten rule.

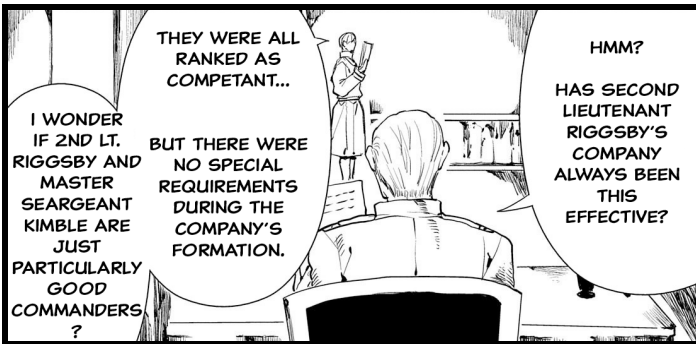
"You've had a rough time! Your soldiers must be tired. I've approved two off-duty days for your company." **Commander**

"Ah! Thank you for your consideration. Excuse me!" **Patrick**

It happened! I've got a vacation!

"Hmm? Has Second Lieutenant Riggsby's soldiers always been this effective?"
Commander

"They should have been competent, but there was no personal selection or particular requirements to the company's incorporation. I wonder if Second Lieutenant Riggsby and Master Sergeant Wayne are particularly good commanders?" **Adjutant**



"Well, this clears up any issues for the Prince's visit to the Marquis" **Commander**

"Yes, if His Highness hadn't wanted to move with such few guards, we wouldn't have needed the cleanup." **Adjutant**

"His Highness has always disliked moving with a large number of escorts." **Commander**

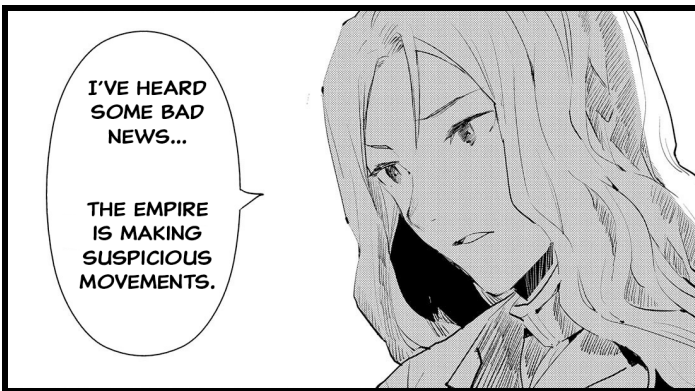
"That preference of his has always been troublesome." **Adjutant**

"Indeed" **Commander**

Chapter 2: The Empire Attacks

The visit of the Crown Prince to the Marquis's territory looks to have been completed successfully. It seems that the visit was to finalize the engagement between Crown Prince William and Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the Marquis.

While most people were celebrating the good news, the army received news of a different sort.



"So, the empire is making suspicious movements?" **Patrick**

"I heard they're importing a lot of food and iron, right?" **Wayne**

That sounds like logistics and weapons manufacturing?

"Who's the opponent?" **Patrick**



"If I was a betting man, I'd put all my money on our Kingdom" **Wayne**

"Yeah, we're not on good terms with the Empire." **Patrick**

The Sabine Empire is located to the west of the Kingdom. They advocate the principle of human superiority and summarily discriminate against non-human races.

While our kingdom is ruled by humans, it does not tolerate discrimination against and welcomes non-human immigrants, so there are plenty of elves, dwarves, and beastmen that live happily in the kingdom. There are even aristocrats who wed non-human spouses.

Since the kingdom shares a border with the empire, territorial disputes and water rights issues appear regularly, most recently about a mine on the border. That part of the border is a mountain ridgeline with an iron mine in one of the mountains there; it's currently controlled by the Kingdom. Diplomats have been working hard to precisely place the border to eliminate complaints about the mine.

"Are they planning on taking over the mine first?" **Patrick**

"That country doesn't have many iron deposits, so I guess they hunger to take over such a rich deposit that's right on their border." **Wayne**

"Isn't the Western Army and Marquis Westin's Army guarding the border? What's your thoughts?" **Patrick**

"Well, the Western Army isn't a pushover, so it won't be possible to just roll in. The problem is Marquis Westin's army." **Wayne**

"Has the Marquis not been keeping up his army?" **Patrick**

"It seems the Marquis has been buying jewelry, dresses, precious metals, and so on. Well, he could raise gold by selling the jewelry and precious metals, but dresses won't sell for

much of their purchase price." **Wayne**

"I've heard he's been running some underground gambling, have you heard that?" **Patrick**

"Seriously? Underground gambling, that's a high-risk operation, right?" **Wayne**

"What do you think the Marquis has gotten himself into?" **Patrick**

"You're talking too loud! What if someone hears us?" **Wayne**

"Oh, sorry, sorry." **Patrick**

I've got a bad feeling about this.

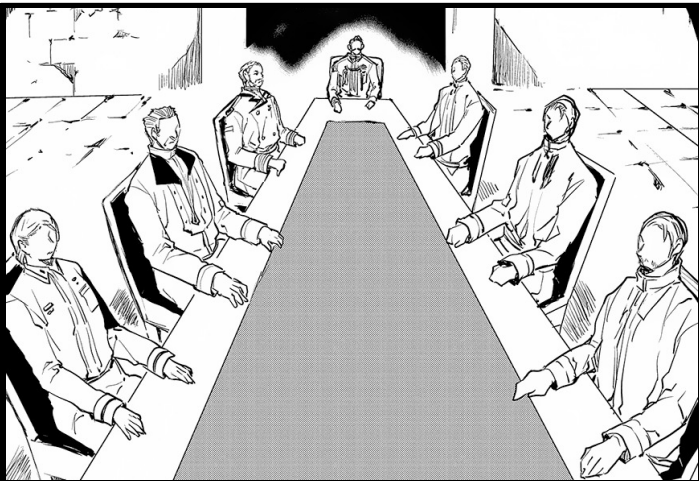
"The empire is moving?!"

"Yes, it looks like they're moving towards us."

Rumors are flying around the military.

In the Royal Castle

There were old men in fancy dress, old men in military uniforms and old men with wrinkled faces. The king, his generals, and the Kingdom's ministers have gathered together.



"So?" a **silver-haired man** asked

"Currently, the Western Army is holding the Empire at the border." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

Prime Minister Bendrick has a slightly thick build with narrow eyes.

"What is Westin playing at?" **King** asks while slamming his fist on the table

"Apparently, he continues to claim that he is working on preparing his soldiers." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"He has nobody to prepare, he reduced his troops below reasonable levels. He is not meeting the responsibility of a noble with a border territory!" **Lieutenant General Simon** interjects

Lieutenant General Simon is a fit old man with short white hair and a mustache.

"There are rumors his wife was spending gold like hot water." **Minister**

"It's not a rumor, more of a generally-known fact? I've been looking into his taxes, but he makes sure to pay the assessed amount. We've been using a wait-and-see approach." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"Didn't the Western Army have 2,000 soldiers?" **King**

"Yes! 2,000 soldiers were stationed at the fort, 1,000 have since been ordered from the Southern Army to reinforce the fort, as well as a reconnaissance team that was sent ahead of the 1,000." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Hmm, we may need to dispatch the Royal Capital Army as well, so be prepared." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"Hah!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Well, the Western Army shouldn't fall anytime soon." **King**

"Yes!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Since the South is a friendly country, it should be fine to move 1,000, but the North and East armies can't send reinforcements." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

The north has various tribes that often invade Kingdom territory, while the East has a wild forest known as the Dragon's Nest. The Eastern Army often has to deal with wild wyverns that fly into Kingdom territory.

The next day, terrible news arrived at the royal castle.

"What? Westin has turned?" **King**

"Hah! The Western Army was attacked by Marquis Westin's Army from the rear, turning the situation into a pincer operation where the Western Army suffered numerous losses. Major General Lanigan was lost in the fighting. The remaining troops retreated to the south, joining up with the Southern Army reinforcements. That group is currently engaged in a standoff with a force of Imperial and Westin troops.

I was dispatched to report the situation by the Major General of the Southern Army."

Soldier

"Even someone of Lanigan's skill..." **Minister**

"The Major General sent the troops away saying 'I'll hold them back, everyone should retreat to the south.'" **Soldier**

"Westin! You made a secret deal with the Empire?! Move the royal capital troops to reinforce! Hurry up! We've got to wipe out the traitor Westin and the Imperial troops!"

King

"Ha! Then I will move to begin preparations! Excuse me!" **General**



"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, you're ordered to move out." **Commander**

My eyes widen as I read the orders I was just handed.

"The Marquis Westin Army..." **Patrick**

"It seems they've changed sides." **Commander**

"Are you sure about me? I am a son of the Riggsby family, who is also from the Western area and the family is known to be loyal to the Westin family. Knowing my less-than-reputable parents, I'm very sure they're going to be on the Westin side of this conflict."

Patrick



"What?" **Commander**

"I have no intentions of betraying the country, even if the rest of my family has followed that path. But will the commanding officers believe that?" **Patrick**

"Hmm, give me a little time. I'll check on the decision." **Commander**

"So, if it would be a problem, just lock me in a prison cell until the rebellion is dealt with. Wayne is a fine commander of the troops." **Patrick**

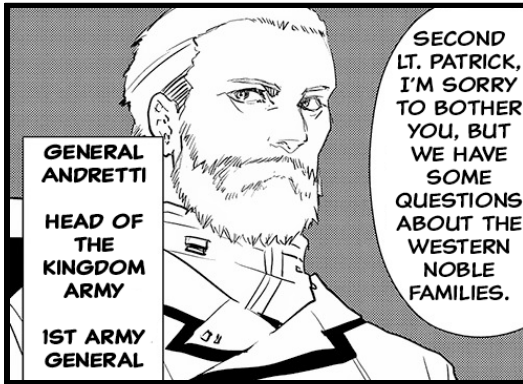
"I'll let your superiors know that is an option." **Commander**

"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, the higher-ups want to ask you some questions."

Commander

A little while later, I enter a room with several high-ranking officers. I'm a little surprised they're so high-ranking, and not just military, but some high-ranking members of the government.

"Second Lieutenant Riggsby, we're sorry to bother you, but we have some questions for you." **General Andretti**



General Andretti is around 50 years old with red hair and a fine beard. He has a muscular body and around 180 cm (a little under 6 feet). He's the top-ranking army personnel, the only one higher is the king himself, who is also here.

"Ah, excuse me." **Patrick**

There is a conspicuous empty chair for me to sit in, so I do.

"My question is around how deep the relationship between the Westin and Riggsby families is. It's known that they're connected, but is it deep enough for the Riggsby family to join the Westin family and the Empire?" **General Andretti**

Certainly, it's not sure that the Riggsby family would take the risk, at least from a distance.

"First of all, I should explain the Riggsby family situation.

My remaining parent, my mother has passed away, that's my father and his legal wife. She's the mother of my two half-brothers, they all have expensive tastes. Everyone here understands that taxes are split between the national government and the local nobility.

But what happens when the Baron's wife spends more than the territory's budget on jewelry alone each year, notwithstanding any of her other expensive habits. What does the Riggsby family do? Beg for more loans from the Westin family, obviously.

At this point, I think the debt owed by the Riggsby family is enormous. If the Westin family suggested to lower the interest or reduce the principal? Well, the Riggsby's would jump at it.

Furthermore, if they changed sides, the Empire allows each lord to set the tax rate for their territory. If the Riggsby family was given the chance to become an Imperial noble family? I doubt they would think more than a second before agreeing." **Patrick**

"Do you have any evidence they've turned?" **General Andretti**

"I do not, but I would be very careful when interacting with them to be sure I was not betrayed." **Patrick**

"Why are you so detached and distrusting of the other members of your noble family?" **General Andretti**

"Do you want to hear about my background? It may take a little while." **Patrick**

After I'm done with my piece, there's a dark atmosphere in the room.

"Ok, I think Second Lieutenant Riggsby has a good grasp on the situation, so we should act as if the Riggsby family has turned sides. Second Lieutenant Riggsby, do you have anything else?" **King**

"Yes, your Majesty! I know of several other likely houses that would join with the Westin's." **Patrick**

"What!" **Several people** shouted

"There are several territories in the Western area that have exceedingly poor farm yields. The Westin family was happy to loan them money under the guise of support. The lords of those territories are likely to be far more loyal to the Westin family than the Kingdom. Some have even offered their daughters to the Westin house to reduce their loan amounts." **Patrick**

"Can you list those houses?" **King**

"Yes, there is the Viscount Harter, the Baron Carey, and the Baron Hazy." **Patrick**

"The territories of those families do seem a bit barren, but Second Lieutenant, how have you learned so much? If you were so loathed by your family, why would you know these things?" **King**

"The maid who served my mother when she was alive ensured I had a current understanding of the surrounding political environment. She has since returned to my mother's family, the Baron Canaan family, but she continues to send me updates occasionally by letter." **Patrick**

"Hmm, well I think you've helped us understand the general situation. I'll leave the army maneuvers to General Andretti. I do have an assignment for you, Second Lieutenant Riggsby, since you seem to be a good problem-solver. You're not completely off the hook, but I think it's fine to trust you." **King**

"Thank you! So what is your request?" **Patrick**

The meeting continued, with me getting some interesting high-risk high-reward orders.

"Now, Second Lieutenant Riggsby, you must carry out your new orders! I'll leave the selection of soldiers to you. Everyone else, stick to your original orders! We will drive the empire back and the traitors will meet their end!" **General Andretti**

At this point, everyone in the room stood up and saluted the general (except the king, of course).

I'll need to move quickly.

"Wayne! The General has given me a royal edict, so I'll need to move independently for now. You will take command of the company in my absence." **Patrick**



"What?" **Wayne**

"I need you to lead the company..." **Patrick**

"Whoah, uh, wait a minute! Royal edict? General? What happened?"

By Royal edict, do you mean the General issued it to you? On behalf of His Majesty the King, right?

What? Huh?

I'm taking command of a company while I'm still a Master Sergeant?

Why can't you lead the company?" **Wayne**

"I can't give you all the details, but I'm grabbing two specific people I'll need. Don't worry too much, I'm sure you're qualified to handle it. Fight hard!" **Patrick** says as he runs off

"What's going on?" **Wayne** mutters to no one in particular

I grab Corporal Mirko and Private Colton, the one with a sleepy face and short blond hair and brown eyes. The two are the only soldiers, excepting Wayne, who have managed to find me when I'm taking a break. Also, they are able to ride a running dragon.

What's a running dragon?

Well, normally, the army moves on foot or horseback. Given sufficient training, pretty much any person can ride a horse.

A running dragon is a reptilian monster shaped like a ostrich. They're one of the very few species of tamable monsters. They have scales instead of feathers like the ostrich, eat both plants and animals, run fast, tolerant of heat, but weak to cold.

They are particular, but if one running dragon accepts a person, nearly all running dragons will accept that person. Apparently it may be something about scent? Some researchers have put forward that as the reason, but I don't think it's been properly tested. It does seem to be genetic, as children where both parents can ride, will always be able to ride.

My guess is that it's something to do with an odor...

I inform the other two of our mission and prepare their equipment.

The two were upset, but I was able to smooth things over and we left only two hours after the meeting concluded.



The Royal Army departs from the royal capital. In addition to the thousands of soldiers, they're also bringing many horses and hundreds of carriages. Behind the carriages march the infantry.

Somewhere in the infantry, there's the Riggsby company, led by Wayne. Wayne hasn't been informed why Patrick isn't commanding, but he knows to follow his orders.

Good armies follow orders.

After several days on the road to the western area of the kingdom, the army should enter the Westin territory tomorrow. At least, that's what they thought.

Suddenly an arrow flew into the army.

"Enemy attack! Enemy attack!" **Soldier**

"So the Westin family actually betrayed us? I was skeptical of the reports." **Lieutenant General Simon**

If the Westin family hadn't betrayed the Kingdom, it would have been impossible for the reinforcements to be attacked here. Even if troops had been lost, the remaining numbers would be able to restrain the Empire troops by holding various forts.

Lieutenant General Simon issues orders as the Kingdom Army clashes with the Westin army.



The enemy they're facing is around several thousand, he estimates. In addition to the Westin flag, Simon notices the flags of other Kingdom aristocrats, and the Empire flag.

"So it was exactly as he said? Shame on the kingdom!" **Lieutenant General Simon** curses

Westin mansion

"Report! In the Sahara grasslands east of the territory, fighting with the Kingdom Army has commenced. Westin forces have the upper hand!" **Messenger**

"Good to hear!" **Marquis Westin**

The Westin family had immediately sent out forces to build a fort in a certain area even before they had attacked the Western Army. The plan was to grab all possible advantages before their allegiance switch was noticed.

"We can't just drive them back, they would just fortify in our path to the royal capital, we must exterminate them." **Marquis Westin**

The head of the Westin family is greasy, bald and fat. Not all aristocratic family heads are good looking.

"Are you sure this is going to end well? If we fail, we're in bad trouble?" **Baron Riggsby** worries

Baron Riggsby is a slender man with long brown hair, maybe a little taller than Patrick.

"Shut up! When you were told you could get rid of your debt by joining, it was you, Baron Riggsby, that took only two seconds before agreeing!" **Rudolph van Ceu**

Baron Riggsby visibly shudders at the response as three other men look anxiously on. The three men were Viscount Harter, and the Barons Carey and Hazy.

"Our soldiers are reinforcing yours, so we'll win." **Rudolph van Ceu**

Rudolph van Ceu is the third prince of the Empire, who concocted this whole scheme to draw in the Kingdom aristocrats into changing sides. He's a slender man around 20 years old.

"That's fine, because we can't pull back anymore without issues." **Marquis Westin**

"If you win, all of you will become Imperial aristocrats, don't worry so much." **Rudolph van Ceu** grins



The Kingdom Army is fighting under the command of Lieutenant General Simon, but they're struggling against the Westin Army's fort. Even though it was made of logs covered with boards, it was quite effective. Arrows flew like rain from the fort, so it was difficult to approach.

The Kingdom's Army fires back, but nearly all their arrows are stopped by the fort's walls. Under the barrage, the Kingdom Army was taking losses.

"Dismantle the carriages to make shields! It's enough to stop the arrows!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Can you really consider this a shield?" **Wayne**

The shield he was handed was a board from the carriage with a small handle attached.

"I guess it's better than nothing?" **Wayne**



He holds the shabby shield like an umbrella to stop the arrows from falling down on him. It can't stop all the arrows on the sides though.

As the army gets closer to the fort, the Westin army starts to take aimed shots, where they aren't saturating an area, but shooting at a specific person. The army changes the placement of the shield to more of a diagonal space relative to the fort. Some arrows pierce through the makeshift shield and kill the soldier on the spot.

Finally, a few soldiers reached the fort.

Wayne inserts his two-handed sword into the fortifications and pries the board loose. He and the other soldiers find that there are no foot soldiers around, just archers.

"I can fight like this!" **Wayne** grins as he jumps into the fort

The archers are felled by Wayne and the other soldiers one after another. Archers take time to line up each arrow, and the archers were not issued shortswords to defend themselves. It's difficult to line up an arrow when a swordsman is coming straight for you.

As the archers were disrupted, the Kingdom Army outside the fort saw the arrow rain lose most of its strength, meaning more of the Kingdom Army could approach and enter the fort.

As Wayne and the company were eliminating the archers, smoke rose from the back of the fort, but it was unnoticed as of yet.

"Be careful! I hear Cavalry!" **Wayne** shouts

Cavalry, or soldiers in metal armor on a horse. Infantry generally has leather armor, since it's difficult to move quickly with metal armor. Metal armor is used when the wearer isn't required to move quickly, like when riding a horse.

Wayne manages to avoid the cavalryman with a spear. The horse can't run overly fast due to the weight of the armor. Wayne slashes the horse as it runs by, so it bucks before running off and the rider is knocked to the ground.

The rider attempts to stand up, but Wayne stabs him through a gap in the armor before the rider can regain his feet. In order to move with armor, the armor must have gaps for joints. You can't move without them.

"Oof" **the Rider** cries as he collapses to the ground

Not every soldier is as skilled as Wayne. Many Kingdom soldiers fall prey to the cavalry.

"Don't falter! Secure a position to defend!" **Wayne** orders

"Just a little more, Kingdom cavalry should be here soon! Endure!" **Wayne**

As the Kingdom cavalry rushed in, the Westin Army and the Imperial Army found themselves with a major issue. The Kingdom cavalry was quickly taking down the rebel cavalry.

Spears are quickly downing the horses, then the riders are taken out.

When most of the rebel cavalry had been eliminated, more Imperial reinforcements arrive.

"They've got more..." **a Kingdom Soldier** mutters

The soldier is not alone in thinking that, most of the Kingdom Army would have the same opinion. The bulk of the Imperial Army should be dealing with the Western and Southern Army, not be fighting here.

What are all these soldiers doing here?

Lieutenant General Simon desperately calls out to the despairing Kingdom Army to continue the battle, before he spies black smoke rising from the enemy camp.

"The enemy's food store is on fire! The plan succeeded! They've got no food! If we can hold them for today, we've won!" **Lieutenant General Simon** shouts



Was that really their food stores? The soldiers aren't really sure, but the Lieutenant General seems very sure.

The reinvigorated Kingdom Army takes on the rapidly demoralizing Imperial and rebel forces.

The morale has flipped in an instant.

Patrick's Independent Action

Patrick travels through the woods on a running dragon, accompanied by Corporal Mirko, Private Colton, and Sergeant Josh, an Inspector General. Sergeant Josh is around 30 years old with a lean physique with a fringe of blonde hair and blue eyes, around 180 cm tall (a little under 6 feet).

A major advantage to the running dragon is that it can move in the forest quicker than a horse. It's also near silent while it's moving and it's smarter than a horse. On the other hand, it can't carry the same weight as a horse and it's slower than a horse on a road. So it can carry one person, with light armor at best, and you can forget about pulling a carriage or wagon.

The reason this group is moving through the woods is so they won't be spotted.

"So, Second Lieutenant Patrick, what's your strategy." **Mirko**

"Pretty simple, I'll sneak into the enemy's camp and set fire to their food stores, while you three stay hidden and observe." **Patrick**

"Eh? No, you'll just..."

Hmm?

Well, it is the Second Lieutenant we're talking about..." **Mirko**

"Yes, I'm the only one that will be invading and setting the fire. You two will act as the escort for the inspector general. If I fail for some unknown reason, you three should escape and rejoin the Kingdom Army." **Patrick**

"If the Second Lieutenant is trying to stay hidden, I pity the enemy attempting to find him. I don't think I would be up to the task." **Mirko**

"Is he really so hard to find? I heard he was able to sneak behind orcs?" **Josh**

"That's exactly what happened. Sometime I just hear him, but I can't see him at all." **Mirko**

"Am I really that bad?" **Patrick**

"Absolutely!" **Mirko & Colton**

While the Kingdom Army was approaching the area, four figures were discussing something behind the fort.

"For the time being, I'm going to sneak in and kill an enemy so I can take their uniform. I'll be gone for a while, you three should stay here for now." **Patrick** explained before he started into the enemy fort

I moved behind a tent where I found a soldier, restrained him, then killed him with a dagger thrust into his neck. I dragged him into the empty tent.

"Ok, now time to get into disguise." **Patrick**

I removed the armor and uniform from the soldier. The equipment varies a bit from the Kingdom Army to each noble's army. The Kingdom Army's armor has the emblem of the Kingdom placed in prominent space, while the Westin equipment has their crest in a similar but different area. I'm changing my armor just in case I'm spotted.

"Well, I'm ready. My running dragon is with those three, so it should be fine." **Patrick**

Nobody seems to be suspicious of me, even though I'm not greeting anyone by name. It seems I just fade into the background.

Do you know anyone who is especially indistinguishable? Someone who should be there, but you're still surprised when they start talking? Or when everyone gets a slice of cake, they're the one forgotten? A person who you would look past when looking for them? Is there a person like that?

Well, I am that type of person.

"Is this it?" **Patrick**



I stepped into a large tent near the back where I saw some carts laden with food leaving a few minutes ago. I see sacks of wheat, barrels of dried meat, and bags of dried fruits. I splash the oil I'm carrying over the sacks. I made sure to grab some strike anywhere matches before I left the royal capital, so I lit one and threw it onto the sacks.

Once the fire had gone past the point of no return, I left the tent.

"I wonder, should I go ahead and burn some command tents?" **Patrick** mused

Some of the tents have people inside them, as I pass by one, I splash oil then light it. Somehow, nobody noticed anything, until they saw the smoke and piled out.

While most of the soldiers were running around in an attempt to fight the fire, one seemed to recognize Patrick.

"Oh no, is that the guy who took out the bandit group?" **One man** whispered

This soldier had previously been a bandit, but escaped into the forest while Patrick was cleaning up the highway. He escaped to the Westin territory, where he was hired as a soldier, and then found himself here.

"I'm not getting in the way of that grim reaper! I'm escaping this place, no way I'll survive sticking around here." **One man** mutters

That man ran towards the border with all possible speed.

The center of the enemy's camp was on fire. I threw the last of the oil I had at the largest tent along with a lit match, then left.

"I'm back." **Patrick**

It was just two words, but the three people I said it to almost jumped out of their skins.

"Second Lieutenant, when you're meeting up with allies, could you be a little more obvious? Make louder footsteps or something, please?" **Mirko**

"Well, the fire is burning out of control and visible from here, so you should expect me to be arriving about now." **Patrick**

"I'm not surprised about any of this." **Private Colton**

"Well, fully successful?" **Mirko**

"No problems, I'll just change my armor and we'll be off." **Patrick**

Westin Commander's Perspective

"How many tents have burned?" **Westin Commander**

"About twenty, most importantly, nearly all of the food storage was burned." **Soldier**

"Idiots! What were those soldiers doing? Can we even fight tomorrow after this?" **Westin Commander**

However this commander isn't blameless. He was sleeping in one of the big tents that Patrick ignited, so the commander had a burn from that fire.

"Sorry, but none of the soldiers report any suspicious people." **Soldier**

"It's obviously the enemy! It's Arson! Tents don't normally burst into flames!" **Westin Commander**

"You're right, but nobody has reported anything suspicious." **Soldier**

"They're all incompetent! Send a messenger to the main army!" **Westin Commander**

"Ha! Immediately!" **Soldier**

The rebels have abandoned their forward fort and are withdrawing to a fortress in the west, but the Kingdom Army is in close pursuit. The rebels have little food to eat, almost no water, even their salt supplies were lost.

Their physical strength and morale were down, so a considerable amount were taken down by the arrows, swords, and spears of the Kingdom Army.

"Blonde Devil!" **Rebel Soldier**

Wayne attacks the rebels, recklessly stabbing with his spear.

Once the rebels around him are defeated, he retorts.

"Who is the devil? I'm just a man!" **Wayne**

After his short breather, Wayne moves to the next knot of soldiers.



The rebel army is entering the gate of a western fort.

"How many soldiers made it here?" **Rebel Commander**

"Probably about 500" **Rebel Lieutenant**

"Oh, we've really been hit hard." **Rebel Commander**

The rebels are down to 1,000 Imperial troops, 500 Westin troops, and 500 from the other four traitor houses. Three quarters of the original force have been lost.

It was a catastrophic loss for the rebels.

"What are our casualties?" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"I'd say around 400 killed and 200 wounded." **Soldier**

"That's pretty beaten up... But we would have easily lost twice as many without the good work of Second Lieutenant Patrick." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Sure, but here's the problem. The next fort is different from that makeshift one earlier, this is a fortress." **Commander**

"I never thought we would need to attack our own fortress..." **Lieutenant General Simon**

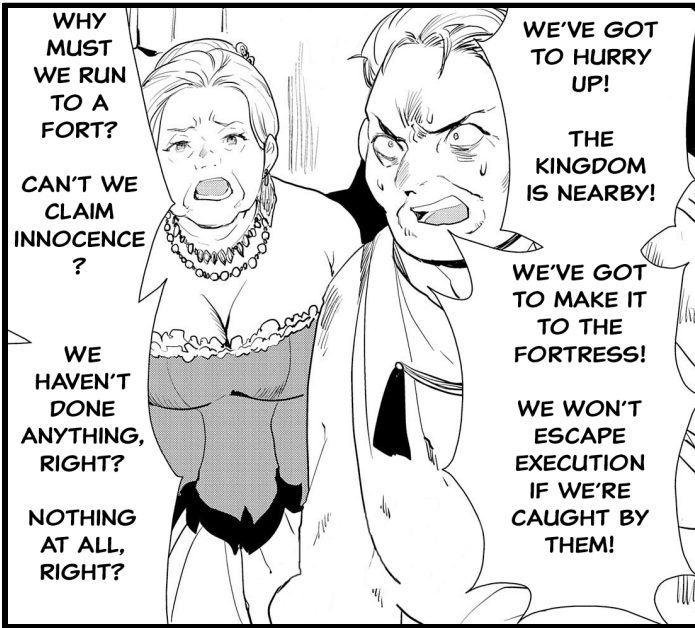


A number of carriages are fleeing from the Westin mansion to the Western fortress currently held by the rebels.

They are the carriages of Viscount Harter, and the Barons Carey, Hazy, and Riggsby.

"Hurry up! The Kingdom Army has entered the Westin territory! We have to make it to the fortress! We won't escape if we're surrounded before the fort!" **Baron Riggsby** yells

"Why do we have to escape to a fortress? If we haven't done anything, can't we claim innocence?" **Baroness Marianne Riggsby**



The Baroness is a double-chinned woman in her forties, standing 155 cm tall (a bit above 5 feet).

"We can't do that now! Soldiers with our family crest were fighting against the Kingdom Army! The same is true for the other houses! There's no way we can go back now!"

Baron bon Riggsby

"What about our sons?" **Baroness Riggsby**

"We're moving with the soldiers first! We're taking the food and money!" **Baron Riggsby**

A little later on a quiet backroad...

"Is that who I think it is? My useless father approaches?" **Patrick**

There are only two major roads from Marquis Westin's mansion to the fortress. The eastern road has already been captured by the Kingdom Army. I was told to oversee the western road.

"Inspector General, please pay attention as I display my resolution through my actions."

Patrick

"Yes, I'll observe and report to His Majesty." **Sergeant Josh**

"Then let's go, Mirko and Colton, escort the Inspector General." **Patrick**

I ran towards the moving carriage that just appeared from the forest.

An arrow stabs into the carriage with the Baron Riggsby crest.

"Is it an enemy attack?" **Coachman**

It seems just one arrow flew, and there's no obvious enemy presence...

"Hey, what's wrong? Are there enemy soldiers?" **Baron Riggsby**

"Well, an arrow came at us, but I don't see any more coming, so I'm not sure what to do."

Coachman

"Ugh, ignore it! All speed to the fortress!" **Baron Riggsby**

"Yah!" **Coachman**

At this point, the coachman whipped the horse to resume the journey, but the metal fittings that connected the carriage to the horse have been undone. The horse gallops off while the carriage is left sitting there.

"What?" **Coachman**

That was the last word the coachman would utter.

"Hey, what are you playing at? We've got to get going!" **Baron Riggsby**

"That's impossible, you don't have a horse." **Patrick**

I'm standing in the road, wearing the leather armor of the kingdom, with my emblem of a second lieutenant on my chest. I'm holding a hatchet loosely in my hand.

"Pat, Patrick?" **Baron Riggsby**

"Hey, it's been a while, you asswipe of a father." **Patrick**

"What? Where did that tone come from? How dare you say that to your father! Shame on you! What do you think you're doing?"

Wait, aren't you in the Kingdom Army..." **Baron Riggsby**

"Yes, I'm currently a Second Lieutenant in the Kingdom Army." **Patrick**

"A second lieutenant? You can't make second lieutenant in less than a year!

You're a thief, you stole a rank badge! No, you must have deserted!

Get out of here with your bullshit! Do you think you can come crawling back to the family? Hah, your home is now part of the Empire... Augh!" **Baron Riggsby**

I got tired of his tirade, so I cut it short by lopping off a few of my father's fingers.

"You have an annoying mouth that doesn't know when to shut itself." **Patrick**

"You!" **Baroness Riggsby**

"Oi! Pig! Are you being transported to a butcher?" **Patrick**

At my words, Baroness Marianne Riggsby's face turned red.

"Patrick! Why is an ill-fated child like you talking to me! I won't forgive this!" **Baroness Riggsby**

"Who cares? Your guard is currently lying dead over there." **Patrick**

"Well, fine. Leave this place now! I'll forgive you this time. Disappear immediately!" **Baroness Riggsby**

"Are you insane? Has your brain been eaten by moths? I'm a soldier of the Kingdom's Army and you all are rebels. Do you honestly think I'm going to let you go?" **Patrick**

I walk over to my father, kick him in the stomach as he's rolling on the ground, then kick him in the head for good measure. In case he tries to run, I stab my spear through his thigh, pinning him to the ground.

"Now, you sad excuse for a parent, thanks for nothing. Are you aware of the situation you've gotten yourself into?" **Patrick**

"Wait, wait! I was in the wrong, please stop! If you keep going, I'm going to die!" **Baron Riggsby**

"So, who was the one who killed my mother?" **Patrick**

"Oh, that was Marianne, all Marianne!" **Baron Riggsby**

"You! You're selling me out that easily?!" **Baroness Riggsby**

"Ugh! You were the one convinced that black eyes were cursed!" **Baron Riggsby**

"Ugh, shut up, you're too noisy." **Patrick**

After saying that I shoved their shoes into their mouths to shut them up. I made sure to tie up Marianne with a rope.

Content Warning: Torture

In that space, there was a scene that was an image of hell, two badly-injured people with another looming above them.

The man is Baron Riggsby and the woman is Baroness Riggsby, who regularly tortured Patrick and had his mother murdered.

From his neck to his feet, the man was covered in blood. He had no fingernails, fingers were bent in the wrong direction, arms were bent in places where there should be straight bones, bones poked through the skin, and intestines were spilling out of his belly.

The woman screamed at the sight and barbarity of it, her face pale and trembling.

"Now it's your turn..." **Patrick** says as he turns to the woman and grins

Marianne fainted in shock, but I brought her back by stabbing her in the back with my spear.

She tried to escape, but since I had already broken her legs, it was a painful crawl using her arms. You could hear her moaning, her face turning purple and swollen while blood dripped from her nose.

"The pitcher winds up... And fires!" **Patrick**

I picked up a rock and threw it at the woman.

"Strike!" **Patrick** jokes

A second later I pick up another rock and throw it, to another scream from the woman.

It seems Marianne has given up as she collapses into the dirt. I walk over to her.

"Oi! Pig! Aren't you going to run away? Wasn't this your favorite part?

Why aren't you playing along? Is it potion time, so we can start from the beginning again?

Do you even know how many times you did this to me?!" **Patrick**

"Please, forgive me..." **Baroness Riggsby**

"What was your response when I said that? Did I get any respite?"

Do you think people worry about the desires of insects? Really? Then why would I listen to the wishes of a pig?" **Patrick**

The three hidden observers were trembling at the sight and sounds of the carnage.

Some time has passed, 30 minutes, maybe an hour. Or was it more than two hours?

The horse that was released from the carriage returned. It seems true that a well-trained horse knows to return to the carriage.

"I've had enough of this. I'm ending this." **Patrick**

At this point, I simply cut off the heads of Baron and Baroness Riggsby and threw them into the carriage. I called out to the three hidden observers.

"There's plenty of good food in the carriage, want to have some lunch?" **Patrick**

There's a large contrast between the jovial Patrick and the three men with blood drained from their faces.

"Is that the Baron Riggsby's carriage? Why is it stopped? Did it have a malfunction?"
Baron Carey

The coachman for Baron Carey calls out as he stops the carriage next to the Riggsby family carriage.

"Sir? Do you need assistance?" **Baron Carey Coachman**

"Hello, Baron Riggsby? This is Baron Carey, what happened? Did your carriage break?"
Baron Carey

"Oh! I'm so lucky! Can you come in and we can discuss my breakdown?" **Voice from carriage**

The coachman of Baron Carey entered the Baron Riggsby carriage to see what had gone wrong.

"What is wrong with the carriage?" **Baron Carey** called out after a few minutes

Nobody replied to him.

"What's the problem with your carriage?" **Baron Carey** yells as he sticks his head out of the carriage

"I'm yelling, but I can't get an answer from the person inside. I'm not waiting here forever!"

Baron Carey replies to another person in the carriage

"Death to traitors!" **Patrick**

That was the last thing Baron Carey heard as I separated his head from his body with my sword.

"That worked, but I was so nervous the whole time! I can't act!" **Corporal Mirko**

The plan we had enacted was to have Corporal Mirko hide in the Riggsby carriage and pretend to be Baron Riggsby to distract the other carriages, while I got into place to execute the traitorous nobles.

In the Rebel-held Western Fortress

"Are we still waiting on Carey and Riggsby?" **Marquis Westin**

"Their sons and soldiers have arrived, but we haven't seen their carriages arrive yet."

Soldier

"Even though everything else made it, they're so slow!" **Marquis Westin**

Yes, everyone else but those two family heads had made it to the fortress. Well, it's more like they left late and they didn't have the good sense to travel with their soldiers when they had joined a rebellion. That's why Patrick had such an easy time killing them.

"We should see the Kingdom Army appear very soon. Strengthen our defenses, we can't let them burn our food again! Well, this is a secure fortress, so we should be fine!" **Marquis Westin**

Westin



The Kingdom's Army was advancing carefully to the fortress.

"Lieutenant General Simon, we've spotted them! They're holed up in the Western fortress! We can see archers on the ramparts!" **Messenger**

"Yes, make sure to halt just out of the archer's range." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Ha!" **Messenger**

"Send word to the survivors of the Western Army and the Southern reinforcements, I want to meet up with them." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"What? I'll get on it!" **Another Messenger**

Two horses gallop off from the Kingdom Army.

The commanders of the Kingdom Army have been gathered at the operations meeting. It was decided that the overall commander would be Lieutenant General Simon, so he started to lay out the outline of the plan.

"We'll go with this strategy. The independent force should already be in position and working, so I'll give them some time for their part." **Lieutenant General Simon**

The surviving commanders of the Western and Southern armies can't believe that Simon isn't trying to pressure the fortress at all.

"How long will that take?" **Southern Commander**

"In the previous battle, the sabotage happened right as we started our fight. If you assume a proper fortress would take a while longer...

Impossible today, probably tomorrow or the day after. For now, make sure the soldiers get a hot meal to increase morale." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Sounds good, the soldiers would be happy to eat something other than dried meat while on the march." **Southern Commander**

"Sir, but is that fine? Your independent force depends on a commander with less than a year of experience?" **Western Commander**

"Truth be told, I'm referring to a man who became Second Lieutenant in that short amount of time. Well, if he fails, we can always fall back to the normal strategy, but that would end with a lot of casualties on our part. Losing a day or two isn't going to shift the assault strategy one way or another." **Lieutenant General Simon**



After a day, no other carriages holding rebellious lords came by so we gave up and headed for the Western fortress.

"In the end, I could only take out Baron Carey, my idiot father, and the pig." **Patrick**

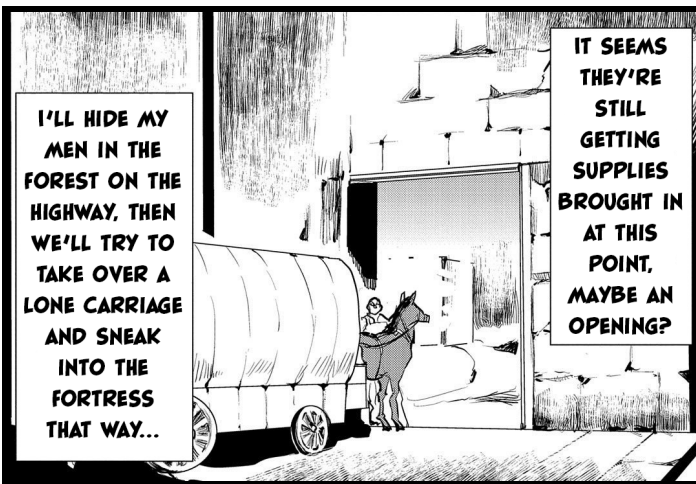
The other three reassured me that taking out half of the traitorous nobles was a more than sufficient achievement for the time spent, I just wish they wouldn't look so scared saying it.

"Well, we got here before the Kingdom Army, but the gates are closed. How are we going to sneak in?" **Patrick**

Unlike the previous makeshift fort, this fortress is properly walled off from the surroundings.

The fortress is fully defended, there are lookouts on the walls and the drawbridge is closed. Since the Kingdom Army should be arriving from the back side, that side is heavily guarded, but the front gate is only lightly guarded.

I observe some merchants coming with last-minute supplies, just before the Kingdom Army can encircle the fort. This looks like my way inside.



I have my force hide a little ways away from the front gate where the road passes behind some trees. We'll wait until we see a carriage coming.

I spy an Imperial Merchant carriage with one coachman and two escorts. There might be more people inside, but we have to risk it. I had to let some earlier carriages pass by because they were moving in groups of two or more, but this lone carriage is what I was waiting for.

"Finally, a lone carriage" **Patrick**

As carriages have a limited carrying capacity, I can't see it holding more than 5 people, while I have 4 soldiers. This is doable.

"Go with the plan! Keep the merchant alive!" **Patrick**

"I got it" **Corporal Mirko**

"Hah!" **Private Colton**

"Uhh, me too?" **Sergeant Josh**

The Inspector General is unsure.

"You are also a soldier, please assist with the plan." **Patrick**

"I understand, I'll do my part." **Sergeant Josh**

An arrow fired from the tall grass pierced the coachman's throat. The coachman releases the reins to grab his throat, but his moans are drowned out by the road noise. When the escort went to ask why the carriage was slowing down, he spotted figures emerging from the grass.

"Enemy attack!" **Carriage Guard**

The horse continues to slow as nobody is holding the reins.

Corporal Mirko and the Sergeant Josh are fighting with the two guards while I rush to the back of the carriage and flip open the tarp.

I find a fat 40 year old merchant sitting here.

"If you resist, I'll kill you now. If you follow directions, you'll stay safe and keep your life. Choose now!" **Patrick**

"Augh, hiee!" **Merchant**

"Speak clearly! I will absolutely kill you right now! If you follow my directions, you'll easily survive. Choose!" **Patrick**

"I hear! I get it! Let me live!" **Merchant**

"Ok, you've made a wise decision!" **Patrick**

At this point, the two guards had been dispatched. Corporal Mirko, Sergeant Josh, and Private Colton change into the armor or clothes of the two guards and the coachman, but I'm left out. I settle for the spare clothes of the merchant, though it was too large even when I put it over my armor.

The carriage starts moving again, towards the main gate of the Western fortress.

"Good! If you don't alert the guards, you'll be able to leave before anything starts. If you pull anything, I'll make sure you're the first to die." **Patrick** whispers to the merchant

"Hello" **Guard A**

"Next!" **Guard B**

"What's inside?" **Guard A**

"Wheat, salt, and dried meat." **Merchant**

"Check the inside!" **Guard B**

"Checking!" **Guard C**

The merchant was thinking if the guard discovered the person hiding in the wagon, he maybe could get away in the confusion, but that wouldn't happen.

"Everything is normal! You can continue!" **Guard C**

It seems the merchant's expectations were shattered. He proceeds slowly into the fortress.

"Ok, you three are going to offload the supplies, then leave the fortress and let this guy go free." **Patrick**

"Do you think you're in any danger?" **Corporal Mirko**

"A single person can hide much better than four people." **Patrick**

"Makes sense" **Corporal Mirko**

"Keep an eagle eye on this guy to make sure he doesn't try anything on the way out."
Patrick

"I got it" **Corporal Mirko**

"Then, it's time for my acting performance" **Patrick**

I walk through the fortress, pulling a cart with a sack of wheat in it. I'm walking casually while noting the locations of supplies, armories, barracks, etc. Occasionally I would make conversation with soldiers, pretending to be a merchant who had just arrived and gotten lost.

Once I had gathered enough information, I arrived at the food storage area, handed in the

wheat I was carrying and took the receipt I was handed. I walk off, then find a place to hide the cart and myself in a shadowy area.

I wait until the sun sets and the hallways and streets are less crowded. There are soldiers patrolling inside the fort, but they're awfully casual. I listen in to two nearby guards for information.

"Kingdom troops are massed at the back gate of the fort." **Guard A**

"Well, I doubt they're going to start the assault with a suicide attack. They got here yesterday, so maybe they're working on some siege weapons?" **Guard B**

"Then, the battle might start tomorrow?" **Guard A**

"Maybe, I wouldn't want to be on the gate or ramparts. We lucked into just doing guard duty on the night shift." **Guard B**

So, the Kingdom Army has arrived. I'll need to burn the supplies and do something about the gate.

A few hours after the sun had set, I snuck into one of the food warehouses I had identified earlier. I made sure to check that there was no lock earlier when I brought the wheat. I also confirmed that there were only two officers around during the day, so there was likely the same number or less at night.

I gently open the door, but there's a slight squeak.

The guard noticed the sound, and when he looked at the door, saw a black figure (me) in the moonlight.

"Who is it!" **Food Warehouse Guard A**

The other guard pulls out his sword in response to the first guard. The two people approach the door holding candles. The second guard looks around for anything, but the warehouse is pitch black and he only has a candle.

He thinks he spots something moving near a pillar, but then red liquid starts to gush from his neck.

"Ugee!" **Food Warehouse Guard B**

The first guard drops his candle to draw his sword. The two candles haven't gone out, but their light can only illuminate a little bit and visibility is terrible. The first guard hears a noise behind him and when he looks back to the second guard, the sword the second guard was holding was now lying on the ground. He starts to check on the second guard when he feels a hot shock on his back. He swings his sword reflexively.

I had to leave my sword stuck in the first guard's back as I jumped back to avoid his wild

swing. I pull the dagger from my right hip with my right hand and get back into range of the guard. Once the next swing misses me, I thrust my dagger into the guard's throat. My right shoulder is now drenched in blood, but I ignore the stain and twist the dagger to ensure the guard dies quickly and quietly.

I remove the sword from the guard's back and put it in the scabbard on my left hip. I pick up the dropped candles and start to sprinkle the oil I brought onto the sacks of wheat. I then throw a candle on top to start a blaze. Once I saw the fire had caught, I left the warehouse.

I sneak into more warehouses and start more fires. Before long, the smoke is noticed by the guards and the fortress wakes up.

The soldiers are all running around to put out the fires. Even the gate guards have rushed over to the fire, leaving only a single guard behind. The soldiers that aren't fighting the fire are staring, transfixed by the sight of it.

Nobody notices a man with bloody black hair sneaking in the background.

Then another guard collapses.



"Lieutenant General Simon! Black smoke is rising from the fortress!" **Soldier**

The Lieutenant General exited the tent to check the report and then grinned at the black smoke rising from the glowing red fortress.

"Prepare for a battle! Hurry up!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

The food warehouses are burning and they aren't able to be put out by water. The fortress had a few wells for drinking water, but that's nowhere near enough water to put out a fire of this size. A bucketful of water is doing absolutely nothing to the blaze, but the soldiers have to fight it as it's burning their food.

Even the archers and lookouts are joining in the attempt to fight the fire. Nobody was around to notice the side gate quietly open.

I was the one opening the side gate and peeking out. I spy a large and ready force from the Kingdom Army waiting for me.

"Lieutenant General Simon, thanks for your patience." **Patrick**

I found the Lieutenant General at the head of the approaching force and saluted him.

"Second Lieutenant Patrick, you've been quite busy! Well done! We can take it from here!"

Simon

"No, I'd like to join the force for a while." **Patrick**

"Ok, you've done more than enough at this point, I don't want to lose a good soldier if you're tired. Everyone, quietly enter the fortress." **Simon**

When about half the soldiers have entered, probably around 1,000, the enemy finally notices something is wrong.

"Hey, the enemy is here!" **Rebel Soldier**

That was the last words from the soldier as a Kingdom archer killed him with an arrow. That became the cue for the Kingdom Army to stop being quiet and start shouting to demoralize the enemy.

"Oooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!" **Kingdom Army**

It was more a rumble than intelligible words.

The soldiers who rushed to extinguish the fire had left their bows, swords, and shields behind. In the face of the archery barrage by the Kingdom Army, they could do little more than fall one after another.

By the time reinforcements from the sleeping Imperial Army came onto the scene, the full force of the Kingdom Army was inside the fortress and the rebel army was all but destroyed. The Imperial Army found it hard to fight against a Kingdom Army twice its size.

The rebel aristocrats and Imperial officers in the fortress's command room chose this moment to withdraw.

The officers and aristocrats quickly pack their luggage. The soldiers nearby pick up on the actions and start to flee themselves.

Demoralized soldiers are difficult to handle. Even one panicking soldier running away can trigger a stampede, it's like an infectious disease.

"Let the soldiers escape! We just want the rebel aristocrats and the Imperial Army leaders! Stay sharp!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

Following his order, the Kingdom Army soldiers concentrate on the carriages attempting to escape. Most aristocrats are weak physically, excepting the rare ones that are actively serving in army positions. The fat nobles don't move further than room to room in their

mansions, and when they do leave their mansion it's on a carriage or a horse.

The Kingdom Army catches carriage after carriage of rebelling nobles.

An arrow is fired at someone who is running off on a horse. The back gate leads to the main force of the Kingdom Army and the front gate is still closed, so the only open gate is the side gate the Kingdom Army entered from. It's too small for a carriage to exit, and even horses would find it difficult since the gate is clogged with escaping soldiers.

However, the Imperial Army leaders passed through the gate by riding their horses on top of the fleeing soldiers.

The side gate has devolved into a crush, so some soldiers have decided to open the main gate.

The main gate can't be opened by one or two people, instead twenty soldiers work together to move the heavy iron bar that keeps it closed. Once it's open a flood of soldiers begin to flee in the direction of the Empire.

Even so, it's three days by carriage to the nearest Imperial village. That's ten days on foot, a soldier won't make it that far without food and water supplies. You could make it with a carriage, but all the carriages were interdicted by the Kingdom Army before they could leave the fortress.



Rudolph van Ceu, the third prince of the Empire is having food issues. He escaped from the fort with several of his guards on horseback, and was summarily unable to carry enough food to get him to the Empire. He settles on visiting a village in the Westin territory to acquire food for the journey.

However, the food situation of the village was terrible, there was almost no food anywhere as the merchant hadn't visited recently. It was the worst timing for the prince. He was able to forcibly requisition a little food, but not enough for his party to make it to the Empire.

"Your Highness, there isn't enough here. Little food and not even a cart or wagon."

Soldier

"Is there another village nearby?" **Rudolph van Ceu**

"Perhaps, there may be one about a half-day further into the Kingdom lands." **Soldier**

Rudolph thinks about it. He managed to locate enough food for two days, but that's still not enough. Should he take a risk and go further into the Kingdom on the chance of supplies? Or just leave from here and get food on the way back to the Empire?

"It can't be helped, going deeper into the Kingdom is suicide. Returning to the Empire is our top priority. We'll hunt for food in the forest on the way." **Rudolph van Ceu**

Between a carriage and horse, the horse is overwhelmingly faster. The rebel lords and Imperial officers that attempted to flee in carriages were all apprehended. Rudolph's choice of a horse was right in that respect.

"So we got everyone but the fucking Imperial Prince?!" **Lieutenant General Simon**



Rudolph van Ceu and his companions chose to move through the forest, avoiding the highways.

As you would expect, their horses weren't having a good time in the forest. Horses can walk in a forest, but they can't trot and definitely not gallop. Rudolph chose a path that would slow him down, but drastically reduce his chances of detection. Also, it made it more likely that he will stumble on food.

"That's something! Rabbit!" **Rudolph van Ceu**

After he praised the soldier that had caught the rabbit, the group dismounted and prepared for the meal.

They located a creek with water, and prepared to boil some water and cook the rabbit. Two prepared the meal while the rest kept a lookout on their surroundings. Rudolph was sleeping next to the makeshift camp without doing anything.

It seems he hadn't ridden a horse for this length of time before and was exhausted by the need to camp on hard ground.



The running dragon is fast in the forest. After the main gate opened, Patrick joined back up with Corporal Mirko and the other two to hunt the remnants of the rebel army.

Former soldiers often become bandits, this is commonly seen in army desertions. Most deserters who are planning on banditry will seek to enter the forest at the first opportunity. Patrick eliminated several soldiers that were going for that.

"Hey, look at that" **Patrick** whispers

I call to the other and point in a certain direction.

"Imperial soldiers... no, that's officers?" **Corporal Mirko**

"Oh, that's a lot of white clothes and fancy equipment, isn't it? Potentially an aristocrat, who can be ransomed back to the Empire. By the way, Kingdom soldiers get 20% of the ransom for any enemies they capture." **Sergeant Josh**

"Let's make some money." **Patrick** grins

I'll not be seen in the dark woods by even a vigilant Imperial soldier. Since the Imperials were camped in a small clearing, they would find it even more difficult to look for things in the dark forest around them.

I walked around and moved closer to the makeshift camp. I spy a single person sleeping. In this situation, the only person who can sleep like that must be a high-ranking nobleman.

One of the soldiers was heading to the stream with the rabbit. He must be going to wash out the insides after cleaning the carcass.

My chance has arrived.

I pull out a knife and throw it at one of the soldiers, it sticks right in the soldier's gut.

"Gufaw!" **Soldier**

While the soldiers are confused, I draw my dagger and rush to the sleeping person.

The rest of the soldiers pull their swords, but I've already put my dagger to the neck of the sleeping nobleman.

"Don't move! If you attack, I'll kill this guy. Don't do anything suspicious either, I'll take that as a trigger to kill him too." **Patrick**

After about a minute or two, the soldiers accepted their defeat. Soon, the soldier with the rabbit returned, but the other soldiers talked him down before he could attack me.

At this point, the sleeping person finally woke up and started to panic. I didn't expect that.

The battle is over for now.

The rebellion is suppressed and the Imperial invasion force has been eliminated. The rebellious noble families are completely crushed and their territories have been confiscated by the royal family.

Well, one house is still in limbo...

"Now, brothers, I'm guessing you have nothing to offer, but just in case, is there anything redeeming you possess to save your skins?" **Patrick**

I ask that question to the two brown-haired, blue-eyed, fat men in front of me. Unfortunately, they're my brothers. They attempted to escape the fortress in a wagon, but were captured immediately.

"Patrick! Untie me, now! Who do you think you're talking to?" **Second Son**

"That's right! Untie me first! I'm the next head of the barony!" **First Son**

They really have no idea what they've gotten themselves into.

"Second Lieutenant, are they feeble-minded? Worms ate their brains, maybe?" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Hey, old man! Who do you think you're talking to?" **First Son**

"Shut up! Idiot brothers! Ugh, it disgusts me that I'm related to you swine! Fine, listen you little worms! This person is Marquis Simon, a Lieutenant General of the kingdom you rebelled against and a high noble as well! A mere heir to a former baronetcy doesn't have any right to open your mouth to him! Shut your foolish mouths!" **Patrick**

At this point, I decided the best course of action was to kick my oldest brother in the fucking face.

"I'll leave Patrick the benefit of the doubt here. His Majesty has let me know that the punishments for these two are left to you. I'll just follow whatever you recommend. I would guess that your future reputation will depend on what you do here." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Hah! I understand!" **Patrick**

"Then, I leave this to you." **Lieutenant General Simon** says as he sits down in a chair

There were also the Minister of Justice and a few other senior military officers.

"So, before I hand over your future dispositions, I'll let you know this. Our father and the pig that was your mother were killed after I returned them the kindness they showed me so many times." **Patrick**

"What? What!" **Eldest Son**

"Oh my god!" **Second Son**

"So, for your charges, the eldest son was not only unable to stop his father from entering a rebellion against the state, but also actively participated in that rebellion. The sentence for that will be a beheading after a public shaming where the citizens may throw stones at him..."

Patrick

"After a cross-examination by Kingdom soldiers, the second son will be sentenced to quartering by axe followed by hanging upside down until death. That's all!" **Patrick**

After that, the two screamed at me for a short time, but my expression was radiant.

"I'm not sure what to say, I guess I really do hate the other members of my paternal family that much." **Patrick**

"Well, if your claims are true, it makes complete sense. You're still quite ruthless. I'll send the sentences to His Majesty, you two can leave." **Lieutenant General Simon**

I left the room alongside the Minister of Justice, leaving just Lieutenant General Simon there. A little while later, the King arrived with an escort as well as Sergeant Josh (Patrick's Inspector General).

"Your Majesty!" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Good, Simon. Well, sit down, and let's hear the report." **King**

"That's all" **Sergeant Josh** ends

"What do you think, Simon?" **King**

"It seems he has a ruthless side. He went right for the strictest punishment for his brothers as well. But that seems to only be shown to the Riggsby family. He seems to worry for his subordinates and seems completely loyal to the country." **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Sure, the report states he was quick and clean when executing Baron Carey and any soldiers. Well, ignoring the cross-examination." **King**

"I was honestly scared at times. I felt like a frog being stared at by a snake. I've always been rated as an above-average soldier, but I don't feel like I can compete against him. If I was on a battlefield, I would not want to be against him." **Sergeant Josh**

The Inspector General role requires the officer to be quite strong, they have to be able to restrain the person they're observing if need be.

"Hmm, I can see the snake comparison. Oh, that gives me an idea! Also, the capture of the third prince of the Empire, wasn't he also responsible for that? Don't we have a department that could make good use of him?" **King**

"Your Majesty, but what exactly would that be? Assassination, behind-enemy-lines sabotage, those are wonderful skills, but what Army would that fall under?" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"Well, if we don't have one, make one!" **King**



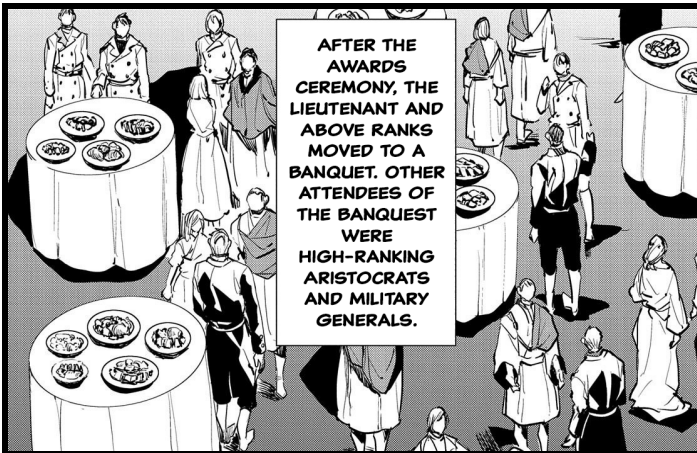
After a month, the various punishments were exacted and a five-year non-aggression treaty was signed with the Empire. All the reparations and ransoms had been paid.

The third prince was returned to Imperial territory, but rumors suggest he is confined under house arrest for an unknown length of time. All of the five rebelling noble families from the Kingdom were completely crushed.

To celebrate, the Kingdom held a grand ceremony on the one month anniversary.

After the award ceremony, those who were given awards move to the royal castle for a banquet. This banquet is also attended by most of the heads of prominent noble families and high-ranking military officials, so lower-ranked soldiers will dread this part of the ceremonies.

Due to the number of awards this time, Second Lieutenant and lower ranked awardees will not be attending the banquet this time.



Wayne and I are in the castle courtyard where the banquet is being held, along with all the other attendees. The format is a standing buffet. This is a time where connections are made.

Maybe an up-and-coming military officer finds an aristocrat that has space to employ a Knight soon. Perhaps a lower-ranked noble meets a higher-ranked noble and joins their faction. It is useful for military officers to have a powerful backer.

In Wayne's case, he's a Lieutenant, but he is only a Baronet's son. He isn't even the first

son, so he has nothing in terms of backing. Even though the Kimble family are military aristocrats, and all members of the family are involved with the military, the highest rank currently held is Major. That's only one step beyond Wayne's current rank.

My mother's family is a Baron family, and the head reached the rank of Major before being formally discharged. He never became significant, even within the military.

Currently, a crowd has gathered around Wayne. Aristocrats bring their wives and daughters to visit him. Wayne has amazing looks and an impressive military career. There's second and third daughters of lower ranked aristocrats like Viscounts and Barons, as well as families without a son talking to him. Well, at least the daughters are interested and are actively appealing to their fathers. He's currently engaged in a bit of group matchmaking, one of the ways connections are made at these banquets.

I'm currently eating a little ways away from Wayne. Luckily, I don't have much of a presence, so I'm able to eat in peace. I'm watching Wayne being bombarded by questions by multiple glamorous women when an even more beautiful woman appears.

"Wayne Kimble, may I have a word with you? I want to introduce you to my daughter."

Lieutenant General Simon

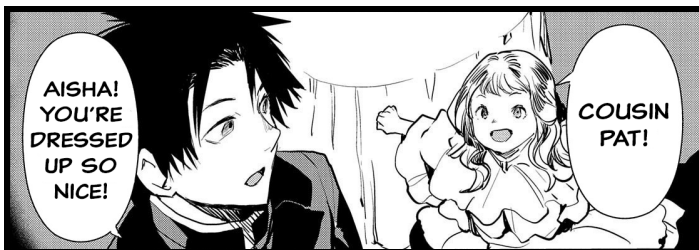
Lieutenant General Simon has no sons. Even though he has five wives and fifteen children, they've all been daughters. It seems the one talking to Wayne is the eldest daughter, she looks just a few years older than him.

She's around 165 centimeters tall (5ft 5in) with long blonde hair, blue eyes, and slender, though she has two apples budding from her chest. Well, aesthetically pleasing is how I would describe her.

She's blushing and looks excited to meet Wayne.

My musings over Wayne's future was interrupted by a voice I recognized.

"Cousin Pat!" **Aisha**



There's only a few people who can find me, most of whom are my family.

"Dad, brother, I found Pat!" **Aisha**

A brown-haired twin-tailed girl with brown eyes is calling out to me from behind.

"You're dressed so nice, Aisha. You're growing up to be a fine lady, but your voice is a little loud. Please lower your volume a bit." **Patrick** calls out

"Two years... No it's been three years since I've seen you! I'm just excited to see you!"
Aisha

"Hey! Pat! It's been a long time! You've been pretty successful!" **Uncle Trolla**

"Ha! Looking good and rising up! Patrick!" **Cousin Dekose**

"You two look good as always, glad to see you Cousin and Uncle!" **Patrick**

These are my mother's brother and his family, the current Baron Canaan and two of his children.

The Baron Canaan family are skilled cavalry noblemen. The current Baron has a good physique and a powerful body. His wife is a bit chubby, so was my mother, maybe Aisha was a little chubby too, it seems the family has a type.

"So I was overtaken by Patrick! Hahaha!" **Baron Canaan**

My uncle, who is currently laughing, reached the rank of Major in the First Army and was part of the Royal Guard. He is a monster that moves around with tremendous speed while wearing full-body plate armor.

He has brown hair with a thinning hairline, standing around 180 centimeters (5ft 10in) tall, but his bulging muscles are the first thing most people notice about him.

His character is that of a painfully straightforward person, he would state his opinions without the normal diplomatic phrasing. That's why he stalled at Major, even though he possessed the skills to rise to the Major General level.

He has little talent for economics and once had to take a loan from the Riggsby family, who were known as the loan shark aristocrats at the time. His territory had seen several years of crop failures, but he was able to use the loan to ensure the territory's people made it through. He's revered inside of his territory, even if the territory only has middling growth.

At that time, the Riggsby family hadn't fallen to borrowing money from the Westin family, since the Baroness's extravagant desires were only starting to manifest.

The Riggsby's would ridicule the Canaan family's situation as the Canaan Curse. Later, they would call me out as the newest example of the curse.

My Cousin Dekose is similar to Uncle Trolla. Until two years ago, he was also a member of the Royal Guards, just like his father, but now he is in training to become the next Baron Canaan. He was given a Reserve Discharge in order to undergo the training.

The Kingdom Army has four methods of discharge, Formal, Dishonorable, Honorable, and Reserve. Formal Discharge is also known as mandatory retirement. A Dishonorable Discharge is a firing for misconduct or similar reasons. An Honorable Discharge is dying while in battle. A Reserve Discharge is where you aren't active, but can be called back in an emergency, or you may return in the future.

Dekose is ten years older than me and when I was a child, he and his mother would practice with me when I was visiting. I would often go to visit them, until my mother passed away. He's more of a brother than my half-brothers ever were. He's big and strong with a kind heart.

Aisha is two years younger than me and a little chubby, but a lovable girl with a lot of energy. She missed seeing me as much as she misses her brother, maybe more.

"Pat, come visit us again! My brothers miss you too! I want to hear about the war. I want to hear about your territory!" **Dekose**

"Dekose! Honestly, consulting you would be a big help! I'm in a bit of a difficult spot, suddenly becoming head of a noble family!" **Patrick**



He smiles and laughs, I'm glad I have people in this world that I would call family.

After eating and drinking with the Canaan family, I promised to take a vacation and visit their territory. Then a new person approached our group.

"Major Patrick!" **Kevin Dixon**

"Long time, no see" **Patrick**

"You look like you're doing well for yourself." **Marquis Dixon**

The Marquis and his son came to greet me.

"It's been a long time, Your Excellency, Marquis Dixon." **Patrick**

"I would like to congratulate you on your success, Major Patrick. I've heard about your fascinating exploits in the recent rebellion." **Marquis Dixon**

I introduced the Marquis and Kevin to the Baron Canaan family, without mentioning the kidnapping. I went with the explanation that the bandits had been disrupting trade in the Marquis's territory.

I didn't notice the girl watching our group from a distance, nor did I notice Aisha looking at Kevin with a certain interest.



Wayne made out well from the war with a two level jump in rank to Lieutenant; it was a special dispensation. Corporal Mirko ranked up to Sergeant while Private Colton went up twice to Corporal.

As for me...

"You're now a Major! Amazing!" **Sergeant Mirko**

"And appointed as the commander of the Mobile Brigade, essentially second-in-command of the newly created Eighth Army, plus you're now a Viscount with the new family name of Snake!" **Wayne**

I've gone from a third son of a minor Baron family to the head of a new Viscount family. I was given the territory of the former Baron Riggsby family and part of the former Viscount Harter territory.

At the age of 15, I've started a new aristocratic family alongside building a new army...

Chapter 3: I'm an Aristocrat?

After the war, there have been major changes in the Army. Because of the losses, newcomers were brought in to replenish the units. In my Brigade, I lost Wayne to the Second Army.

While the Second Army did suffer some losses, Wayne's transfer is mainly due to his engagement to Lieutenant General Simon's daughter. Well, I won't begrudge him the transfer to his future father-in-law's Army.

The Kingdom Army has historically been organized into seven armies. The First through Third guard the capital and internal areas, the Fourth through Seventh guard the borders. Each army is commanded by a General, ranking somewhere between Major General and General. See the Army Information chapter for more details.

The new Eighth Army I'm commanding is different. The day-to-day commander (me) of the "Mobile Brigade" is only a Major, who is ostensibly overseen by Lieutenant General Simon, the current head of the Second Army. This odd arrangement was done to satisfy regulations about Army titles.

Since the Army's size is only a brigade, it's an Army that is serving at the King's discretion. If it does well, the Army's size could increase, perhaps to the size of the other seven armies. The current size is small, but there's a strategy to it.

In my regiment, the front line is all people who can ride running dragons. That's approximately 100 soldiers. Then there's 50 cavalry and 50 horseback messengers and transport escorts. Finally, there's 100 transport soldiers.

The Eighth Army is expected to regularly move through forests, so a primary concern as to only bring on personnel who could ride running dragons. There was only one battalion's worth of available soldiers who were able to meet this requirement. That force was supplemented by a supply unit that uses horses and carriages.

Due to those requirements, the Eighth Army is limited to the scale of a brigade for now.

I wanted the training to be strict, to ensure the quality of soldiers was high, so I created the Patrick Boot Camp. I issued them special weapons and took them through an intensive training regimen.

I trained the soldiers in how to use even muddy water to slake their thirst, how insects could be a source of calories, and how to stay focused on the task at hand even through exhaustion. Some say Eighth Army soldiers have a thousand-yard stare.

My Brigade is currently in special training since it was just established a little while ago.

The Brigade is yet to reach operational readiness, so we're training intensively to reach that point. After all, the goal of the Eighth Army is different from the other seven.

Our missions are expected to be behind-enemy-lines sabotage and disruption, infiltration, and assassination. We'll also be assigned bandit eliminations when a war is not going on.

Our equipment is going to be different from the normal armies. The normal spear is too long for forest fighting, so we are using a shorter one. We use either one-handed swords or short swords. We also use a smaller bow and we train for accuracy instead of distance when shooting.

I've also incorporated throwing weapons into our armory. The throwing knife is common, but expensive since it's not likely to be recovered.

"Shuriken? When did you think of this? So how do you use it?" **Soldier**

It became quite popular after my demonstration. The blacksmith complained about it when I put in my order.

"Too many edges! Are you trying to kill me?" **Blacksmith**

"Can't you cast the shape? That should work!" **Patrick**

I have no intention of killing off the Army blacksmiths from overwork.

Corporal Mirko's Perspective

Run

Run more

I can't say how many hours I've been running...

Half of the runners look to have dropped out already. I'm Mirko, a soldier in the Kingdom Army, now belonging to the Eighth Army.

The primary missions for the newly established Eighth Army is behind-enemy-lines operations, infiltration, and assassination. It's said that physical strength is required to operate behind enemy lines, so we are to run every day. However, we're not informed of any particular goals for the running, such as how many laps or how many hours.

This is hard. I can motivate myself if I knew I only had to do a few more laps, but this lack of knowledge is stressful. Our leader just tells us to run until he lets us stop.

Army soldiers know to follow orders.

I swallow water from my waterskin while running. I feel a little sick, but if I didn't have any water, I would collapse.

Our leader is small in stature, but has deep reserves of physical strength. He's been running at the front of all us this whole time.

"Major, I'm down to the last third of my water, what should i do?" **Soldier**

"Then if 50 more people drop out, this session is over. We'll speed up now! Those who are late this lap will drop out. Anyone who dropped out gets the reward of a punishment task! Then let's go." **Patrick**

After that, the Major sped up even more. Is he actually a monster?

We're having fun today.

The Eighth Army is having an excursion in the woods. We set up a camp near a stream in the forest and procured food in the forest. We didn't spot any dangerous beasts, but we did run into three orcs. That gave us plenty of meat.

There were a few injuries, but injuries in outdoor activities are common, right? Isn't it only problematic when people die?

After dinner, the Army went Patrick hunting instead of fox hunting.



The game is easy, all they have to do is find me in the woods. If I was found, then I promised to give them all a prize when we got back. Everyone was happy to play when I mentioned the reward.

I ended up sleeping in a tree until the sun came up. Haven't the men played hide and seek when they were kids?

Well, I'm glad I slept soundly, even though I was sitting on a branch. I noticed there was a bird's nest also in the tree with a single large egg the size of my palm. I'm warming it up now, I'm sort of hoping it's a bird like a Java sparrow, that I could keep. It's a pretty big egg, what kind of bird is this?

For the morning activity, I taught the use of a small bow and arrow in the woods as well as how to use a shuriken. Some people encountered some difficulty, so the median accuracy was poor. They'll have to get some special training when we get back.

I have them try again at Patrick hunting in the afternoon, with their dinner on the line. I made sure to leave footprints and break the undergrowth on the way to my hiding spot.

Did they really not understand the game? Are they going on a diet?

Now they're complaining that they're hungry and didn't get enough sleep, how annoying.

Eighth Army Soldier's Perspective

I'm so sleepy, I really want to sleep. I'm super hungry as well.

Hmm? So what am I doing instead?

I'm looking for Major Patrick!

I heard that we were supposed to find the Major last night, and I searched all over for him, but I don't think anyone could find that guy at night!

I didn't get to go to sleep, instead we did shuriken training and a second round of hunting Major Patrick.

The shuriken is a weapon I haven't seen before, but it has its uses. Long range is right out, but at 10 meters or less, it can hit lethally. Unlike a knife, it's smaller and lighter.

No, no, I can't fall into escapism. We have to find the Major.

He wants us to look for footprints in the forest? Don't be ridiculous! Look at how the undergrowth has been broken? I've never heard of that!

Ha! No, no, no, I was half-asleep when I was walking...

Pull yourself together! Mirko! I can keep searching! I was able to find him on the parade

grounds!

Take a deep breath!

Phew, I've calmed down.

I tried to inspire myself, but I'm not sure I'll find him. In the end, nobody was able to claim the prize.

I heard later that he was sitting in a tree in the night search, while he buried himself in a burrow for the day search.

Who would dig into the dirt to find someone?!

"That's no good" **Patrick**

I reflect on the outdoor training from the other day while muttering to myself. The branches of the trees are effective for both hiding and attacking. It's a problem that none of my soldiers thought to look up.

For the day search, I snuck into a beast's burrow and blocked up the entrance from inside. If you looked carefully, someone should have noticed the sloppiness and unnaturalness of the former entrance.

It's possible a lack of concentration from missing sleep the night before disrupted the normal thinking process.

When you think about the sort of missions the Eighth Army will take on, we'll find it necessary to hide and maybe escape from an enemy's detection. It was just staying up one night, and if they can't work well after that, it's worrying for future missions.

"Should I do more training and more education on tracking and awareness for the time being?" **Patrick**

As I'm walking through the training grounds, someone calls out.

"Hey! Pat! Long time no see!" **Wayne**

"Oh, it's Wayne, isn't it? I hear you've been getting some intensive training from a certain Lieutenant General. I've heard things!" **Patrick**

This man was my subordinate until a short while ago, but he is now engaged to a general's daughter.

"Hey, if you're going to mention rumors, I've heard a few about you. It sounds like you took your army into the forest and kept them training most of the night? What if someone

ran into an orc?! They can't fight in the middle of the night!" **Wayne**

Generally speaking, that restriction is correct for armies, attacking at night is an act tantamount to suicide.

"The Eighth Army might be ordered to move through a forest overnight to attack from the rear of an enemy army, right?" **Patrick**

If we can't manage to do it in training, we'd only fail disastrously in reality.

"Ok, that's reasonable. But training to find you? That's ludicrous!" **Wayne**

"Is it really that hard? I'm staying in a single place, not moving at all." **Patrick**

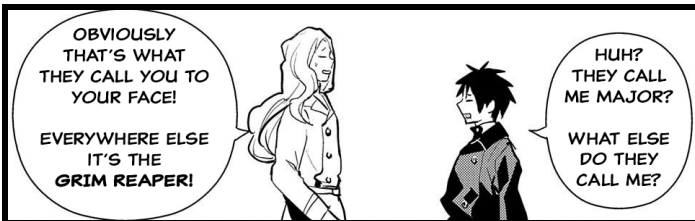
"Even when you aren't moving around I can't find you! I can't even find your footprints!" **Wayne**

"What's wrong with you?" **Patrick**

"Are you even aware of what the soldiers call you?" **Wayne**

"Huh? It seems they call me Major?" **Patrick**

"Obviously that's what they'll call you to your face! But it's 'Grim Reaper' everywhere else! Please tell me that people aren't passing away during training, 'cause the rumors say that soldiers feel like they're in hell during the training." **Wayne**



"What? They're still that naive about the nature of death? I can make sure to show them how bad the world can be." **Patrick**

"Seriously? You're doubling down?" **Wayne** asks stunned

"I'm going to die..." **Soldier**

"You maggot! If you can spare energy to complain, you can keep running! Keep at it!"

Patrick

"Let me lie down..." **Soldier**

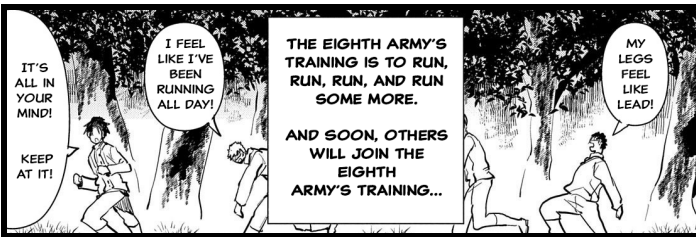
"I'll hit you if you fall asleep! Keep running!" **Patrick**

"My legs feel like they're full of lead..." **Soldier**

"It's all in your mind! Run!" **Patrick**

"I feel like I've been running all day..." **Soldier**

"That fine! You have been running all day! Keep at it!" **Patrick**



"That's the Eighth Army, right?" **Onlooker A**

"Oh, they've been running since yesterday morning." **Onlooker B**

"That's more than a full day, isn't that hell?" **Onlooker A**

"Well, it's hard to complain when your commander is out there running with you."
Onlooker B

"I'm glad I wasn't picked for the Eighth Army" **Onlooker A**

"Me too! Training like that, I wouldn't survive!" **Onlooker B**

"The Second Army training seems like heaven in comparison." **Onlooker A**

"Today's training is a joint exercise with the Eighth Army! As you have no doubt noticed, they're very serious with their training! We, the Second Army, can learn from their example! Major Patrick, please take over! I have been summoned by His Majesty!"

Lieutenant General Simon

"Yes, Lieutenant General Simon!" **Patrick**

As the Lieutenant General walks away, the assembled soldiers give him a jealous look, but the general doesn't notice. One of those soldiers is Wayne.

Eight hours later...

"Pat! Oh! For God's sake, let us rest!" **Wayne**

Wayne took the initiative to complain on behalf of the soldiers from the two armies that were all running.

The answer was...

"No!" **Patrick**

For my Eighth Army, I decided to create combat uniforms in addition to the normal dress uniforms. Our budget had room in it that the other armies didn't have, we're a bit small. Though we didn't invest in any metal armor, it's too loud for our purposes.

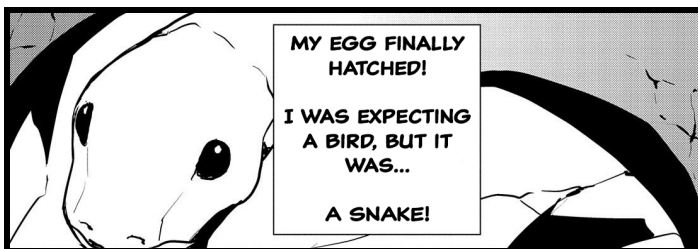
Our battle uniforms are covered with green, black, and brown splotches, excepting our leather boots and breastplate. You might call them a BDU, or battle dress uniform, like the modern combat uniforms of Earth armies.

I also had the soldiers equipped with a waist belt with a one-handed sword and dagger. Breastplates had storage for shurikens and other items, to prevent them from rattling. This should drastically improve our covert ability in forests!

Oh, the egg I found during the outdoor exercise finally hatched!

But it wasn't a bird, it was a snake.

Yeah...



I thought it was strange that the shell was soft and not hard. I asked someone knowledgeable and they explained that there were snakes that would lay eggs in a bird's nest to let the birds warm the egg. Obviously, the snake eats the bird eggs first, so the only remaining eggs are snake eggs. It's really clever.

So I make sure to catch mice and rats every day to give it to my new snake.

Pets are cute, aren't they?



I'm being gently rocked in a carriage on my way to the Baron Canaan territory. I'm going to see Dekose Canaan.

I've become a Viscount, so I must manage a territory.

Of the former bureaucrats of the Baron Riggsby family, I ended up keeping around half. Nearly all of the ones I kept were working in the annex building, very few were from the main building.

Those in the main building feared retribution from me, and when you consider how many of them took out their frustrations on me in the past...

It was a smart idea to flee.

I let most of the corrupt officials escape, except for a specific person. That man was fraudulently collecting money at the behest of the Riggsby family, and fled as soon as I was appointed to lead the territory. Well, he attempted to flee. He was quickly captured and is now rotting in prison.

The militia roster for the territory was drastically reduced after many of the former members were caught up in the recent rebellion. I've been recruiting actively, but the numbers are still insufficient.

Most of all, I have far too few officers. The situation is so bad that I'm looking for retirees to lure back in for a few years. All in order to buy time to train up a new set of officers.

Canaan Territory, Capital City Tonil

The Barony of Canaan is located in the Southern area of the Kingdom and the economy is based on the abundant agricultural lands. The capital of Tonil has many residents and wagons carrying harvested products are everywhere. The town is bursting with energy.

The center of the town is the mansion of the Canaan family. My carriage stops in front of the gate, which allows entrance past the two meter tall wall that surrounds the mansion.

A middle-aged gatekeeper calls out to the coachman who answers him and the gate opens.

I open up a small window in the carriage.

"Hi Charlie, it's been a long time." **Patrick**

"Patrick? Oh, my! Patrick has come to visit! I heard about you from my wife. You've come up a lot in the world!" **Gatekeeper**

The slender blonde-haired, blue-eyed man who serves as gatekeeper looks like I made his day.

"Yeah, thanks. Tomorrow, do you think we could do some training like you used to?"

Patrick

"I've missed you so much!" **Gatekeeper**

I had a pretty gentle expression after getting to see a familiar face.

I was invited into the mansion and led to the drawing room, where I was served tea by a familiar maid.

"I'm glad to see you're doing well, Elinda." **Patrick**

I called out to the older blonde woman, Head Maid Elinda.

"Mr. Patrick, you're looking good yourself." **Elinda**

"Well, this and that happened, but I'm doing the best I can." **Patrick**

"The Master will be happy to hear that." **Elinda**

At this point, there was a knock at the door. Elinda opens the door and Paul, the butler for the Canaan family enters as Elinda exits.

"It's been a long time, Mr. Patrick." **Paul** says as he bows

Paul is a slender old man with white hair, he's dressed up in a nice black suit.

"Paul, it has been a long time. You look good." **Patrick**

"No, I've gotten weaker. Recently, I've started losing more often to Dekose in sword practice." **Paul** with narrowed blue eyes

No, no, no, it's amazing that he can fight on par and even win against a swordsman like Dekose at Paul's age.

"Hmm, Dekose told me you're still doing pretty well? Even though he got a very nice new two-handed sword, he still has to be in good physical condition to win against Paul. At

least, that's what he's told me..." **Patrick**

"Dekose is working hard, but you shouldn't take it easy even during sword practice." **Paul** retorts with a grin

"Ah, haha..." **Patrick**

"Oh, I missed talking with you so much I'm letting the time run away. The Baron is waiting in the dining room." **Paul**

"Ok, let's not keep him waiting." **Patrick**

I remember exactly how to get to the dining room, but I'll walk after Paul for politeness. Paul stops in front of the proper door and knocks.

"I have brought Viscount Snake." **Paul**

"Send him in." **Baron Canaan**

Viscount, heh. He wants to let me in, heheh.

I'm being careful not to laugh at this overly proper introduction.

I walk through the opened door and enter the dining room.

"Welcome, Patrick! No, Viscount Snake!" **Baron Canaan**

"Uncle Trolla, don't get so formal, I'm just Patrick to you. Is your guard on vacation?"
Patrick



"I can't, Dekose said it's better to call you a Viscount. My normal bodyguard is off on vacation this month." **Baron Canaan**

"Well, you're a Viscount and a Major in the Army, so I wasn't sure if we were still close enough to be casual in the place. In public, we'll stay formal, but I'm fine with being casual in private." **Dekose**

"Patrick, it's been so long, please regale us with your escapades." **Brose**

Brose is the younger brother of Dekose, about five years younger. He's clearly a son of the Canaan family with his brown hair and muscular figure. He's currently the head of the Canaan militia.

"Cousins, it's been so long! Well, I got into a few messes, but I did my best to clean them up!" **Patrick**

Brose is a little older than me, but we were trained together under Dekose.

"Cousin Pat! Tell me about the battle!" **Allen**

Allen is the third son of Baron Canaan, he's younger than Aisha but taller than me.

"Allen, you're growing up so strong." **Patrick**

I sat down in a chair and we talked until dinner was served.

I'm enduring some physical pain in the carriage on my way out of the Canaan territory.

"Those two are just too energetic, in every sense." **Patrick**



Of the four people I trained with, there were two that were particularly hard on me. I had a good match with Uncle Trolla and I managed a win once against Dekose, but I was no match for the gatekeeper Charlie and the butler Paul.

I was beaten to a pulp.

They're both speed type attackers, so anytime I try to move, they've already started a counterattack. Charlie's spear handling is nothing short of genius and Paul swings a two-handed sword like it's nothing.

"I know I wasn't fast enough, I'll have to do more training when I get back. But I secured some important personnel." **Patrick**

My purpose was not just a visit, but mainly to secure human resources for my territory. There are vacant positions in the nascent Snake family I had to fill as soon as possible.

Paul's nephew Santino, a 35-year-old who was working for the Canaan family, will hopefully become my butler in the territory. My Chief Maid will be Lina, who had previously served my mother as her personal maid. She's bringing along her daughter as well, so I've got two trustworthy maids.

Several members of the Canaan family will transfer temporarily to help build out my territory's militia.

Will I ever understand the Canaan family?

My territory prospects have improved with this visit, I'm feeling better even if my muscles are aching.

Chapter 4: Bloody Grim Reaper

When I got back to the Royal Capital, my Eighth Army received a training request from the First and Third Armies. Soon my moniker of 'Grim Reaper' spread to those two armies. I'm now known as a boss that imposes outrageous training on my subordinates with a smirk, the Grim Reaper Patrick. I'm a little worried about my reputation.

A year after it was founded, the Eighth Army, the "Rapid Deployment Brigade" had undergone training to ready itself for its first battle as a behind-enemy-lines unit.

A month later, the Eighth Army received their first assignment.

"Men, we've got a mission! Second deployment stratagem, plan to leave tomorrow morning! All hands, get ready!" **Patrick**

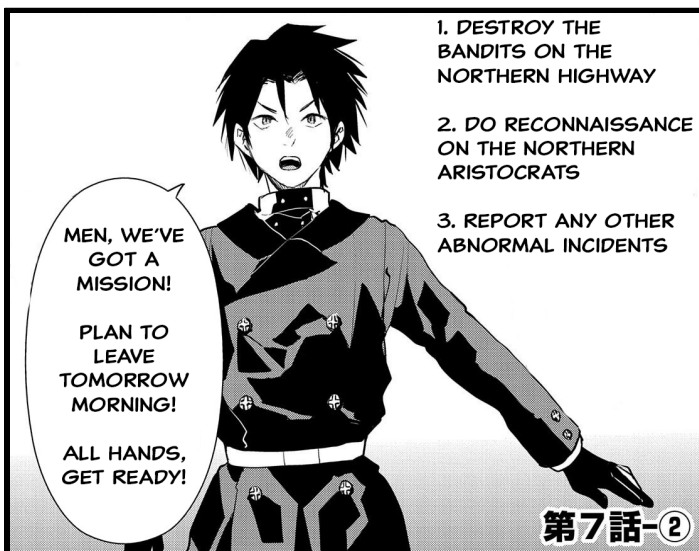
Orders

1. Destroy the bandits appearing around the Northern highway
2. Reconnaissance of territory management for Northern nobles
3. Report on any other incidents if they occur

The soldiers salute me and begin their preparations in a hurry.

The second deployment stratagem is the set of equipment for eradication of bandits. This involves carriages disguised to look like merchant carriages and leather armor disguised to look like cheap adventurer armor.

The first deployment stratagem is for war deployment, serving in a behind-enemy-lines distraction and sabotage. The third deployment stratagem is equipment for hunting monsters.



That's all...

Following the orders I received from General Castro Andretti, the Eighth Army departed the capital the next day. We headed north on the main highway to that region.

However, a platoon I chose to directly command was moving in a different direction. Taking on some bandits would be an easy victory for the current Eighth Army, so I split off a few people for a different task. I've seen their skills in training, so I'm certain they'll be fine.

"Listen up! Nobody can die! Everybody has to come back alive! If anyone dies, I'll double the training for everyone else! Remember the lessons you've learned from training! You can't lose if you follow those lessons! If it looks dangerous, count on your fellow soldiers for support! You'll be fine!" **Patrick** shouted

I heard that some soldiers turned blue from worry.

My separate platoon was observing the movements of the Eighth Army from a reasonable distance. We could see them, but wouldn't be easily seen.

"Oh, the bandits came out." **Soldier A**

"The caravan disguise is still effective." **Patrick**

"Bandits are so stupid." **Soldier B**

"Oh, the battle has begun." **Patrick**

"Aren't the bandits too weak? It's nearly over already." **Soldier A**

"Did they think the scattered caravans weren't friendly and would scatter at one being attacked?" **Soldier B**

"It's a reasonable distance, and merchant caravans will often ignore the attacked carriages and run away." **Patrick**

"Oh, it's finished." **Soldier A**

"That wasn't even 10 minutes." **Soldier B**

"Good job everyone!" **Patrick**

The unfortunate bandits were annihilated except for a few taken as prisoners.

I dismissed most of my surveillance platoon to rejoin the Eighth Army and brought only a single squad to inspect the villages and towns along the highway. We're disguised as adventurers on horses, let's check out these villages.

When we arrived at the first town, we were charged a silver coin to enter as an "entrance tax". While there aren't laws on the amount for an entrance tax, a silver coin is ludicrous. The rest of the country varies between three to ten bronze coins, at most only a tenth of this town's amount.

"Is this right?" **Patrick**

"Yes, it must be at the behest of Major General Newgarden." **Soldier**

"Oh, that pig Major General." **Patrick**

This town is pretty lackluster. There are very few merchant carriages, probably due to the high entrance tax.

We chose to stay in a middle-class inn for the night, and I came down to the inn's dining room to listen to gossip. Since there's only a few other visitors, I can easily keep track of their conversations.

"A large merchant caravan like us can handle a silver coin entrance fee, but a smaller peddler would lose money paying that entrance fee." **Merchant A**

"Sure, if goods are scarce, a silver coin wouldn't be that bad, but I don't think that's happening. The lodging fee is four bronze coins higher than our last visit as well."

Merchant B

Sounds like the whole town is undergoing inflation.

While listening to the other conversations, I check on the food I was given. Two pieces of black bread and vegetable soup with a serving of sauteed mutton, not much seasoning in the soup or on the meat.

I'll have to investigate if this town is particularly unlucky, or is this a widespread problem for the territory.

The next day, my squad rides our horses over to another town in the Newgarden territory.

"It's here too." **Patrick**

"Why are the prices so high?" **Soldier**

"I wonder whether it's to raise money or to reduce the number of people visiting the territory?" **Patrick**

"Reduce the visitors?" **Soldier**

"It's a way to curtail the number of people coming in and out to keep any news from the territory from spreading." **Patrick**

"Like what kind of news?" **Soldier**

"I have no idea. Maybe the pig has gone crazy with greed, that happens sometimes." **Patrick**

We stayed at a cheap inn today, normally it would be full of adventurers, but there were none. There was a single group of merchants staying in the inn.

There's clearly something wrong.

"Normally, an inn like this would be packed with adventurers! It's weird!" **Soldier**

What's happening in the Newgarden territory?

I decided it was time to visit the capital of the Newgarden territory.

"Two silver coins! Overnight stay only! If you don't have the money, get moving!" **Gate Guard**

This is what I heard when entering the city.

"Far from being lively, there's nobody here, right?" **Soldier**

That was the impression we encountered on entering the city. The sun was still high in the sky, so there should have been plenty of people around.

I wasn't registered as an adventurer, so I had Mirko visit the Adventurer's Guild. Many commoner soldiers will work in the guild before joining the army. It helps them to pick up weapon and camping skills.

When Mirko got back, he had an astounding report.

The dungeon had **overflowed**.

So, magic is present in this world. Magic is in everything and anything. Living things, rocks, even the air! When magic builds up in caves, it turns into a comfortable place for monsters. In those places, the monsters breed and multiply, growing steadily. It falls to soldiers and adventurers to regularly cull the monsters.

It seems Major General Newgarden had gotten greedy and failed to allocate money towards eliminating monsters.

It costs money to move soldiers and the Adventurer's Guild needs reward money to incentivize exterminating unprofitable monsters. Keeping the monsters in check is a necessary expense for a territory with a dungeon. As soon as the monster numbers have gotten dangerous, the ruler is paying ten times or more what it would have cost in periodic culls. Notwithstanding the increased peril posed by the monster count, of course.

Apparently Newgarden dispatched his militia and a bunch of adventurers hurriedly, but they seem to have suffered a large number of injuries and deaths. It seems he has refused to report the situation to the Adventurer's Guild and is hiding it from the Kingdom.

When a merchant travels, they use escort adventurers, so the wider Guild is learning the truth, slowly. Newgarden can't keep this information secret forever. So that's why he was trying to restrain movement...

"There's no way they could keep it hidden." **Receptionist**

Mirko was able to find a Guild receptionist willing to give us the information. I handed him two silver coins to pay the receptionist for the rest of the information.

It seems the dungeon wasn't subjugated, it is still full of monsters and the remaining soldiers and adventurers are keeping the monsters from invading the city, but it won't last.

"I'm going back to the Royal Capital. Mirko, bring the Eighth Army to this city while I report to His Majesty. I'll be back soon!" **Patrick**

I left Mirko and one soldier while I took the other two from his squad as I left the city in a hurry.

After two days of traveling on horses, I made it to the Royal Capital and delivered his report to Lieutenant General Simon. Lieutenant General Simon sent the report to General Andretti, who then sent the report to the King.

Preparations were hurriedly made, so the next day found the Second Army heading for the Newgarden territory with full equipment. Five days later, the Second Army entered the Newgarden capital and joined the Eighth Army that was already in the city. Lieutenant General Simon and I sat down with the Adventurer's Guild manager to get a full report of the situation.

In the meantime, 100 soldiers were dispatched to arrest the Newgarden family and detain them for questioning. The commander of the territory militia had already fled, so his second-in-command was desperately keeping the defense together.

Thanks to the army reinforcements, the adventurers could be relieved and the dungeon subjugation operation began.

The monsters overflowing from the dungeon entrance were goblins, orcs, ogres, gray wolves, and cyclopes.

The archers devastated the 500 or so goblins that were pouring out. The spear corps took out the orcs while the cavalry took down the ogres. The Eighth Army took out the wolves in the chaos of the battle.

Since there were no King-class monsters, the Second and Eighth Armies were able to destroy the monsters with a good degree of success. Of course, they weren't unscathed. There were many wounded and a few dead.

The fiercest area of the battle is where certain soldiers are fighting the cyclopes. A single Cyclops wouldn't be too dangerous, but there were five of them. The best fighters available were sent against the cyclopes.

You might think that arrows to the eye would work, but a Cyclops is not that stupid. If there are archers around, they'll cover their eye with one hand and run around around smashing soldiers with their other hand. They're so large that anyone hit by them is seriously injured.

Wayne, the newest ace of the Second Army, is leading his men against one Cyclops while taking on another one solo. I can't discern the movement of his spear, I just see the blood coming from new wounds on the Cyclops.

"Well, Wayne's target isn't going anywhere. He's a monster." **Patrick**

Other talented soldiers are doing the same for two other Cyclopes.

There's one Cyclops who is fighting a seemingly invisible enemy, me. As far as it can tell, nothing is there, nobody is around, but its wounds continue to increase.

The Cyclops thinks: "What am I fighting? What could I be fighting against?"

He swings his arms around, but they don't connect with anything. He swings his feet, but they hit nothing. And yet, his wounds increase.

Ugh, this idiot moves too much

I'm scared on the inside. If one of those arms hits me directly, I'm looking at an instant death. Just wildly swinging an arm is a deadly attack, what is this monster?

I dodge everything by the width of a sheet of paper, but I have no choice but to dodge it. I'd be lucky to get off with a broken arm.

Dodge and slash, duck down and rush in every so often.

I switch from my short sword to a katana, then aim at the ankle with the cutting edge. The knee of the Cyclops is slightly taller than me, what else can I attack?

After a few slashes, I finally connect and sever the Achilles tendon on the the right leg. The Cyclops bends down and I slash at the flanks. A bit of an intestine pops out.

Chance! I grab the intestine and run away at full speed, pulling out the intestine from the Cyclops. The Cyclops stops covering his eye and grabs at his flank.

I finally managed to distract the beast from protecting his eye!

I carefully aim at the eye with a shuriken, before letting it fly to pierce into the giant eye. The Cyclops barks and moves its hands back to its eye to extract the shuriken.

I'll run back to grab some more of the intestines, though I'm getting covered in blood from the pierced eye. It's all over my body and uniform. Then the intestine splits, the half-digested food begins to overflow and a strange odor starts to drift around. The Cyclops is now rolling on the ground in pain.

I finally get to slash at the neck, blood flies out like a fountain. The area around me is turning into a sea of blood.

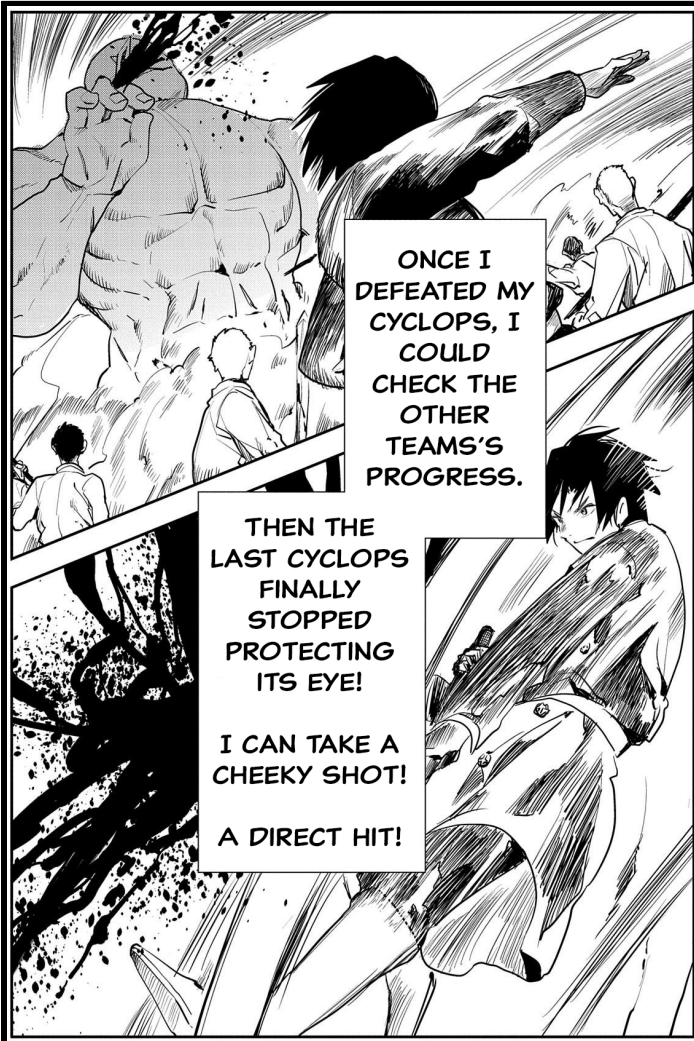
"The Quintessential Grim Reaper" **One Soldier** mutters

Who said that?

"The Bloody Grim Reaper!" **Another Soldier** shouts

I defeated one Cyclops and other talented soldiers managed to defeat three more. There was only one left, the one that Wayne's platoon was taking on.

Just then, the last Cyclops stopped protecting its eye for a second, so I took a cheeky shot at it with another shuriken. A direct hit!



Wayne and his men swarm the badly wounded Cyclops.

As I look around, it is quite clear the end is in sight.

Behind me, a large thud from the last Cyclops was heard. I'm exhausted, I sit down on the

Cyclops I defeated and look around.

The area is full of monster corpses, soldiers are starting to drag the useless ones like goblins to bonfires to burn. Orcs are being butchered while wolves are being stripped of their fur before the carcasses are tossed on the bonfires.

The eyes and livers of Cyclopes seem to be useful for medicine, but the rest is being burned. If we leave the corpses as is, they could become zombies or rot and cause sickness to the nearby city.



Once the armies are down with the cleanup, we'll get back on the way home.

With the dead and injured riding in carriages, the army sets off back to the Royal Capital. We walk with joy and sadness.

As for my Eighth Army, we had some injuries but no deaths. That's a huge success!

Count Newgarden had his possessions confiscated and his family was erased from the aristocratic lists. They were downgraded to commoners and sent to the Royal Capital to work.

He managed to escape the death penalty as he didn't betray the Kingdom to another nation. I mean, he sort of betrayed the Kingdom by letting the dungeon overflow, but that was up to the King, not me.

The commander of the militia who escaped was later arrested and sent to work in the mines as a convict. The Newgarden territory became a holding of the Royal Family for the moment, it will be given to a different noble family in the future.

After the Second and Eighth Armies returned to the capital, they were each given two days of vacation. However, I got summoned by the King.

I'm currently kneeling and lowering my head before the King. He enters and sits on the throne.

"Viscount Patrick von Snake, raise your face." **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"Ha!" **Patrick**

I look up now.

"If this had continued to stay hidden, it would have turned into a major problem for the Kingdom. You showed good judgement in discovering and reporting the issue. Therefore, you will be given a reward.

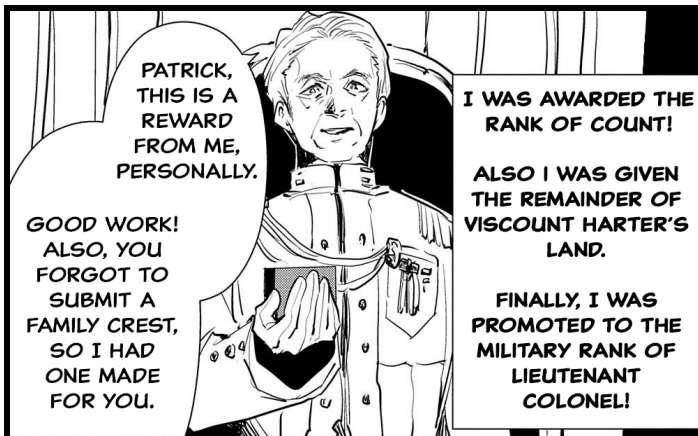
Prime Minister, please read the inventory." **King**

"First, Viscount Patrick von Snake is appointed to the rank of Count. Second, the remainder of former Viscount Harter's territory will be given to Count Snake. Finally, Count Patrick von Snake is awarded the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. That is all!" **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"Thank you for this kindness, I will continue to devote my power to His Majesty the King and the people of the Kingdom." **Patrick**

The King nodded at the proper response.

"Also, Patrick. This is a reward from me, personally. Take it." **King**



The Prime Minister brings me a small wooden box.

"Yes, your Majesty." **Patrick**

"Hm, good work! Also, you have yet to submit a family crest? I had something drawn up for you, enjoy it!" **King**

The King grinned as he left the audience chamber.

Oh, I've been targeted. I'm sweating inwardly from the stress.

Chapter 5: Living as a Count

When I got out of the audience chamber I sat down on a bench in the castle courtyard and opened the lid of the box.

"What is this?" **Patrick**

Inside the box was a snake-shaped bracelet, I picked it up and examined the thing.

"I see, it opens up here and you can fasten it around your wrist." **Patrick**

I fasten the bracelet around my left wrist. Suddenly the catch's gap disappears and it's now snug on my wrist. This is weird.

"Can I take this off?" **Patrick**

I can't locate the bit that released the catch.

"Well, I'm fine with it. It was a gift from the King, so I can wear it anywhere." **Patrick**

I stand up from the bench to return to the military barracks when I accidentally bump into someone.

"Ack" **Girl**

The girl let out a high-pitched yelp of surprise before falling on her butt.



"Oh, I'm sorry, I wasn't watching where I was walking. Are you hurt?" **Patrick**

I take the hand of the girl I knocked down and help her to her feet. She seems around 12 years old. She has a thin body with short-cut blonde hair and blue eyes. I haven't seen anyone wearing the same style of clothes, is she a visitor from another country? The clothes seem to be built of high-quality cloth and put together in a professional manner.

"No, no, I wasn't paying attention either. Excuse me." **Girl**

"Are you hurt anywhere? I hope you're not injured." **Patrick**

"Oh, I'm fine." **Girl**

"Then, please excuse me." **Patrick**

I bow and leave.

Behind my back the girl watches me leave and goes "Hmph" with a smile.

The door of the King's private chambers slam open.

"Father" **Sonaris** calls out with a lively voice

"Sona, don't you ask me to knock when I enter your rooms?" **King** gently scolds

"Yes, I'm sorry. But, listen! I finally got to talk to the gentleman while I was taking a walk in the courtyard!" **Sonaris**

"The gentleman?" **King**

"Huh? I already told you before! I said I found an interesting gentleman at the ceremony!" **Sonaris**

The King makes a face of realization.

"Oh, I remember saying I couldn't guess who it could be, since there were a lot of nobles and soldiers at the ceremony. But there were only a few visitors today, so maybe we can figure out who you saw. What do you remember about the gentleman?" **King**

"Well, probably around 16 years old? From the outfit, he looks like an aristocrat serving in the military. He had black hair and black eyes..." **Sonaris**

A certain person is coming to mind for the King...

"He had a snake bracelet on his left arm!" **Sonaris**

Ok, that clinches it. That's Patrick...



One day, a person came to visit Patrick's room in the military barracks, specifically a maid. They make sure the residents are cleaning up their rooms, keeping things organized, not letting food rot and so on. The ranks are filled by the wives and children of soldiers who passed during combat. It's not hard work and it pays well.

Occasionally soldiers bring in unconnected civilians for certain activities, which is against regulations. The maids will regularly undertake unannounced inspections, to ensure those regulations are being followed.

Today, my room was chosen for inspection, obviously there was no advance notice.

The janitor who entered the room saw something monstrous.

"Geeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!!!" **Maid** shouts

It's a large snake.

"Yes, I'm so sorry." **Patrick**

I had been sitting and apologizing in during sermons by various maids for the past hour.

It seems pets aren't allowed in the barracks.

I was told to "Get out **NOW!**" and booted from the barracks.



So I have to find a new place to sleep.

"Ahh, what's with them?" **Patrick**

I've got my possessions in a backpack on my back and I'm followed by a big snake as I walk around the Royal Capital.

When I asked various inns for a room, I got refused by every one. The cause is the snake, of course.

Do you know the anaconda? It's a snake that's over 8 meters long, but it's just a big and long snake. They aren't poisonous.

The snake I have is pretty similar, the scales are a bluish-green with a triangular head. Nearly all of the snakes in this world with triangular heads are venomous, so no inn will take me. Pi-chan wouldn't bite anyone, at least nobody who didn't attack him first, but he might be venomous.

I even tried asking real estate agents about buying a house. Unfortunately, there weren't any properties I could buy and occupy today, so I had to camp out on the edge of the army training grounds.

The next day, I was introduced to a mansion that I could purchase by a real estate agent.

"Here?" **Patrick**

There was a large mansion in front of me.

"It's huge" **Patrick**

I think back to the requirements I gave the real estate agent. I asked for a property that can be moved into as quickly as possible with a large room and my max budget was 100 gold coins. I've been saving my rewards, so I have plenty of money saved up.

For the time being, I open the gate with the key I was given and enter the property. When I reach the entrance and unlock the door, I look at the spaciousness of the entrance hall and the gorgeous staircase.

"How can this place only be 100 gold coins?" **Patrick**

I wondered, but then I saw something black move out of the corner of my eye.

I was informed that this was the former residence of the Viscount Harter family, but that family had been removed after their rebellion and their properties had been taken over by the royal family. Since the royal family didn't want to deal with the mansion's upkeep, it was sold to a real estate agent in the Royal Capital.

The agent hired adventurers to regularly check on the mansion, but they ran into an issue. Before anyone realized it, rats had taken up residence in the mansion.

Rats? You might be thinking an exterminator can take care of them, right?

But it wasn't normal rats. It was a monster rat, the Gigarat. They range in size between 50 centimeters and 1 meter and breed rapidly. They're quick and intelligent as well. The flesh stinks and the fur is useless, but they're more dangerous than goblins. They know how to use their speed when attacking.

It seems there's no less than 200 of them infesting the mansion. Plus, if you leave even a handful, they can be back to 200 in a month. There's no way the agent can sell this property to an average customer. That's why he'd let it go for only 100 gold coins.

I had already paid for this property and waived the inspection clause, but I think we can handle this.

"Pi-chan, you've got plenty of food now." **Patrick**

Yes, the snake's name is Pi-chan. Yes, people have told me I have no naming sense. I can't even explain why I call the snake Pi-chan, it just popped into my head when I first saw her.

Pi-chan immediately lunged at the nearest Gigarat as if he understood what I was saying.

A few hours later, Pi-chan lays down in the entrance hall to sleep with a swollen stomach.

I went out to request assistance from the Adventurer's Guild to assist with the cleaning. For the time being, my hired hand and I were able to clean up the mansion to a reasonable degree. The adventurer left exhausted after cleaning rat droppings all day. The mansion was sold unfurnished, so I laid out a blanket next to Pi-chan and went to sleep.

The next day, I purchased some proper bedding for the mansion. I didn't have more than a backpack's worth of luggage, so I didn't need to procure a chest of drawers.

Since buying the mansion, I got a reprieve from catching Pi-chan's meals. The house is an all-you-can-eat buffet for my snake. Pi-chan goes from room to room and eats up the rats. She keeps getting bigger and bigger.

Two months on and there were no more rats in the mansion. It seems they have been annihilated. I consulted some people and they said that snakes could survive without eating for several months, so I decided to take Pi-chan out to the nearby forest once a month to let her feed.



Later, when I brought Pi-chan to the forest...

"Time to eat" **Patrick**

After I said that, Pi-chan disappears into the grass without a sound. After a few minutes, I heard a scream from a creature. I hear more screams every few minutes for about an hour, then Pi-chan reappears with a swollen belly.

I lifted up Pi-chan's head and commented "Heavy!", then we returned to the mansion.



I guess I should talk about how my territory is doing.

The former Riggsby territory was historically a high-earning territory that shouldn't need to carry any debts. The reason it became debt-ridden was the extreme greed of the ruling nobles.

Three generations before me, the Baron of that time made loans with usurious interest. The profits were then invested in building an ale and wine industry for the territory. A generation later, the Riggsby family was known as a respected purveyor of ale and wine across the Kingdom and abroad.

Furthermore, that generation's Baron realized the harvest was declining due to continuous planting of wheat, so they started to plant beans every other year to let the fields recover. That bean was similar to soybeans from Earth.

Previous generations of the Riggsby family were somewhat crooked, but scarily competent. The territory is blessed with water and rich soil, with vast wheat fields and vineyards all over the land.

Part of the wheat harvest is sent directly to the King to satisfy the territory's tax burden. Most of the rest is turned into ale or (starting recently) distilled into whiskey. Grapes of course are turned into wine. The principal industries of the former Riggsby territory are wheat, ale, and wine. My newly developed whiskey is very profitable. No matter what kind of alcohol we export, it sells out easily.

That's why the former Riggsby family was called the loan sharks of the Kingdom. Thanks to the pigs spending spree, all the accumulated wealth was squandered. Luckily, the debt to the Westin family went away with their execution, so I don't have to worry about repayment. Additionally, the jewels collected by the Riggsby family were given to me when I took over the territory, so I sold them to reestablish the territory coffers.

I'm not a heavy drinker, but I do partake. I never really liked ale, must be from my past life's memories. In that life, I gravitated towards whiskey. So I found a craftsman to build me a distiller. I then distilled the Riggsby ale into a whiskey-ish product.

That was really good, so I turned it into a product of the territory. The whiskey is worth three times as much as the ale that is put into the distiller.

In another case, I worked with a brewer and an elf to use time magic (a rare magic) to age select bottles of Riggsby wine for an extra three years. Because of the high demand for wine, I can't hold back much for normal aging, but my aged wine is a luxury item that sells out quickly. Of course, I sent a few crates of both the whiskey and aged wine to the Royal Family as tribute.

In the other section of my domain, the part that originally belonged to Viscount Harter, they didn't have much land suitable for farming. Most of the territory is taken up by a vast lake and the surrounding wetlands. The main industry of the territory was fishing, but the Viscount had let the fishermen grow too greedy. The catch has been going down year over year, so the territory is getting poorer and poorer. The fishermen are leaving the profession

or going into debt.

When I went to inspect the area, I found a certain grass growing in the marsh. There was a ton of it. I asked the villagers if they were going to eat it. One villager said that it looked like wheat, but it doesn't work for making bread, so they just feed it to the chickens and pigs.

Yes, it was rice!

I immediately organized rice cultivation with the caveat that all rice produced from the new fields will be purchased by me. Of course, I want the rice for sake. Since the rice-polishing technology is well behind Earth, the sake isn't as clear as a modern Earth sake, it's a slightly brownish color.

I've also used soybeans to make mirin and soy sauce. The new seasonings and sake were well received in the capital.

After a number of years, the Snake territory would become the second most prosperous territory after the Royal Capital. But that is a while away still...

My Snake family is an emerging noble house. There's just me at the moment.



Connections are important for aristocrats. By marrying each other, families create new relationships, which can build a faction or cause conflict.

I don't have parents or siblings anymore...

I killed them when they rebelled against the Kingdom.

The only blood relation I have is the Canaan family from my maternal bloodline.

I think it's fine to be independent, but it does lead to certain issues. It's difficult to hire servants without connections.

I can't hire distant relatives if I don't have relatives, plus I can't hire classmates since I didn't attend the aristocratic academy. I attended the military academy, since I was a third son of a Baron.

Now that I'm living in a mansion in the Royal Capital with my pet animal, my biggest problem is cleaning the house. I only use the entrance hall and a bedroom, but I also need to clean the toilet and shower, do my laundry, and buy and cook food.

I could probably get an introduction from the Canaan family.

"I want a maid..." **Patrick** murmurs

My closest friend in the military is Wayne, but Wayne is now under Lieutenant General Simon because of Wayne's betrothal.

I thought I'd ask Lieutenant General Simon what I should do.

"I need to hire a maid, how would I go about finding one?" **Patrick**

"Maids are normally the fourth or fifth daughters from friendly aristocrats. There are maid agencies, but those maids aren't familiar with noble customs. You need a maid to work in your aristocratic mansion, right?" **Lieutenant Gen. Simon**

I didn't realize that maids needed specific education for aristocratic service.

While I was walking around the military barracks, I spotted my Uncle Trolla, the current Baron Canaan.

"Uncle!" **Patrick** called out

"Oh, Patrick! I haven't seen you around the barracks before. I guess I'm always staying around the royal castle when I'm here, so I never got around to meeting you here! Hah!" **Baron Canaan** laughs

"Do you know how I could get a maid? I bought a house, but the cleaning is too troublesome." **Patrick**

"Hmm, you bought a house! Where?" **Baron Canaan**

"It was the former Viscount Harter mansion." **Patrick**

"That's really large for a single person, but for a count... it works. How many people do you need?" **Baron Canaan**

"For the time being, it's just me and my pet living there, so I think one person could keep it clean." **Patrick**

"Hmm, I'll see who I know." **Baron Canaan**

"Thank you" **Patrick** says as he bows his head

"A Count doesn't need to bow so easily! Act a little more dignified!" **Baron Canaan** says with a laugh

A little while later, my uncle contacted me and introduced me to a maid. Since there don't seem to be any issues, I decided to hire her.



"Best regards" **Patrick**

"Nice to meet you too, Master." **Maid**

Master! I'm that kind of person now! It sounds good.

This woman is a wolf beastwoman named Pamela. She's a little chubby, but she looks healthy and doesn't feel abrasive. She's 30 this year and had worked as a maid of a certain house, but the family was destroyed and she lost her job. She went to work as a waitress in the dining room of the Kingdom Knights, but the pay is mediocre. She was more than happy to take this opportunity.

I hope it wasn't a house where I played a role in the destruction. That being said, I think I've been part of every house destruction in recent memory...

Oh well.

She took a room in the servant area of the mansion and she'll be a live-in maid for the house. When she opened the front door and saw Pi-chan, she fell to the ground and had an incident. She's not quitting already, right?

The King's Perspective

At the King, I'm worried about one of my beloved daughters. She's still only 12 years old, though she's near to her 13th birthday.

If you're an aristocrat, that's early enough to get engaged. Royalty is usually a little slower since a marriage with the Royal Family can change the balance of power among the aristocrats. If one faction is too connected to royalty, the other factions can become discontented. There needs to be a balance.

There's also an order to betrothals, generally oldest to youngest. The crown prince's engagement was only recently announced. Even though there's the second prince, the third prince, the first princess, and the second princess without engagements, the third princess is the most interested in becoming engaged.

As the King, I have three wives. The Queen birthed the crown prince and the third princess, while the second prince and second princess are from his first concubine, and the rest were from the second concubine.

If only the children of the Queen are engaged, the concubine's families will cause trouble. That being said, if the third princess is interested in Patrick, I can't push back. Patrick has pledged allegiance and faithfully served the Royal Family and his results are excellent. His territory is coming out with new products, the new alcohol products are especially tasty.

That sake is quite tasty! The brandy? I like to have it with ice. His whiskey is also quite

good, I like it watered down a little.

Oh, I've gotten distracted.

Patrick is doing well with his territory's economy and the territory is happy with his governance. I hear he's started revitalizing the former Harter territory by growing new crops. The only worry I have is that military life is a harsh environment, but all military aristocrats have the same problem.

Court aristocrats, the ones that only serve in administrative roles and don't manage a territory, rarely go to war, but there's a very short list of them I could marry a daughter off to. There are so many pig-headed aristocrats in their ranks.

For now, I should explain Patrick's history to my daughter.

"What a poor person. I'll heal his heart!" **Third Princess Sonaris**



Oh, what should I do now?

In the meantime, let's hurry up engagement talks for my other children.



A family crest is a coat of arms that represents a house.

The Royal Family is the only one that can use the Eagle in their crest. Military families will often use swords or spears in theirs, or alternatively, some strong animal. Many families use a specialty of their territory, like ears of wheat. The former Riggsby crest was made of wheat ears.

The big taboo is using a monster in the family crest as this could be seen as challenging the Royal Family. Note that this taboo is unique to the Kingdom, plenty of nobles in other countries use creatures like dragons in their crests.

Any document submitted to the Royal Family on behalf of a noble family must be stamped with the family's crest. Less important documents only require a signature. All tax documents require the family crest to be stamped onto them.

I hadn't submitted a family crest. I didn't forget it, I still had most of a year to submit it! Before I could finish one, the King took it upon himself to submit a family crest for me. I just received the final version from the government office. It's two snakes entwined with a dagger.

"Well, it's Snakes for the Snake family." **Patrick**

The stamp is actually an expensive magic tool. The tool stamps using the magic signature of the person who pressed it down. This prevents counterfeiting, since it won't bleed or fade like normal ink and each person has a unique impression using the tool. Along with the stamp is a dagger with the crest of the Royal Family on one side and my crest on the other side. This is proof of an aristocratic house.

I haven't needed my stamp yet, since it's mostly used for tax documents and I got a year's tax exemption for being a new aristocratic family. I still need to determine the mix of products to submit as taxes. Since my alcohols are becoming popular, I will need to figure up the correct ratio between liquor and wheat.

I've started spending half a month working with my Eighth Army and the other half in my territory, a common pattern for military nobles. The workload of a Count keeps me busy, the paperwork for my territory never ends. I have to read and sign all sorts of documents. Even if I don't agree, I have to sign the Reject area of the document.

In addition, I have to travel all over the territory to check on the maturity of the whiskey and brandy in the main brewery, sake in the other brewery, and a locally made plum wine I named Inesh. In the former Harter territory, I started the cultivation of sweet potatoes, so I'm looking forward to those sweet potatoes.

Yep, I'm going to make shochu.

When I'm in the Royal Capital, I split my time among training with the Eighth Army, my personal training, and occasional practice with the First, Second, or Third armies. The other day, the King's Guard practiced with my Eighth Army. Now even my Uncle is calling me the Grim Reaper, which made me a little depressed.

The Eighth Army has advanced in our primary skill, running. Originally we would run in battle uniforms, but the army is now running in full battle equipment.

I'm fully convinced that the Empire is going to declare war as soon as the five-year non-aggression pact expires. That's what I'm working towards with the Eighth Army training. Well, whenever the criticism gets annoying, I gift some whiskey to the soldiers. That cheers them up quickly.

One day, I was summoned to the Royal Castle to sit across from a certain girl. I have seen her regularly around the Royal Castle and surrounding areas.

That was when the King told me why I was summoned.

"Seriously?!" **Patrick**

I hurriedly sat down and apologized. I was more surprised than when I became a Count and a Lieutenant Colonel on the same day.

A little while later, about an hour after I said "Seriously?" to the King and fell to my knees...

A woman and I are drinking tea in a room of the royal castle.

"Greetings, my name is Patrick von Snake." **Patrick**

"I am Sonaris Mental." **Sonaris**



"So, why me? I'm not a handsome man nor do I come from a good family. In fact, my family recently participated in a rebellion. I then had to brutally execute them on behalf of the Kingdom. Plus, I'm seemingly cursed with a lack of presence." **Patrick**

"I saw Patrick for the first time at the ceremony after the rebellion. You were eating alone at a table near the end. Even though it was a ceremony with so many people around, just one person stood out to me." **Sonaris**

I think about the situation. I wasn't in battle at the time, so I wasn't trying to conceal my presence. However, I was nervous around so many important people, so I should have been trying to fade into the background.

How did she find me?

"You looked so forlorn, but when you met the Canaan family, you lit up..." **Sonaris**

I guess I did perk up at that point, the only house I'm close to is the Canaan family.

"A few days after that, in the castle courtyard, I bumped into you on purpose, but you just apologized like it was your fault. All to a girl dressed like a princess. When you took my hand, my heart started to race and I almost collapsed." **Sonaris**

I was definitely looking at my bracelet, so I didn't notice her.

I guess love is blind, just like they say.

"I'm sure you've heard about me from His Majesty, but I have a somewhat twisted personality. Is that fine with you?" **Patrick**

"I can't find anybody else interesting like you. I trust my instincts!" **Sonaris**

I looked into her eyes and wondered if this was fine. If she didn't like me, she could easily cancel the engagement.

"Then, I look forward to being with you." **Patrick** bowed his head

"Yes, I'm a bit of an odd princess, but it's nice to be with you." **Sonaris** bowed her head in response

Hmm? You're an eccentric princess? Who am I now entangled with?

So, my engagement has been decided, but I have a new problem.

The territory is doing great, but there's a problem in the Royal Capital. More specifically, it's my mansion. Currently there is only me, a maid, and my pet snake living in the mansion. There's not even a gatekeeper.

For a noble, that's no good.

I've been pondering over the situation, but I don't have an obvious solution. The Canaan family has already helped me on a number of occasions, but I should have someone else I can ask. Do I have any other people I can ask?

Wait, I just thought of someone!

"Marquis Dixon said I could consult him!" **Patrick**

I hope he is willing to assist me, so I sent my maid to the Marquis Dixon residence in the Royal Capital with a letter.

A few days later, a letter arrived from Marquis Dixon.

"That worked, he remembered me." **Patrick** says in a relieved voice

The letter said I would be received at his mansion at such-and-such time. It seems the Marquis is staying in the capital at the moment.

As a prelude, I sent my one maid in the morning, then I went myself in the afternoon. I walk alone without any guards, that's not normal for an aristocrat.

I've been endeavoring to build more of a presence recently. It's inconvenient to live a life where people don't recognize your existence. When I go to a store and bring my purchases to the counter, it's annoying when the clerk thinks the products are floating.

So I'm trying to build a more noticeable presence, it's my current goal. Hopefully, more people will take notice of my presence.

At the same time, I'm training to have no presence. It's a weird contrast. When I take care, I've never been located.

Getting back to my current task, I've arrived at the Marquis Dixon mansion. I've told the gatekeeper my name and was let in. At the entrance, I was greeted by Kevin.

"Count, it's been a long time." **Kevin Dixon** looked up with sparkling eyes

"I'm glad you're doing well." **Patrick**

Soon I was shown into the reception room.

The Marquis was already there waiting on me.

"It's been a while, I'm sorry for any inconvenience." **Patrick** bows his head

"No, no. I promised to give you guidance in the future. You're not a bad person to have friendly relations with either." **Marquis Dixon**

"Excuse me" **Patrick** said as he sat down on the sofa

"When you get to be a Marquis, there are many people who want to work at your mansion. It gets difficult to pick who is and who isn't going to be employed when everyone is suggesting their sons or relatives to you. There is a limit to the number of people I can employ. How many people are you looking for?" **Marquis Dixon**

There are many people who appeal to aristocrats to find a job. If it was an unconnected person, they can be rejected immediately. When it is a request from a relative or a servant, especially an important one, it becomes difficult to refuse.

They are introduced as servants from the barons or viscounts of the factions, but even then, there are too many of them, so not all can be employed.

Lieutenant General Simon isn't concerned with this sort of thing, he leaves this sort of affairs to others.

"For the time being, I need a butler for my Royal Capital mansion, several maids, a gatekeeper, at least one cook, a coachman, at least one attendant, a valet, and a number of guards for my residence. At the moment, I'm scraping by with a single maid..." **Patrick** admitted

"In that case, I'd recommend a butler, two assistant butlers, five more maids, a gatekeeper..." **Marquis Dixon**

It seems I'll need to pick up around twenty servants, based on what the Marquis is muttering. I'm a bit surprised I need so many, but I won't let it show on my face.

"Are you particular about race?" **Marquis Dixon**

"No, I'm not particular about race." **Patrick**

"Hmm, I can definitely help you out with this. All right, I'm happy to be able to pay you back! No, it's less of paying a debt off and more building a connection to your family!" **Marquis Dixon** smiles smugly

That evening, Patrick was invited to dinner with the Marquis and his family. The Dixon's that were in attendance were the Marquis, his two wives, the third son Kevin, the first and second sons, and the eldest daughter, who I hadn't met before.

It seems they're visiting the capital to participate in the wedding ceremony of the eldest daughter and the crown prince. I offer my congratulations and promise to give a gift at a later date. That was the end of my visit.

So here is how aristocratic marriages work in the Kingdom. The absolute maximum number of wives is set at five, but that is only in special cases. The normal maximum is three wives, like the current King.

What is a special case?

The noble can petition the King for the fourth and fifth wife if he is having trouble conceiving a male heir. If three wives have all borne daughters, then the noble can choose to ask for up to two more wives.

I think that it makes more sense to divorce and find a new wife or two instead! Don't overly entangle the noble families. That being said, divorce is considered a hostile action among noble families. Nobles aren't able to have a simple divorce.

While I walked home, I kept thinking about what I should give at the Crown Prince and Marquis Dixon's daughter's wedding.

Now that my personnel issue is sorted as well as my territory, I can work on the comfort

issue and improve my lifestyle.

Firstly, I need a personal carriage. Previously, I would rent one from the army. I sent out for one to be constructed, but I will also need horses to pull it and horses need stables. My money is flying out the door.

My residence was formerly a Viscount's so it does have stables, but since Viscount Harter was habitually in debt, the stables were neglected on top of their being made of cheap materials. I tore the stables down and built a better one.

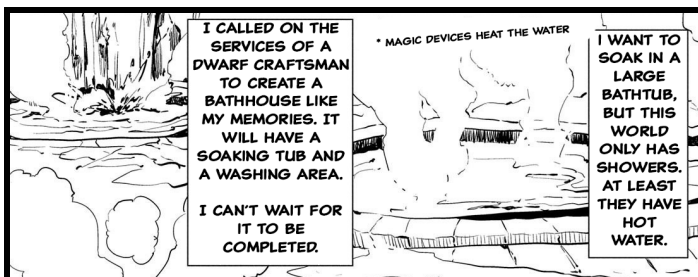
Then, I started improving my mansion. There were no major issues with it, but I do have one complaint.

I want to soak in a large bathtub...

My past-world memories are encouraging me to be selfish. In this world, there isn't a thing like a bathhouse or even a large bathtub. Commoners wipe their bodies with a wet towel while aristocrats and the army use showers. Showers in this world use a magic tool to turn water into hot water that can be controlled by temperature and water amount, but I'm still dissatisfied.

I call a magic tool craftsman to the mansion, a dwarf. They're well known as skilled tool makers.

"So, I'd like something like this. A big tub made of stone, about this long and deep. Over here, I'd like a shower area, and here I'd like an area to sit and wash the body." **Patrick**



After my description, the dwarf thought a few minutes.

"So, you want to soak in hot water? That's a new idea." **Dwarf**

That's when his next comment surprised me.

"Is it patented?" **Dwarf**

"Patented? Is there such a thing?" **Patrick**

In this world, a certain god exists. I've not met him.

He's a god of knowledge and granted the commercial guild a certain power. It seems the commercial guild also handles the sale of the alcohol of my territory, in exchange for a margin on the sale. Well, that can't be helped. However, at least in this world the alcohol creator is allowed to sell the product directly if they wish.

If you go to the temple, pray to the god of knowledge, pay the appropriate gold coins, and have a unique product, you will receive a patent. It's similar to the patent system on Earth. Upon hearing about it, I immediately went to visit the temple.

I applied for a patent on sake, distillery equipment and whiskey, a bathtub, and even chess. I was charged 20 gold coins for it, but I have new products to sell. Chess ended up becoming extremely popular in the Royal Capital.

Previously, reversi, cards, and well pumps were already part of this world, but there weren't any board games around simulated battles. I hired woodworkers to make standard quality sets and stonemasons to make fine sets for the nobility. Of course, one of the first sets went to the King.

As my celebration gift, I sent a set to Marquis Dixon. Obviously, each set has instructions on how to play.

County Snake is **booming**.

Previously, the territory had been deteriorating due to poor governance and then the rebellion, but since I've take charge the territory's profits have shot up above historical highs. The profits came mainly from my new alcohol varieties and the new crops of rice and sweet potatoes. Recently, I've added chess sets to that list.

When the economy starts to boom, people will gather. Merchants set up stores, people are employed in the new stores, and carpenters will gather to build the new stores and residences. Where there is wine, the dwarves will gather as well.

I have the dwarves making equipment for my militia. Yes, the Snake militia was made up of survivors from the Riggsby and Harter militias, newly recruited soldiers, and some soldiers transferred from Baron Canaan's militia. There are currently 500 soldiers, which is about where I want it for now.

I trained them on a similar program as the Eighth Army!

A year later, the Snake militia would become known as the most powerful militia of the Kingdom. All the soldiers have matching green uniforms with a snake embroidered on the left breast pocket. Their leather armor was also branded with the Snake pattern, and they became known as the Viper militia.

I also constructed multiple temple schools in my territory. I want to improve the low literacy rate in this world. It's a strategy to improve my territory's prosperity.

With increasing wealth, criminals will gather to cheat honest people out of their money. The most common scam is cheating people by giving them the wrong change. So I want my citizens to have a working knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Lessons are free to attend and a meal is served. It was just bread and soup, but it's a tradeoff that small farmers would take. Sure, they lose some hands for part of the day, but they're fed while they're gone.

The temple schools are my pet project, and they appear to be completely unprofitable for the territory at the moment. Key phrase being 'at the moment'.

I'm fully convinced they will prove their worth in a few years time.

Beastman Maid's Perspective

My name is Pamela and I'm a wolf beastman. I'm currently employed as a maid at the Count Snake mansion.

Previously, I worked in the cafeteria of the military barracks. That was awful. First of all is the smell, the smell of sweat saturated that place. The soldiers come right in after training without wiping off, so no amount of cleaning would remove the sweat stench.

Also, there were a lot of good-looking people there. I'm a little old to be single, and not as up to date with trends, but not everybody needs to be hip! I mean, there was a good man at my job before the cafeteria!

That workplace was Baron Karee's mansion. I was a maid there and had a good relationship with a wolf beastman who was the gatekeeper. We were even thinking about getting married at some point.

Then the Baron rebelled, the house was crushed, and all the servants lost their jobs. My lover was unemployed and turned to adventuring to scrape by. I can't do anything with a penniless adventurer, we broke up!

Well, let's not dwell on the past and instead think of the future. Today, new servants are coming to the Count Snake mansion, twenty of them! Hopefully, one of them is a good man for me! Now, I can't wait to see their reactions when I open the door.

I have to admit, I had an incident when I first opened the door.

Who would have expected it? I didn't know a snake could get so big! It's humongous! It looks like a venomous snake as well, doesn't it?

You get used to it quickly, but I want to find someone who can handle that sight.

Well, looks like all the new servants showed up, and fifteen of them are males. Oh, one is a good-looking wolf beastman! He looks quite macho. Men with muscles are so romantic! You just need a bit of sense in your head if you have muscles, you don't need to be a genius.

Muscles are the best!

Now, let's open the door!

...

There were only two who didn't encounter incidents of their own. The macho wolf was not able to prevent a leak. Well, it could be worse, he could have let off a foul smell.



He's lucky he didn't go all the way!

I wonder if a servant could recover from that?

It seems the Dwarf stableboy and the Elven butler didn't have any issues.

Did you understand my expressions? I didn't want to descend to crass phrases.



An Aetherial Space

There is a man, well not exactly one man, there's a crystal-like pillar too. The man looks into the crystal and grins at something he's watching.

"What are you looking at?" **Woman**

"Oh, I moved that soul from the alpha world to the beta world a while ago, right? About 18 years ago?" **Man**

"Oh, I think you said there was a memory malfunction with that one?" **Woman**

"Yes, that's it. The child happened to regain his memory. It's interesting that he's now called the Grim Reaper. I thought I had erred when he was able to recover his memory, but it's turning into a happy accident. He's contributing to the cultural development by making distilled spirits." **Man**

"So the last crossover brought out Reversi and Playing Cards? Before that was the hand pump for wells, I think. Alpha has rapid cultural and technological development. Compared to them, Beta is taking it slow." **Woman**

"Well, that's part of what the soul swaps are trying to solve. Beta's natural laws prevent weapons of mass destruction, but wars are common in both worlds. I wonder if there was a mistake in the setup for Beta..." **Man**

"If the big guy hears you talking like that, you'll find yourself with no limbs." **Woman**

"Ooh, that's pretty scary. Well, getting back to the crossover in Beta, I thought he was interesting, so I gave him a little blessing. Well, I gave him a minor boost and added some value to his surroundings." **Man**

"Don't overdo it, ok? It might upset the balance." **Woman**

"Don't worry, it's just a tiny tweak. Just a little change." **Man**

"Sure, sure, Mr. Shinigami." **Woman**



I managed to welcome the new servants to the mansion. There were more than a few incidents in the entrance hall, but it was dealt with by sending those servants to the new main bathroom. In the end, only two of the servants had no issues. I had cleverly warned the servants to bring a change of clothes.

While I was waiting on the other servants to get back, my new butler struck up a conversation. He's a handsome young man, maybe 190 centimeters (6ft 3in), with blue hair and green eyes. He wears his long hair in a tied-up bun at the back of his head. He's an elf, so he's probably older than he looks.

His name is Astoria, unfortunately he's not named Sebastian.

There's also dwarves and beastmen among the new servants. I hope there's no issues with the servant makeup for a nobleman's mansion. I think it's acceptable in the Kingdom, definitely not the Empire.

"So, are you a demonologist, master?" **Astoria**



"What's a demonologist?" **Patrick**

He explained that it was a certain type of human who can command monsters. They are also called "demon tamers" or just "tamers". Nobody among the elves, dwarves, or beastmen are able to become demonologists, it's just humans.

Additionally, keeping pets is rarely practiced by the other races. Even then, keeping a pet isn't like taming. Also, demonologists use mammal-like monsters, there's no record of one

taming a reptile-like monster.

I'm glad it's a rare skill.

I tested the competence of the mansion's security personnel, but I can't say anything good about them. I sent them to my territory for retraining and brought a few militia members to fill in for them. They looked excited to visit the Royal Capital, but even they leaked a bit entering the mansion. In a few months the servants will finish their training, so enjoy your time here while you can.

I also bought four horses for carriage and escort riding. The carriage has been completed, but the ride quality is terrible. As delivered, it had a leaf spring suspension, but it was a bad design. I prayed at the Knowledge God's temple about a coil spring patent, which cost me two gold coins. I ordered some coil springs from my favorite blacksmith on the way back!

The carriage's ride improved considerably.

Oh? You want to know more? Well...

I received a new mission, a secret one.

One day, I was called to the King's private rooms. I saw another person besides His Majesty there, he had silver hair and brown eyes.

"You two haven't met, Patrick, this is Kyle from the Intelligence Department. Have you met Patrick, Kyle?" **King**

"Yes, I'm familiar with just about every nobleman of the Kingdom. Nice to meet you Count Snake. My name is Kyle Keselowski." **Kyle** bows

He's about the same height as me, probably a few years older, 25 maybe? Medium build, medium face, it's the most average appearance I've seen.

"Nice, to meet you, I'm Patrick von Snake." **Patrick**

Since Kyle has a family name, he must be an aristocrat.

"The Baron Keselowski family has served the Intelligence Department for generations. We are court aristocrats who don't hold territory and spend our lives investigating the crimes of other court aristocrats, since they are central to the proper functioning of the central government." **Kyle**

Oh, so like Japanese Public Security.

"Ok, Your Majesty. What have I been tasked with?" **Patrick**

"Quick on the uptake. Kyle's investigation suggests that a noble family has been committing fraud, but there's a lack of conclusive evidence. Kyle, fill Patrick in." **King**

"Yes, Your Majesty, Count Snake..." **Kyle**

"Oh, please just call me Patrick, I'm just a young upstart." **Patrick**

"Ok, call me Kyle then. So Patrick, what do you know about the Ministry of Agriculture?"
Kyle

The Ministry of Agriculture is a department that focuses on the farmlands of the Kingdom. They inspect the type and quantity of crops being planted and harvested and coordinate imports and exports to ensure the Kingdom will have sufficient supplies. It's an important department for the safety of the Kingdom's food supply.

"Well, they're critical to the security and consistency of the Kingdom's food supply."

Patrick nodded

"It seems the leadership is fraudulently reporting low yields in specific territories, then taking part of the difference as a bribe." **Kyle**

So, they're in cahoots with local lords to falsify taxes.

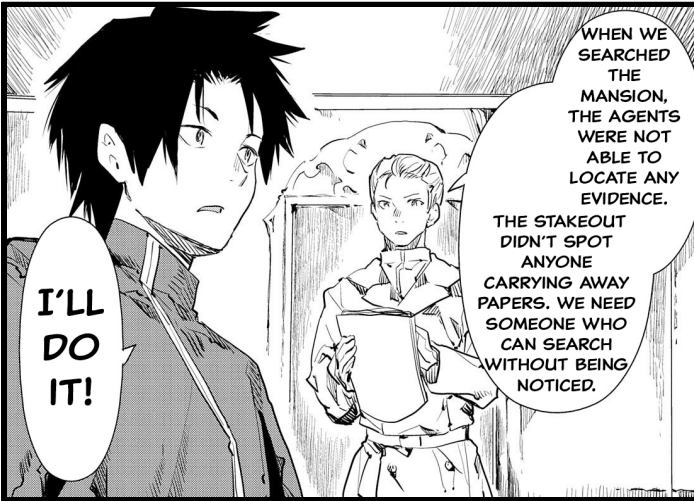
"It seems they're also paying off the tax collectors to keep the scheme hidden. Court aristocrats like the Agriculture Minister are paid a fixed amount from the Kingdom, so the income should be easily derived. But he's been getting rich without working a known side enterprise. I started the investigation because his money wasn't making sense." **Kyle**

"So, what evidence do you have?" **Patrick**

"Well, even when we searched the mansion, we couldn't locate any evidence. I checked for an associate or mistress, but I couldn't find anything. So I came to His Majesty for assistance." **Kyle**

"So, Patrick! Can you use your abilities to investigate? Can you sneak into the house and figure out the trick?" **King**

"I'll do it" **Patrick**



After Kyle filled me in on the rest of the details, I took action the next evening.

I was headed for a certain noble's mansion in the capital.

I chose to wait a short distance away from the mansion's gate in a stakeout. Since the sun has set, there's nobody coming in or out.

I creep closer, ready to observe any comers or goers.

"Silence" **Patrick** mutters

That wasn't magic, because I can't use magic. I'm just reminding myself I'm in covert mode!

I carefully climb over the wall surrounding the mansion and land in the garden, then skulk over to the mansion. I peek through a few windows, unlit ones so I don't get spotted, but they're all locked. I won't get in through a window.

While I was thinking about my next move, I heard a voice at the gate.

"Oh, old lady, the master wants another massage? You work so hard. I'll let you in, just a minute." **Gatekeeper**

The gatekeeper calls out to the old woman and they head for the front door.

Here's my chance.

The gatekeeper comes out to let the old woman through the gate and then the front door. I followed the gatekeeper so I could slip through the door.



"The master is in his usual room. You know the way, so I won't escort you. I've got to watch the gate." **Gatekeeper**

I'm pleased that I'm going to get led straight to the mansion's owner, that saves me the trouble of searching.

At this time, I didn't realize I was about to see something akin to torture soon.

I follow behind the old woman as she walks through the mansion until she reaches a large door and knocks on it.

"Come in" **Man** speaks from inside

When she opens the door, a fifty-year-old man embraces the old woman like he's a puppy. He gives her a large hug.

What?

"Oh, I've been waiting for you, Rachel!" **Man**

So, the old woman is named Rachel?

"Boy, you promised to wait until the door is closed, didn't you? We don't want this to be seen, let's get moving." **Rachel**

The old man and woman enter the room, still locked in a hug. Before the door closes, I sneak into the room.

That's where I would see tonight's horrifying act.

"Rachel! Ahh! Rachel!" **Man**

The man starts with a passionate bout of lip on lip contact before he moves lower.

I'm on the verge of a mental breakdown as I'm being subjected to a seemingly endless display of the old man and woman's affair. There were so many wrinkles...

I wouldn't be surprised if my hair turns white after this.

I got an urge to just kill the old woman as she and the man bask in the afterglow of their kinky rendezvous, but I work hard to restrain myself.

"When you go back Rachel, take the latest papers with you. Hide them in the usual place."

Man

"Yes, yes, my little boy. Just leave it to old me. But you haven't changed since you were a child. You're still so energetic, you spoiled boy." **Rachel**

"Because Rachel is my first love." **Man**

"When you were born, I was fifteen and it's been fifty years from then. Even when you slept with me, you were thirteen and I was twenty-eight. I'm happy you still have love for me." **Rachel**

"I still remember our first time together, I was so happy." **Man**

So, what? You bedded your personal maid and have kept up that relationship for how many years?

I don't want to think any more about their relationship, I heard the man mention documents to be hidden. I'm following the old woman, that's what I'll do.

I walk behind the old woman as she leaves the mansion. I'm desperately trying to purge the nightmarish scenes from my head as the old woman's lamp illuminates the path as she slowly walks to her house.

Finally, she gets there and unlocks the door to enter the house. I slip through before she can close and lock the door. She takes some documents out of her pocket and sticks them in a kettle hidden in a cupboard.

After a simple meal, she went to bed after snuffing the candles. She then began to snore.

I'm surprised I can still see in the pitch black house that has no candles lit. Even without the light, I can make out the interior of the house. It seems like something I heard of from my past life. I can see temperature as colors. That sort of thing.

Temperature sensing? No, thermography?

I'm trying to recall a program I saw on television. It seems the bracelet I was given by the king is actually a magic tool. Even though it's pitch black, I make out the surroundings. Isn't it strange I can see like this?

So, my bracelet was a magic tool?

I must thank His Majesty for his gift next time I see him. I won't have problems crossing a forest in the middle of the night now.



It looks like a normal bracelet, but it might be a gift from a god. I carefully enter the kitchen and take the paperwork from the kettle.

Great, this is the black book of the scheme. I've got the evidence and the mission is complete.

The next day, I contacted Kyle and handed him the documents.

"Patrick! Thank you. This looks like it will bust the case wide open!" **Kyle**

"I'm a little tired, so I'm going home. I wrote the address of the old woman who served as the go-between on this paper, so please investigate her." **Patrick**

I handed the piece of paper to Kyle and started to leave the room.

"Thank you for your contribution!" **Kyle** said as he bowed deeply

I still can't get their rendezvous out of my head.

A few days later, I'm heading to the Royal Castle today; I was summoned again.

First off, I must greet His Majesty.

"Your Majesty, it looks like you're in a good mood... What is it you need from me?"

Patrick

"Patrick, Kyle's case seems to be moving ahead." **King**

"Yes, I was able to locate the evidence that Kyle needed." **Patrick**

"Well, Kyle is wrapping up the charges now. You'll see the results soon, so I called you here today for my daughter Sona." **King**

Sona is the nickname of the Third Princess Sonaris. We are engaged, though the engagement is unannounced as of yet.

"What happened to Her Highness Sonaris?" **Patrick**

"Nothing is wrong, she was just complaining that she couldn't meet you even though you two are engaged. If you have time today, can you visit with her?" **King**

"I can do some time today. I can't stay long though, so should we schedule a longer time in the future?" **Patrick**

"I heard you're terribly busy with military affairs and territory management; I bet you often work til midnight like me. I do want to keep Sona in a good mood. If she's in a bad mood, it will be hard on me." **King**

"I understand, I'm off to visit with her." **Patrick**

"Well, thanks for your help today, Patrick." **King**

"Yah!" **Patrick**

I was led to a courtyard in the Royal Castle to meet with Her Highness Sonaris. After waiting a while, Sonaris appears with a maid.

"I'm sorry Patrick!" **Sonaris** quips cheerfully

Sonaris appears to be dressed like a Navy sailor today, is there even a Navy in this Kingdom?

"No, Sonaris. I'm sorry I haven't been able to meet you as well." **Patrick**

"Well, haven't you been swamped with work?" **Sonaris**

"Yes, I haven't had the time because I've been bouncing between military affairs and territory management." **Patrick**

"That work is important, can you tell me about your territory." **Sonaris**

I regaled Sonaris with various descriptions of my territory, from the grain-covered hills to the lake with fishermen surrounded by the new rice fields.

Soon, I need to talk a bit about myself, but I don't have any hobbies to talk about. So I decided to talk about my pet, Pi-chan.

She loved it.

"You have a snake? I want to see it!" **Sonaris**



Normally, women are afraid of snakes (plenty of men too) but she's glommed on to it.

"It's a really big snake? Are you sure?" **Patrick**

"How big is really big?" **Sonaris** asks while tilting her head

"I think Pi-chan is now about 10 meters (33ft)." **Patrick**

He just keeps getting longer and longer.

"Wow! That is a very big snake! I have to see it!" **Sonaris**

It was decided that Third Princess Sonaris will visit the Count Snake mansion soon.

Today, the Royal Capital mansion of the Count Snake family is a flurry of activity! The Third Princess of the Kingdom is coming!

Although she is engaged to Count Snake, that engagement is unannounced as of now.

Once the news of the visit spread to the servants, every servant began to work on preparing the mansion. It wasn't just the butler and maids, even the stableboys were roped into helping clean. Carpets were washed, missing furnishings were purchased, flowers were brought in to spruce up the previously barren garden, a new pavilion was constructed, etc.

In only ten days, the Snake mansion managed to reach to the general standard of an aristocratic residence.

The Day of the Visit

Ten Royal Guard knights, three carriages with the royal crest, and fifty soldiers of the First Army appeared at my mansion like a procession of a lord that morning. I expected about half as many would have accompanied the Princess, is this some sort of planned show of force?

A crowd of onlookers gathered, of course.

I hadn't expected such a large number of people to show up, are my 21 servants enough?

The servants gather in a row to welcome the Princess while my butler and I wait at the gate. Soon, the center carriage's door opens and Sonaris appears.

"Welcome Princess Sonaris, to Count Snake mansion." **Patrick**



"Patrick, thank you for accommodating my curiosity." **Sonaris**



She looks excited to be here. We meander to the mansion entrance by walking through the hastily planted garden.

We'll see him when the front door opens...

Pi-chan

Sonaris had been warned, and had no issues, but there were screams from some of her escorts.

Her maids and several soldiers were guided to the Snake mansion bathroom.

The soldiers who weren't able to see the inside of the entryway were lucky! Perhaps?

I let the rest of the Royal Guard Knights as well the First Army soldiers know what was inside. They all chose to guard the outside of the mansion and refrained from entering.

"Maybe retraining is in order?" **Patrick**

While all the issues were being solved, Third Princess Sonaris was having fun with Pi-chan, stroking his head and lifting his tail. I think we'll get along well into the future.

We then moved from the entrance hall to the dining room to have a conversation over a cup of tea. For some reason, Pi-chan followed us to the dining room and is currently wandering back and forth between Sonaris and I.

When Sonaris asked me what my hobbies were, I replied that I take care of Pi-chan, while she said that sewing was her hobby.

"I want to make you some clothes!" **Sonaris** tells Patrick

"For me to wear?" **Patrick**

"Yes! I want to make you military and ceremonial uniforms as well as march armor! I even have ideas for everyday clothes for you!" **Sonaris**

"March armor?" **Patrick**

What's that?

"Yes, there's a big military exercise every four years, right? The next one is next year, I think. I want to make armor for you to wear!" **Sonaris**

The Military March

A festival where the First, Second, and Third Kingdom Armies march through the Royal Capital before exiting the city and exterminating monsters around the city in one big go. The meat of the exterminated monsters is provided to the city food stalls at bargain prices while usable items like furs are sold and the proceeds are distributed to orphanages and Army widows.

I haven't had the chance to participate since the last one was the year before I joined the Army, but it's possible the Eighth Army will be called to join the other armies in the March. Certainly, the high-ranking military personnel will march in armor in the city, normally those personnel wouldn't wear armor.

"Sure, I don't have armor like that right now. Making armor like that must be difficult, right?" **Patrick**

"It's fine, don't worry! I've wanted to make some handmade armor for Patrick! I'll design it myself, of course!" **Sonaris**



I'm a little apprehensive about her design, but I can't say no to her. I give up.

"Well, then I'm looking forward to seeing it." **Patrick**

I didn't have the guts to say anything else. A year later, I would regret my decision, but how was I supposed to know the lengths she would go for the armor.

"You need clothes for my brother's wedding as well! It's a month from now, so if I start working now, you'll have them in time! Leave it to me!" **Sonaris**

Certainly, I'll need to attend the Crown Prince's wedding, and the other party in the wedding is a Marquis I'm acquainted with...

I'll also get them a wedding gift because I'm indebted to both of their fathers.

"You can make them in that time?" **Patrick**

Normally, custom-made clothes will take half-a-year to make for major ceremonies.

"I'm a great seamstress, it'll be fine!" **Sonaris**

Well, she seems so excited I can't help but agree.

They started to take my body measurements in the dining room. By the time they were done, it had turned to dusk. I feel like I was smelling something odd while I was being measured.

I gave Sonaris some souvenirs, various liquors and a chess set, before sending her off. I collapsed onto a sofa in the mansion, blessedly alone.

"That was so tiring!" **Patrick** sighed

The servants were also visibly tired. They spent the day serving drinks and snacks to the Royal Guard knights and the army soldiers, as well as shooing the onlookers away.

"I need to thank the servants for their work today. I'll give the chef permission to bring out the whiskey for everyone to get a drink after dinner. The non-drinkers can get sparkling grape juice. That'll serve as a reward" **Patrick**

I made sure to thank the servants for their hard work.

A month later, the Royal Capital is celebrating.

The wedding of Crown Prince William and his bride Elizabeth was held in the church, then a reception party was held at the Royal Castle.

The two newlyweds are dancing in the center of the dance floor, William, with his long silver hair, and Elizabeth, with her golden fluffy hair. She looks at him with her green eyes, overjoyed with excitement.

Once the two are done with this dance, the aristocrats will line up to greet the couple. I'm having to operate in aristocrat mode today, so I lined up behind the other Counts. Luckily, the Counts are pretty early on in the aristocratic ranking.

Behind me is the Viscount line, I hear various mutterings about me like "Impudent Upstart" and "A Son of a Disgraced Moneylender", but I don't let it get to me. I'm doing unprecedentedly well for a person of my parentage and age, I expect all of that.

It's finally my turn to greet the two newlyweds and their parents, the King and Queen and Marquis Dixon and his wife. It was the first time I saw the Crown Prince and the Queen, but they replied with a smile. Now,, my greetings are over and I'm enjoying some wine, when someone comes over to chat.

"Patrick, it's been a long time." **Kyle**

"Oh, Kyle. How did your project end?" **Patrick**

"Yes, I rounded up all the main suspects. I'm glad we were able to put a lid on the case before the wedding. Thanks in no small part to you, Patrick." **Kyle**

"By the way, don't you need to greet the families?" **Patrick**

"I'm a Baron, so I'm not in a rush. The Viscounts have yet to finish, I think? There are so many Viscounts and Barons in this Kingdom. It'll be a while before I can greet them."

Kyle

Kyle has a point there. In the Kingdom, there are 20 Dukes, 8 Marquis, and 20 Counts, including me, but the next ranks are much larger. Currently there are 123 Viscounts and 258 Barons. There are some who dislike me for my rise to the upper ranks of the aristocracy. On top of that, I'm also the first generation of a new family.

If you add up all the Baronets and Knights of the Kingdom, you'd find yourself above 1,000 noble families. Those families are not expected to personally greet the couple.

When making the greeting, the current head and next head will do the greeting. I'm guessing Kyle is the next head. At this point, the Viscounts finish and the Barons start their greetings, so Kyle heads off.

"Count Snake!" **Dekose**

I hear a familiar voice.

"Cousin Dekose! It's been a long time! How is Uncle Trolla?" **Patrick**

"Father is taking charge of the guards. I was planning on getting in the well-wisher line, but I dallied and it got too long. I'm killing some time to let it die down before heading over." **Dekose** laughs

"Are you staying in the capital for a while?" **Patrick**

"Oh, probably around ten days. Do you want to have dinner one of those nights? We're happy to host you." **Dekose**

"No, let me do the hosting. I've got whiskey and brandy!" **Patrick**

"Oh, those are the new liquors that everyone wants! Whiskey has managed to make its way to the Canaan territory, so I got to enjoy some, it was good! I haven't had any brandy yet, I'll look forward to it!" **Dekose**

"Good day, Mr. Patrick." **Sonaris** formally greets me with a fluttering dress

"Your Highness Sonaris, I hope you're having a good day." **Patrick**

I met her yesterday so she could give me the clothes she had made for today, but I have to be formal since our engagement is still not public knowledge.

"It suits you" **Sonaris** whispers

"Thank you" **Patrick** whispers back

The clothes I'm wearing are black with green stripes in various places and the Snake family crest on the left chest pocket. The cloak I'm wearing also has the family crest.

There are rules for cloak length in the Kingdom.

The King's cloak is long enough to drag on the floor, while a Duke's goes down to the ankle. A Marquis's can drape to the back of the knee and a Count's ends at the bottom of the back, like the one I'm wearing. A Viscount's must end above the waist while a Baron can cover the shoulder blades.

The length rules only apply to the head of the family, family members use the rule for the next level down. The other members of the Royal Family use the Duke length rules for cloaks.

"See you later" **Sonaris** whispers as she leaves

Hmm? Later?

At this time, the Baron's greetings are finished and everyone is taking a breather.

"Thank you all for gathering at my son's wedding today. The couple is delighted with the celebration." **King**

Everyone is listening to the King's words.

"Well, there is another announcement I need to make today." **King**

At this point, I started to feel the blood rush to my head.

"What? A war?" **Crowd Member A**

"That not something he'd announce at a wedding." **Crowd Member B** demurred

"Sonaris, please come over here." **King**

"Yes, Father." **Sonaris**

"Following the marriage of the Crown Prince, I will announce the engagement of another child, Third Princess Sonaris!" **King**

"Oh!" **The Crowd**

The venue turned noisy. All the time, I was just thinking 'Really? Here? Now?'

"Her fiance is also here at the celebration." **King**

I'm dreading the next thing he's going to say.

"Count Patrick von Snake! Patrick, come here." **King**

I can hear people in the crowd saying things like 'What?', 'Oh my God!', 'Why?', and 'No?!'. All of that was expected, and more.

I have to go since I've been called.

"Ha!" **Patrick** says as he starts to walk to the King

I stand next to Her Highness Third Princess Sonaris. While I'm looking at the crowd from the raised platform, I can see their faces clearly. Many of their faces look extremely bitter, but I can spot Dekose with a big grin. I also catch Wayne smiling next to Lieutenant General Simon.

"Patrick, please greet everyone." **King**

"I am Count Patrick von Snake, I am pleased to announce that I have been engaged to Her Highness Princess Sonaris." **Patrick**

"Sona, please give your greeting as well." **King**

"I'm Sonaris. I'm happy to be engaged to my beloved." **Sonaris**

Sonaris went with a very simple greeting. I'm surprised she emphasized that she was marrying the person she chose. When I glanced back at the King he grinned. It seems he planned this like a prank on me.

He looks back at Sonaris with a broad smile, I'm guessing he let her know about this ahead of time.

"Sonaris is only 13 years old, so she will be married on her 15th birthday, a little over a

year from now." **King**



So, my wedding date has been decided. After that, I enjoyed the reception without too much jealousy from the other nobles before the reception ended.

"Now, what the hell am I supposed to do? I've got to figure out who has become my enemy from envy." **Patrick**

An upstart aristocrat is engaged to a member of the Royal Family. It's not hard to imagine that some houses will end up destroyed from the actions they take in the near future.

I started to move actively the next day. I've got to host an Engagement Party. Sonaris let me know that the Royal Family has given their approval.

For now, I'll send out invitations to the families I'm close with. That's the Canaan family, the Dixon family, the Simon family that Wayne is marrying into, and the Royal Family. In

those invitations, I asked them to recommend houses that would appreciate an invitation. Friends of friends could become new friends.

I want to identify the houses that are willing to become my ally as soon as possible. Up to now, seven houses were destroyed because their various plans failed due to my actions. When you think of how noble families are connected by marriage, there's plenty of families that should have a grudge against me. In addition, I'm an upstart, so there will be other families who dislike me based on that.

The party was set for two months from now.

I started to receive RSVP's from the invitations I sent out.

The Canaan family all agreed to attend. They're bringing the families of Uncle Trolla's wives. The Canaan family doesn't participate in factions. They're a staunchly military family and maintain their Baron status by repeated and decorated military service. This did lead to the Baron needing to marry his sister to a loan shark Baron after a series of bad harvests, so their stance does have its downsides.

The Dixon family also agreed to attend and they're bringing some families of their faction. The Simon family also agreed along with Wayne's family, the Kimble family. They're bringing some of their friendly houses.

I need to explain a bit about the Simon family. The wife of Lieutenant General Simon is the King's sister. That's why none of the many daughters of the Simon family will be considered for engagements with the Royal Family. It would draw criticism or worse if the Simon family becomes too closely linked to the Royal Family.

The Royal Family agreed to attend with His Majesty, the Queen, the Queen's family and houses of their faction, and the Crown Prince and his wife. The second and third wives of the King are not coming.

If you add all them together, something like a quarter of the Kingdom's aristocrats are planning to attend. I did not expect anywhere near that amount.

Can I fit that many people into the Snake mansion? It's only a former Viscount's mansion, so it's not large enough.

I immediately wrote a letter to the King asking what to do. He replied that the Baronets and Knights should be asked to not attend because of venue size.

I am busy preparing for the engagement party.

I made a trip to my territory to pick up brandy, whiskey, and Inesh (plum wine) in large quantities to the Royal Capital for refreshments and souvenirs. When I arrived at the

territory, the news of the engagement had preceded me, so the servants gave congratulations and asked me to bring the Princess to visit soon.

I also ordered a large quantity of stone chess sets from the territory craftsmen, which I picked up on my next visit. I also brought back a number of the servants from the territory to assist during the party.

On to the day of the party...

The Snake mansion in the Royal Capital is overflowing with people.

The garden is crowded with the guards and soldiers brought along to secure the various nobles attending. Snake family servants move through the group, distributing drinks and snacks.

Inside the mansion, the largest hall is used for a standing buffet, with a table and chairs for the Royal Family placed at the head. Other nobles are served from the buffet tables and a selection of Snake family wine. Sonaris and I are receiving words of congratulations from families here.



I made sure to promise to send various products like sake to the nobles who attended the party today. This should increase the friendliness of the attendees even if they don't become my allies.

The dining hall of the mansion was set up with a large number of chess tables for the nobles to play at. It was well received as a method to deepen the friendship between each other. Even the King and the Crown Prince took a turn at the tables, giving their noble opponents a quandary over whether they should lose to the King or not.

I made sure to warn all the attendees that Pi-chan would be in the mansion, so the number of incidents was blessedly low. Even those that did encounter incidents were astounded at the bathroom of the mansion, and I received requests to have similar bathrooms installed at other mansions.

In the dining hall, a boy and girl were seen playing chess together, but I didn't spot them at the time. It seems their closeness made it to the ears of their parents though.

Once the party ended, I handed baskets of brandy, whiskey, Inesh, and chess sets to each attendee and wished them good luck in the future.

When the Royal Family was leaving, the Queen pulled me aside to ask something.

"Is it true Sona is making you armor? Are you crazy?" **Queen**

I was a little worried at this point.

"My clothes for the Crown Prince's wedding ceremony were made by Princess Sonaris. Sure, the color scheme was a bit odd, but it seems it was well made? Is there something about the armor that makes it worse?" **Patrick**

"She only had a day to draw up the plans and could only spend a month on it, so it was fairly normal. The armor is getting a lot more time and effort, she's a little scary with how much she's putting into it. You need to be prepared." **Queen**

At that point, the Royal Family left and the party was over.

Baron Kimble's Perspective

What is this monster?

That was my first impression when I entered the mansion. It was a reasonably sized mansion that gave off a nice impression, but when I entered the doors and saw a giant snake monster, I instinctively thought of death. That is his pet?

Count Patrick von Snake.



Until a little over two years ago, he was an unremarkable third son of a Baron. He entered the Army when he came of age, a common career path for a son like him, my third son Wayne did the same.

He then rose through the ranks to become a Lieutenant Colonel. Getting to that point in only two years is a frighteningly fast rise in rank that outstrips my son, whose rise to Captain I thought was amazing.

Some say he's favored by the King or alternatively a murderer, but the person I see in front of me is a pretty ordinary person. He has a weak presence, but he gets around to places so he can be where he's needed.

I hear his territory is booming from the sale of new liquors and the development of chess. Certainly, the whiskey they're serving is good. It's nice that you can adjust the concentration yourself, if you want to enjoy it slowly, you can mix the whiskey with water to slow down intoxication.

They're also selling new seasonings and they're serving dishes with the new seasonings here. It tasted like nothing I'd had before, but it wasn't bad. It was actually really tasty.

The Riggsby family had been destroyed, and it was one of the oldest families in the Kingdom. The last head had lost the house due to mismanagement followed by rebellion, but the blood lives on. The Snake family inherited the blood of the Riggsby family, which had multiple great leaders in the past.

His Majesty must have been thinking of that when he made the engagement. I must commend him for tying such a dynamic person tightly to the Royal Family with a daughter.

I feel like praising my son who became friends with that man. Well, my son is now being groomed to take over the Simon family. I'm convinced this is a good trend for the Kimble family.

However, that snake is, well, what's with the snake?



The party is over, so I can finally get back to normalcy.

Well, not quite.

When I'm staying in the Royal Capital, every day that I don't spend with the military, I spend with visitors.

The most common one is Sonaris, she wants to hear about my fighting style to use as a reference for designing my armor. The next most common visitor is someone from the

Canaan family; sometimes it's Uncle Trolla, other times it's Aisha or Dekose.

The third most common was the Dixon family, usually Kevin Dixon. It seems he wants to join the Kingdom Army, but he's too young. So he comes to ask me about training and to get some training in. He's going back to the Dixon territory soon it seems.

While no one house visits often, nobles coming for trade talks are very common. When they want a bath like mine, I will introduce them to one of several craftsmen that can do the work. As for liquor, there were many houses requesting them, so I ended up setting limits according to the title ranking.

The Snake territory is becoming even more powerful in terms of logistics. As more merchants open branches or relocate to the Snake territory, our inns and entertainment districts expand. This does mean security is more expensive, but the rise in tax revenue has exceeded the security cost increase.

The real issue I'm dealing with is suspicious people spying on my Royal Capital mansion.

Some just peek in or watch from a distance, but the foolhardy try to climb over the fence. They're immediately seized by the guards, obviously.

Under interrogation, they all claim the goal is to discover the method for making the new types of alcohol I'm selling. One big difference in the patent system versus Earth's patent system is that I don't need to disclose my method when I receive a patent here. So only some well-paid craftsmen and I know enough about the methods to reproduce the products.

It seems my territory is also dealing with a plague of suspicious people as well.

"I'll need to make a clean sweep the next time I'm in the territory." **Patrick**

One of my servants had a grimace after seeing me quip about cleaning up the spies.

The next time I return to my territory I make my move.

The breweries, distilleries, and storage facilities are all guarded by my territory's militia, but there are shadowy figures only a short distance away. There are plenty of men skulking around trying to get a peek into the inner workings.

If they were to stay outside of the premises, I would have no recourse, but some chose to enter the walls of my properties. Now *they* have a problem.

I approached the first one from behind and punched him in the side as hard as I could. As he bent over in pain, I put a knee in his stomach, then pushed him back and kneed him in his face. He lost his will to fight and was tied up. He was turned over to the militia and put in jail, now time for the next one.

By the time I got ready to head back to the capital, I had captured 137 spies. Of course, I made sure to interrogate all of them. Their faces have turned a bit gaunt, maybe the food

didn't agree with them, or they were too frightened of me?

I head for the Royal Capital with the spies in wagons guarded by my militia. A short distance before the capital I have the spies moved out and tied into a procession to enter the capital. I led the procession, followed by the militia guarding the spies.

"Lieutenant Colonel Patrick, who are these people?" **Gate Guard**

"I found some rats in my territory. I'm thinking about letting their masters take them in and teach them some manners." **Patrick** answered with a cold smile

The guard looked a bit shocked, but managed to keep a somewhat neutral face.

It seems my Grim Reaper smile may have scared him.

"I'm looking forward to our next training event, Captain Jayjay of the Third Army."

Patrick whispers to the guard

"Hey! Please forgive me! Forget everything!" **Gate Guard** sits down and apologizes

"Come on" **Patrick** commands to his procession

"Am I now marked for death? My Army General doesn't even know my name..." **Gate Guard** gives up and sighs with a blue face

My group walks down the main street, slowly, for emphasis. The commoners look on in confusion. In the crowd, someone spots a person they know in my captured spy line, his face flushes before he runs off somewhere.

The procession heads to the aristocratic district, where the mansions of the nobility line the streets.

As we walk through the aristocratic district, the group stops in front of a house.

"What do you want with the Stein family? If you have no business, leave the area immediately." **Gatekeeper**

I look at the pompous gatekeeper coldly.

"I am Count Patrick von Snake. I found a servant of Baron Stein in my territory injured and I brought the servant here. I would like to turn him over to his master." **Patrick** said with a grin

I pulled one of the tied-up men over to the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper blanches his face when gets a look at the person I've got. It seems they know each other. The gatekeeper may even know about the spying mission.

"I haven't seen this man before, but I can check with the Baron. Please wait a while."

Gatekeeper

It seems the gatekeeper has decided he doesn't want to take responsibility for the matter and pawns the issue off on the Baron. He ran at full pelt to the mansion, I was worried he would fall and hurt himself. He was going so fast.

Soon the gatekeeper returned.

"The Baron says he doesn't know that person. Go away already." **Gatekeeper**

Well, that's what I expected, too scared to even claim it was a misunderstanding.

"Well, then I guess I must sell him into hard labor for the crime of claiming he was a servant of a noble. I guess he'll spend the next several years in the mines. I'm sorry for bothering you, I'll be on my way." **Patrick** says as he walks to the next house

The scorned man is looking at the gatekeeper with a deep hatred, but he didn't say anything, that's admirable loyalty.

At the next house, the spy chose to speak up.

"You know me, help me! I don't want to be sent to the mines!" **Spy B**

This visit was noisier, but again the spy was professed to be a stranger and ignored. This one had given up as soon as a needle was inserted under the first nail, a fairly weak attitude.

I couldn't go around to all the houses in one day, it actually took three. I was surprised that only one house was willing to claim its wayward personnel.

That house invited me into the mansion, formally apologized, and promised to pay the "medical costs" (ransom) for the spy. I was happy to see a noble like that and offered to waive the costs in exchange for getting acquainted in the near future.

That noble was Count Abbott of the North, also known as the Iron Fox of the North.

Later that day, Count Abbott came to visit me at my mansion. I made sure to explain about Pi-chan before opening the door.

Count Abbott is a thin man in his fifties with silver hair and about 170cm (5.5 feet) tall. The wrinkles etched into his face seem to reflect a strength of will or hard work and stress.

His house was ambivalent to me up until now, though he was watching my escapades like many Kingdom nobles. It's only natural that a person like him would investigate the rapidly growing liquor trade in my territory. It was only bad luck that led to the spy being captured.

"How did you manage to catch him?" **Count Abbott**

He opens his green eyes to listen, it seems he can't think of how I was able to capture a skilled spy.

It seems the Count places more importance on the territory management than military skills, as my military experience seems to be unknown to him. It seems he is worried about the fact that I was able to discover his involvement in the spying. The spy had been serving for years and was highly trained.

After the explanation of the interrogation (torture) by Patrick, the spy obviously gave up his secrets.

"I feel like vomiting..." **Count Abbott**

He looks a bit askance. He apologizes again and gives me ten daggers made of fine iron from his territory. There are many territories with mines in the North, but Abbott's territory is known for especially pure iron and skilled blacksmiths. I gratefully accepted the daggers and we started to talk about future relations between our houses.

"It makes sense to trade iron from the Abbott territory in exchange for liquor from my territory, so let's set up a direct trade route for that purpose." **Patrick**

"It would also be good to exchange pertinent information and such, so let's work together in the future!" **Count Abbott**

"That sounds great, it would be my pleasure." **Patrick**

Then we shook hands and I gave the Count a selection of liquor and a fine chess set.

Count Abbott's Perspective

When my gatekeeper told me that a certain intelligence agent has been captured, I doubted my ears.

That agent has served me for years; he's a man that doesn't make mistakes. Not only was he caught, he even let out who his employer was. Unbelievable.

Even so, that subordinate was soon led into my mansion.

When he saw my astonished face, he immediately started to apologize and then fainted. He must have been exhausted in both mind and body.

A doctor was called to take care of him and I went to meet Count Snake. I have heard rumors about his from my subordinates. At the Crown Prince's wedding, I made sure to get a look at him. He seems like the most average person, if you ignore his black hair and eyes. His military exploits are unprecedented, he was made Lieutenant Colonel after only two years in the Army. I haven't heard of such a feat in my lifetime.

Favored by His Majesty...

He is clearly favored, but the favor came after he delivered results. His Majesty is enamored with competent subjects, and the Count brings in some of the best results.

A big one was the Westin Rebellion, he returned with a tremendous set of achievements. He proved himself to be more loyal to the Kingdom than to his family, to the point that he executed some of them himself.

He also managed to recover the prosperity of a territory in the blink of an eye. I had to investigate the matter. My house has cunningly survived over the years to the degree that we are called the Foxes. We always make sure to investigate matters, and I am proud of using information we procured or purchased.

Yet, this time I was apologizing to Count Snake. I was surprised that he chose to invite me to his mansion and even more amazed when I saw the entrance hall.

"Don't be surprised, there's a large snake in the entrance hall." **Patrick**

However, I feel his claim of large is underselling the snake. Also, it was not just any snake. It is clearly a Gigantree Viper, a ferocious snake monster with a deadly venom. Who would keep such a dangerous monster in your house?

I question his sanity.

When the Count went over to the snake and rubbed the scales and stroked its head, the snake shook its tail. I'm impressed that such a powerful monster has been domesticated by the so-called demonologist.

Our negotiations were swiftly completed on equal terms. With the number of dwarves in my territory, getting a consistent allocation of his alcohol is my highest priority. If I can distribute his new alcohols in my territory, the dwarves will be happy, and happy dwarves make good products.

I tried the varieties of alcohol I was served, and they were quite good. I especially liked Inesh, which was served warm. There's no doubt it will be popular in my cold Northern territory during the winter.

I started out on the wrong foot with Count Snake, but now we have a good relationship. I was even given a luxury chess set. Only the mass-produced variety was available to me until now.

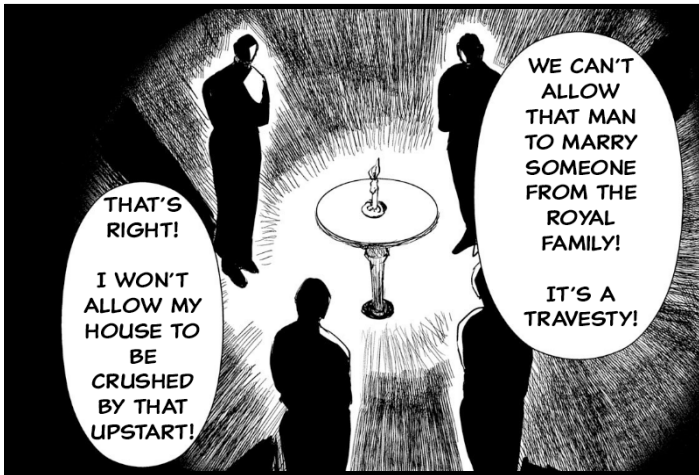
I may have leaked a drop or two in the entrance hall, I hope nobody noticed...

A Darkened Room in the Capital

Dozens of men have gathered in a certain house

"We can't allow that man to marry someone from the Royal Family!" **Man A**

"That's right! I will not allow my house to be crushed by that young man!" **Man B**



"He's the reason I was downgraded to Sergeant!" **Scott Pagenou**

Complaints about Patrick are being shouted by anyone and everyone.

"Hey! What are we going to do? Are we just going to let him keep riding roughshod over us?" **Man A**

"I can't accept that!" **Man B**

"He must be destroyed! There is no other option!" **Man C**

"Can we start something in his territory?" **Man B**

"How many people can you prepare? Do you need money to hire troublemakers? Do you need recommendations?" **Man A**

"I don't have the money since all my property was confiscated." **Man C**

"You're lucky your family survived. My brother and his wife, my nephews, all of them were executed." **Man B**

"Same here" **Man D**

"So we can't spend much money on harassment, since we don't have much capital. But a little harassment is better than nothing, right?" **Man A**

"Of course! I want to see him fall!" **Man B**

"He's got a sizable militia guarding his territory, so any actions we take need to be done in the Royal Capital. Can you do it?" **Man A**

"So we should hire a small number of talented people?" **Man B**

"Do we setup a night operation into his mansion? Or target him on a military operation?"
Man C

"It depends on who we can hire and what their skills are." **Man B**

"Let's pool as much as we can and use it to hire the best people we can find. Let them try assassination, and harass him as much otherwise. That's our best course of action for now."
Man A



I need to deal with the collection of unclaimed spies I now have at my mansion. I sold the men I captured to the mines, except for those that withstood the first round of interrogation (torture). The first group were sold as debt slaves.

The Kingdom allows slavery for criminal acts and debt repayment. Debt slaves must work until their debts are repaid. Criminal slaves undergo forced labor of a certain length according to the crime. Crimes committed in a territory can be sentenced according to the laws of the local lord.

I could have charged them as criminal slaves for the trespassing crimes they did, but that was complicated since they didn't harm anyone and didn't steal any items. Instead, I set their debt amounts to the cost of interrogation that was spent on each person and sold them off as debt slaves. I wanted to put other houses on notice as to the consequences for invasive spying in my territory.

For those who failed to crack in the first round of interrogation, I offered them something else...

"Are you willing to work for me?" **Patrick**

My Snake family is an emerging house. When the Riggsby house was around, they only had a handful of espionage agents. Well, it seems they were all let go when the debts overwhelmed the budget.

I mentioned before that a Knighthood is granted by a noble, not the King. But how can a noble convey a knighthood onto someone without eroding the powers of the Royal Family?

The noble will pay an annual knight fee of 10 gold coins to the Royal Family, who then

pays 5 gold coins to the Knight. The Knights then serve the family that paid the tax. By appointing a Knight, a noble is spending more money than simply employing the soldier as a militia member, but a mediocre Knight receives more exposure than an talented militia commander.

I don't yet have any Knights serving my family, nor do I have a dedicated group of intelligence agents. But I have 29 trained espionage agents in front of me, who are currently unemployed. I may make one or two a Knight in the future, if the individual provides stellar results.

After hearing my generous offer, all 29 of the captured spies joined. On the other hand, they may have been too scared to refuse.

Chapter 6: Northern Conflict

The Northern Army are deployed to stop the invasion of the various tribes living in the mountainous areas of the North. Each year for the past decade, they have fended off multiple attacks by small groups of tribespeople.

Unlike previous years, they have witnessed no attacks yet this year. Have the tribes finally given up?

A watchman at the Northern fortress suddenly notices an enormous group of people approaching. He panics and rings the nearby bell.

"Enemy Attack! Enemy Attack!" **Watchmen** screams

The soldiers of the fort jump to their positions at the sound of the bell. Archers position themselves on the walls, the cavalry dons their armor, and infantrymen grab spears and gather in front of the gate. Major General Fischer climbs to the top of the wall and is shocked at the amount of enemies surrounding the fort.

There are far more enemies here than on any previous attack...



"Lieutenant Colonel Snake, His Majesty has summoned you." **Lieutenant General Simon**

I was summoned to meet with the King, along with the head General, the Generals from the First, Second, and Third armies, the Prime Minister, and several bureaucrats from the Foreign Affairs ministry.

"Now we're all here, I'm starting the meeting. Our goal is to plan a response to the coordinated invasion of the Northern tribes." **King**

"What is the situation of the Northern front?" **Lieutenant General Simon**

"According to the messenger, the enemies number around 10,000. We have 2,000 soldiers of the Northern Army as well as 2,000 militia members from the nearby territories. It seem we have a total of 4,000 fighting men defending our forts." **General Andretti**

"We need reinforcements. Which army should we send?" **King**

"What about sending the Third and Eighth armies?" **General Andretti**

"The Third Army stands ready to go!" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"The Eighth Army is ready as well!" **Patrick**

"Ok, Prime Minister. Arrange for any supplies they need!" **King**

"Understood!" **Prime Minister Bendrick**

"Foreign Affairs Minister! What are the situations with the surrounding countries?"
General Andretti

"Well, we have no issue with the Plum Kingdom due to our existing friendship treaty. Since the Empire is currently tied down with a non-aggression treaty, they shouldn't attack, but we can't trust them to that degree. The Western Army must stay at full strength because of that. Also, our spies in the Empire have reported a large amount of food being exported, it's likely this Northern aggression was instigated by the Empire." **Foreign Affairs Minister**

"They may be importing iron from the Northern tribes in exchange." **King**

"Probably" **Foreign Affairs Minister**

"Ok, we must be wary of the West, so we should move 500 soldiers from the South to the West and move another 500 Southern soldiers to guard the capital. That way the capital troops won't be stretched too thin and we can let the full Third and Eighth armies march to reinforce the Northern Army! That's all. Get moving!" **General Andretti**

"At your will!" **Meeting Participants**

The next day, the Third and Eighth armies left the Royal Capital.

Several days later, the Third and Eighth armies drew near the Northern Fortress, bringing along with them a large amount of food, spears, and arrows. We can see the many Northern tribespeople camped in the area.

"Lieutenant Colonel Snake!" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Yes, Lieutenant General" **Patrick**

"The Third Army is heading to the fort, forcing any tribespeople away that we run into. What is the Eighth Army planning?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

I thought for a few seconds before replying.

"I'm going to leave my supply unit with the Third Army to enter the fortress, please take care of them. The core of the Eighth Army will wrap around the tribespeople, so we'll split off here. I will raise a black smoke signal as the signal for when I'm about to launch my surprise attack." **Patrick**

"Yes, sir. I wish you good luck." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Eighth Army! The supply unit will continue on to the fortress with the Third Army, so get the supplies you need for the next few days before they leave! The Running Dragon and Cavalry group fall in with me, we're going to sneak behind the tribes on the road and ambush them! Get moving!" **Patrick**

At my command, the army packs food and other essentials into their backpacks from the supply carriages.

"Ok, we're ready, Eighth Army, depart!" **Patrick**

The Third Army attacked the back of the tribes that were camped around the rear gate of the fortress. The tribes seem to have not considered potential reinforcements, so the Third Army was able to enter the fortress pretty easily.

The Northern Army has been resupplied with food and armaments.

"Where is Major General Fisher?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"He's at the observation platform next to the main gate!" **Soldier**

Lieutenant General Ganache moved to the observation platform.

"Major General Fisher, what's the situation?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Oh, Lieutenant General Ganache, thanks for the reinforcements. Currently, we've suffered no major damage from the siege, but we do have some injuries from the enemy archers. There were so many enemies, I chose to hold within the fortress instead of an aggressive strategy." **Major General Fisher**

"I see, that's good to hear. Of the reinforcements I've brought, the Third Army and the Eighth Army's supply corps have entered the fortress. The Eighth Army combat corps are skirmishing with the enemy." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Oh, the newly created Eighth Army is here? I haven't had the chance to see them work, but I've heard some rumors about them. What do you think they'll do?" **Major General Fisher**

"Their training is vigorous, it wears out the Third Army and even the Royal Guard. You can expect some interesting things from them." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Is that so? Then, is it safe to stay on defense for a little longer?" **Major General Fisher**

"Yes, we should stay on defense until we see movement. We'll wait for Lieutenant Colonel Snake to make the first move for the Kingdom." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

The horses and running dragons carry the Eighth Army soldiers through the forest. The northern area of the Kingdom is mountainous and covered with coniferous trees. The region is buried in snow during winter.

The Eighth Army troops in their black military uniforms move along the foot of the mountain where the horses can walk. The 200 soldiers are silent as they follow their leader (me).

After a half-day's travel time, nightfall approached.

"All right, we're camping here for the night. Setup tents, no fires!" **Patrick**

When we reached a small creek, I decided it was time to stop. I climbed a nearby tree to get a better view.

The fortress is that way, so the tribes should be that way? Could I see their fires if the sun goes down a bit more?

"Each group, take your lookout in the normal order. We'll move before dawn." **Patrick**

Overnight, there were some attacks from goblins and wolves, but the Eighth Army suffered no damage. I made sure to climb the tree again after the sun set to discern the precise location of the enemy.

At the first hints of dawn the Eighth Army begins to sortie.

"Let's go, expect to be in combat this afternoon. Everyone, we're moving at a reduced speed, for stealth." **Patrick**

At that point, I signal my running dragon with my feet, once I'm moving, the rest of the army follows me. While running, I gnaw on dried meat and drink water from my water bottle. I'm careful not to overeat before the battle.

When the sun moved directly overhead, we could see the outline of the fortress. Our sneaking strategy has been achieved, I can see enemies ahead.

"All hands, keep quiet. Carefully move forward." **Patrick**

The Eighth Army moves forward silently and slowly. There's only barely audible footsteps of running dragons or hoofbeats of the horses.

At around a kilometer from the enemy, I ordered "Full Assault!" with a quiet voice.

"Augh, enemy attack!" **Tribal Warrior** yells when we're around 200 meters away.

We've managed to get quite close to the enemy unnoticed.

"Major Wily! Ready horse archers!" **Patrick**

"Ha! Horsemen, draw your bows! Ready... loose!" **Major Wily**

At the Major's command, about a hundred arrows fly from the horse archers.

"Major Vampert! Running dragons should charge with spears out!" **Patrick**

Major Vampert is a slender man, a little taller than me, he shakes his long red hair and opens his brown eyes.

"Yes, sir! Running Dragon Battalion! Ready Spears!" **Major Vampert**

This battle isn't taking place in a forest, so we're using spears. Though the Eighth Army uses shorter spears than the other Kingdom armies.

The enemy was impatient after staring at the fortress for so long. They had just received word that reinforcements had arrived and hundreds of tribal warriors had been taken out. They never expected Kingdom soldiers to attack from their rear.

The people known as the mountain tribes scraped out a living in various settlements scattered around the Northern mountains. Life in those mountains was harsh, and for many years they could not grow enough food for all their people. In those years, the tribe would attack the Kingdom in an attempt to take fertile land. Since the tribes aren't able to coordinate among themselves, the small raiding parties are driven off and none have been able to take any land.

This time, the tribes were able to coordinate and all the warriors set off in a joint action. They were in high spirits since they outnumbered the fortress, but had stalled out when they had no equipment to attack the fortress. In fact, the tribal warriors had never participated in a group battle before, how would they know what to do?

"Enemy attack from the rear!" **Tribal Warrior**

The entire group is dismayed by the shout, even a nearby arrow causes them to scream.

A tribal warrior thinks to himself

It wasn't supposed to be like this!

The empire sold us food at bargain prices, but it would only last a month before we ran out. Starvation is inevitable if we can't wrest some territory from the Kingdom. This was the only time we could invade!

"Burn the signal smoke!" **Patrick**

At my direction, Mirko ignites the coal he was carrying in his pack. Soon, a lot of black smoke rises into the sky. I waited until we had begun our attack before lighting the smoke, I didn't want our sneak attack to be discovered.

Coal is not used in this world indoors since it is more expensive than firewood and produces black smoke, but it is sometimes used outdoors.

The Eighth Army defeats the tribal groups one after another, the tribals' skill is abominably low, they just swing their spears like they're hunting deer. The Eighth Army is overwhelmingly more powerful.

We attack the tribal warriors further away with our bows and arrows. They pierce warrior after warrior as they start to retreat.

At the Northern fortress

"The smoke signal has appeared!" **Guard** shouts

"Ok! Archers, fire arrows at the enemies in front of the main gate! When most of them are down, we'll sally out at once!" **Commander**

The soldiers inside the fortress start to move, but before they can start fighting, a magical bugle sounds.

"The enemy is retreating!" **Kingdom Soldier**

"Certainly! Success! Open the gate and charge!" **Kingdom Commander**

As soon as the main gate opens, the Kingdom's cavalry charges out to push the tribesmen away from the fortress. The infantry follows close behind the cavalry. The Third Army and the Northern Army head out to relieve some stress.

The mountain tribe leaders had gotten impatient. They had stationed most of the warriors in siege positions around the fortress and had only a few stationed around the headquarters. The warriors had also been attacked from behind, so they were confused as well. Now the Kingdom cavalry is charging from the fort!

"Hey! Bring back warriors to the headquarters!" **Tribal Commander A**

The bugle sounds, but it takes time for the tribal warriors to get back on foot. Enemy

cavalry will be attacking the headquarters by the time reinforcements arrive.

"What are you going to do? We're dead meat at this rate!" **Tribal Commander B**

"Is it possible to retreat and regroup?" **Tribal Commander A**

"We would still have a numbers advantage, right?" **Tribal Commander C**

"Then we should retreat to regroup!" **Tribal Commander A**

"Before that, can we retreat?" **Tribal Commander C**

"In any case, doing nothing is just suicide!" **Tribal Commander A**

"Ok, Retreat! Signal!" **Tribal Commander C**

The bugle sounds the call to retreat!

The tribal headquarters descends into chaos as every person begins to simultaneously prepare to flee.

Until...

"Oof!" **Tribal Commander A**

"Gofu!" **Tribal Commander B**

One after another, the commanders began to fall down.

"What's the matter? Is there an enemy?" **Tribal Commander C**

"I don't know! I didn't see any arrows, plus their wounds were slashes!" **Tribal Warrior**

"Then let's get out of here!" **Tribal Commander C**

"I can't let you go, you fancy looking guys are priority targets." **Patrick**

The tribal's reacted to me as I finally made myself known.

"Who are you?" **Tribal Commander C**

"You started this war, didn't you? Now you're going to need to sound a surrender pretty quick, or most of your warriors aren't going to see tomorrow! Do you really want to see your men die with nothing gained?" **Patrick**

"You know nothing! All of our people will starve and die now! You have no idea how terrible it is to starve! We have no food, our friends and families are barely hanging on, and they'll soon die of hunger ! Every time we come here in search of food, we're simply driven

away!" **Tribal Warrior**

"So you think it's bad when nobody has food? What about when you're beaten and kicked by your parents, siblings, and anybody around while they get to eat a lavish meal and you get nothing?" **Patrick**

"Does such an evil person exist? A parent should be willing to go without so their children can eat!" **Tribal Warrior**

"I guess you had decent parents, but my parents were scum. They would lend out their child to strangers for a few coins to be beaten for stress relief. That being said, why are you here to plunder? Why didn't you try to negotiate? Couldn't you trade your labor for food for your people?" **Patrick**

"I'm not here to negotiate!" **Tribal Warrior**

"Then parents and children would be separated!" **Tribal Commander C**

"Isn't it better to live apart than to die together?" **Patrick**

"If we were separated, how would we know the other is still alive?" **Tribal Commander C**

"It's not impossible! Some could stay and swap out in summer... It's too late for this. I'm not killing you though, you're going to be useful later." **Patrick**

After my comments, I knocked the two down with my fists.

I thought back to my past after rounding up the tribal commanders...

Immediately after my mother died, the persecution I was given became more common and more cruel. Before then, I would only be beaten if I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but afterwards servants would be sent to locate me and drag me to the main mansion. I would then be beaten then thrown against the wall where I would have to watch the rest of the family eat lavish meals.

There would be a glass of water placed a meter in front of me, but if I made any move towards it, a servant would kick it over. I quickly learned that it was just a taunt, there was no way I could drink it. I worked desperately to perfect my ability to hide as long as possible without being found.

I spent two years enduring that several times a week. If it wasn't for a servant in the annex building who secretly left food for me and tended to my wounds, I would be dead.

In my previous life, I have no memories of a father in my life, only a mother. Well, it's doubtful the guy had a relationship with my mother, or that he had any idea I existed.

My mother was a compulsive gambler in constant and despair-inducing debt. She lent me,

when I was named Jin and attending elementary school, to a woman she met at a pachinko parlor for 100k yen for two days and a night. My mother told the other woman she could do whatever she wants, I lost my virginity to that woman. From that point on, I began to be defiled according to my mother's whims.

My mother would often order me to steal products from shops. If I was found out by store clerks or other patrons, she would beat me in public so she wouldn't be suspected. When we got back to whatever hole in the wall she was staying in, she would beat me up again for failing to steal the item.

Did you think a child raised like that would grow up to be an upstanding member of society? There's no way that happened.

Since I wasn't able to attend high-school, I was cursed to a life of part-time jobs, but my mother would take all the money I earned. I ended up shoplifting food in order to not starve.

While living that life, I was noticed by a gang and forced into becoming a member. We would beat and kick street thugs if they got out of line, extort money from brothels and other illegal businesses, and shoot and kill rival gang leaders. After a few years, I became a senior enforcer in the gang.



Soon, I was asked to handle a weapons smuggling deal, so I went to negotiate the deal in the other country by myself. While there, I fell in love with a local mafioso's daughter, but was shot and killed by her father.

I didn't have a nice life...

A few hours later, I entered the Northern fortress, dragging a tribesman by an ankle, letting his head bounce along the ground. The tribesmen have vacated the area around the fortress, so the Kingdom soldiers are working industriously on repairs. They want to be ready if the tribes come back.

I started my cross-examination of the tribal leader in the interrogation room, but the man completely broke after the second round of fingernail peeling. He spat out the whole story.

This man was the chief of the largest tribe and was in command of the assembled troops. It seems the Empire provided the tribe's food in exchange for the attack. In addition, food would continue to flow so long as the fighting continued.

"In other words, they're pursuing a strategy to reduce the Kingdom's strength as much as possible. The Empire is despicable." **Major General Fisher**

"I can't see the Empire ever admitting that was the plan." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

The Lieutenant General and the Major General were the only ones that stuck around through the interrogation; the guards had left the room after they got nauseous.

"What do we do now?" **Patrick**

"We'll need to report the situation to His Majesty and ask for guidance." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Well, can we use a messenger from the Seventh Army? I'd like the Third and Eighth Armies to guard the fortress while the Seventh Army gets a few days off duty." **Major General Fisher** bows his head

"Yes, send three messengers. Lieutenant Colonel Snake, can I ask the Eighth Army to patrol the surrounding area?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Yes, sir. I'll get on it." **Patrick**

After I left the room...

"Hey, Fisher?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Yes..." **Major General Fisher**

"Can you stand?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"I can't do it, I'd just vomit." **Major General Fisher**

"Me neither. Who wouldn't want to throw up after that?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"I can't, honestly. I'm a little scared of the Lieutenant Colonel.." **Major General Fisher**

"I feel like I finally understand why His Majesty wants him on a leash." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Has His Majesty seen his interrogation techniques?" **Major General Fisher**

"He's probably heard of them, but he hasn't seen them. He can't ever see them."
Lieutenant General Ganache

"I know..." **Major General Fisher**

The two look at the tribal chief that Patrick captured...

"This man ran out of luck when he was caught by the Grim Reaper." **Major General Fisher**

"The Bloody Grim Reaper is the most fitting name. He walked back covered with red blood and the only thing you could make out was his black eyes." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"I hear that everyone who trains with him collapses at the end." **Major General Fisher**

"It's not just the Third Army who had that happen, the First and Second armies also collapsed. Even the Royal Guard couldn't take it." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"I don't want to be sentenced to that training." **Major General Fisher**

"Think you can get up now?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"I'm not ready..." **Major General Fisher**

"Can we get someone to help us?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

Three horses gallop towards the Royal Capital, carrying soldiers of the Seventh Army of the Kingdom.

"We're Northern Army messengers! Open the gate!" **Messenger**

The gatekeeper quickly confirms the cavalryman's affiliation before unlocking and opening the gate. The three soldiers gallop to the military command post to report to General Andretti.

"Thank you! I will report this to His Majesty, please go and rest!" **General Andretti**

"I see, I'm pleased with the Third, Eighth, and Seventh armies. I suspected the tribals had the backing of the Empire. That's dirty of them. What's our next move? What do you think, Prime Minister?" **King**

"Hm, if we leave the North as is, I can see a future where we get attacked from the West and North simultaneously. I think it would be better to annex the North into our Kingdom and prepare to defend against the Empire from the Northern areas. Our country has an abundance of food, so it should be fine to subsidize the mountain tribes." **Prime Minister**

"What do you think, Andretti?" **King**

"I agree with the idea to hold the mountainous North. If the tribes become further indebted to the Empire, we will continue to have issues." **General Andretti**

"We should keep the deaths to a minimum, that's a recipe for trouble in a few years. Send them food support to bring most over, subdue any who refuse to take the deal!" **King**

"Your will!" **Prime Minister & General Andretti**

"It seems Patrick is continuing to blow away expectations." **King**

"Reading the report, he's a monster in some ways. I beg your pardon. I guess he is marrying a Princess." **General Andretti**

"Don't worry about it, he is skilled at overturning normal expectations. To be honest, he's unsuited for one-on-one combat that typifies knightly combat. Obviously that's more than compensated for using his other skills." **King**

"Enemies find him impossible to find, nobody is better suited to disrupting enemy armies." **General Andretti**

"What do you think, Prime Minister Bendrick?" **King**

"It's not in my wheelhouse, but he did us a great service by uncovering the incompetence of the Newgarden family." **Prime Minister**

"Well, I'm glad I was able to pair a child to a good partner, but I'm not sure about my other

four children. Anybody have any good children who need a betrothal?" **King**

"Your Majesty, are you seriously asking that? You've got to be careful to ensure the aristocratic balance is preserved." **Prime Minister**

"Should I send one to a noble that is acting rebellious? Why should I send one of my beloved children to a family that is so ungrateful?" **King**

"A civil war now would be amazing for the Empire." **Prime Minister**

"I understand. That doesn't mean I'm going to jump into infuriating choices. Well, I'll take my time and consider things carefully. Quickly handle the Northern tribe annexation!"
King

"Yes sir!" **Prime Minister & General Andretti**

The three army messengers head back North, accompanied by the Second Army's supply unit. They're coming along to deliver more food, weapons, and medicine.



The messengers returned to the Northern fortress, and they brought a large amount of food.

"This is His Majesty's order! You must conquer the mountain tribes and annex them into the Kingdom!" **Messenger**

Lieutenant General Simon read the full order then passed it to the Major General and I.

"So how will this go? Can the Seventh Army providing logistical support while the other armies do the legwork?" **Major General Fisher**

"Yes, that sounds good. I'll take food to the tribal villages and have the energized Third Army negotiate with the leaders. What about the Eighth Army?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Hmm, I can take care of the recalcitrant settlements. If they're not willing to negotiate with the Third Army, we'll deal with them. We'll be working together, somewhat."
Patrick

"Are you fine with it? That's a dirty job." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Two of my primary responsibilities are behind-enemy-lines disturbances and assassination, right?" **Patrick**

"Well, but, do the soldiers agree?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"My soldiers are trained to be ready to carry out those orders." **Patrick**

"That's true." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Well, I'll just do it by myself if there's an issue." **Patrick**

"That's a bit worrying..." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"We're in a war? Haven't we been invaded? If we had lost, I doubt we'd be getting the same consideration. We're giving them better terms than they deserve." **Patrick**

The Kingdom's annexation of the mountainous tribes proceeded apace. Many settlements immediately surrendered when they were offered food subsidies and citizenship in the Kingdom. So many of them were starving...

However, there were a few villages that chose to refuse the offer. The Third Army simply abandoned the negotiations in those villages. Of course, there were a few villages that chose to fight to the last person standing, and those were mercilessly struck down.

In one village that had refused the offer, their leaders were discussing the village's future.

"Can we rob them to get food?" **Tribal Chief**

"When they carry supplies to other settlements, that's when we attack, right?" **Tribal Leader A**

"Will that work?" **Tribal Chief**

"The place to attack is here! We should attack the supply wagons when they pass through this area! We can attack from the cliffs!" **Tribal Leader B**

"Chief? What's your take? What's going on?" **Tribal Leader A**

One of the leaders was suspicious, he looked over to the tribal chief. He saw just the body of the chief, the chief's head was missing.

"Augh!" **Tribal Leader A**

"No! Aaaaahhhhh!" **Tribal Leader B**

Well, that's annoying. **Patrick**

"Hey! Let's get out of here!" **Tribal Leader A**

"Ugh" **Tribal Leader B**

"Oof" **Tribal Leader A**

When they moaned, that was when I separated their heads.

"Hey, it's over!" **Patrick**

The door to the hut is opened by Mirko, one of my subordinates.

"Lieutenant Colonel, that's wonderful. What are you going to do with the heads?" **Mirko**

"I'm not sure, probably going to have you put them somewhere important in the village. After they're noticed, I'll lead the Eighth Army to surround the village for a second round of negotiations." **Patrick**

"Wait, I'm the one to place the heads? Won't I get found out and attacked?" **Mirko**

"How long have you been training to stay hidden? And if they find you, just run away. If you can't outrun a bunch of starving tribals, I'll have to retrain you when we get back."

Patrick

"Uhh, if I can't escape, how will I survive to be retrained?" **Mirko**

"Just go!" **Patrick**

"Yes, sir!" **Mirko**

He wraps up the three heads in a cloth towel and leaves the hut.

We leave the village a short while later when Mirko finished his task.

The next day, my Eighth Army surrounded the village.

"You have one hour to decide your fate! If you choose to surrender, I'll let you off with the three executions from yesterday! If you choose to fight, you need to be ready for a tough battle!" **Patrick**

My commands are relayed by Private First Class Dave, who has a particularly loud voice.

An hour later, the men of the village appear with a white flag and empty hands.

After a month, the annexation of the mountain tribes has been nearly completed. There's only a single remaining village, which sits right next to the Empire's border.

In that village, the chief and Lieutenant General Ganache are negotiating.

"If we surrender to the Kingdom, we'll be killed once the Empire decides to invade."

Tribe Chief

"This location is going to have a fortress constructed nearby, that will protect your tribe

from the Empire. If your tribe will cooperate, some of your men can become paid soldiers for the Kingdom. That would provide enough money to buy food for the entire village. It's not a bad trade, right? I'll intercede with His Majesty to ensure you're treated well."

Lieutenant General Ganache

"How can I trust you?" **Tribe Chief**

"I can only ask you to trust me, but let's look at the bigger picture. If this settlement refuses, we've got another place picked out that would work about as well. To the Kingdom, your village isn't especially important." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"What if we refuse?" **Tribe Chief**

"The Third Army is leaving today, deal or no deal. The Kingdom is sending in the Eighth Army, you call them the Blackcoats, to see if they can convince you. After that point, the Kingdom is going to give up." **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"The cruel unit!" **Tribe Chief**

"The leader is relentless, isn't he? I guess you've heard the rumors about them."

Lieutenant General Ganache

Lieutenant General Ganache smiles as he sees a path to conclude the negotiations.

"It seems they start with popping off the heads of leaders then push the rest of the tribe to surrender... If the tribe doesn't surrender, they proceed to a battle. I can't prevent him from taking action, but if you choose annexation, I can't see them visiting, right?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Do you really think I'm so easily cowed?" **Tribe Chief**

"By the time you realize the Eighth Army is here, your head will be rolling on the floor. What's your final answer?!" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"You fool! I refuse! Leave immediately!" **Tribe Chief**

"Well, I'm sorry, but I'm leaving now. See you later... Probably not, though. I guess I'll see you in the afterlife!" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

The chief followed the Lieutenant General out of the hut and watched the Third Army begin to depart the village.

"It's War! Ready your weapons!" **Tribe Chief**

Right as the warriors began to move, the chief suddenly had blood spurt from his neck, then he collapsed to the dusty ground.

"Oh, it's over. They had already arrived, I guess. So what about the rest of you? Are you

going to join your chief bleeding out on the ground? Or are you willing to surrender?"

Lieutenant General Ganache

The warriors were stunned into silence, not sure whether to fight or run.

"I'm asking again, for the last time! Do you want to die? Or will you surrender? I'm not asking again!" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

It seems my execution was a little too astounding, I'm going to prod the crowd a bit.

"Oh, I surrender! I don't want to die!" **Patrick**

"Oh, me too!" **Tribe Member A**

"Yeah, give me a minute to tell the rest to surrender! I'm not sure who won't, but give me a minute! I know I can convince them! Don't kill me too!" **Tribe Member B**

"That's fine. Can you guess what will happen if you run?" **Lieutenant General Ganache**

"Of course!" **Tribe Member B**

I watched the tribe members run around in fear.

"I finally get to go home." **Patrick** mutters

Finally, the mountainous region has been completely annexed by the Kingdom!

After serving as the stick to the Third Army's carrot, the Eighth Army is returning to the capital. The Third and Fifth Armies are going to stick around for various reasons, but my army's tasks have been completed.

That being said...

"How did they run up a bill of 5 gold coins at the bar?" **Patrick**

I regret saying I would pick up the night's tab. Somehow 300 soldiers had guzzled down 5 million yen (\$37,000) in alcohol. That was 16,667 yen (\$123) per head. Well, they had suffered under the guilt of being the savage unit, so if it helps them get back to normal, I guess it's worth it.

After our safe return, I needed to report to His Majesty.

"Lieutenant Colonel Snake, you and your soldiers have undergone a rough situation. You are all allotted five days of leave, rest well." **King**

"Thank you for the consideration." **Patrick**

After the audience was over, I got to announce the reward to my men.

"Everybody! You all get a five day vacation, courtesy of His Majesty! Take it easy!"

Patrick

Then the soldiers all left to enjoy their time off. But I had a new issue to tackle, in my mansion.

"So, what's with these guys?" **Patrick** asks the butler

There are currently three men tied up with ropes in my entrance hall.

My butler explains that apparently they broke into the mansion last night, that marks them as quite skilled. Normal spies are captured well before getting into the mansion proper, but these were able to knock out a guard and enter the house.

"How badly was the guard injured? Did he need more than a potion? Is he still recovering?" **Patrick**/

"He was only lightly injured, currently he's on light duty out of an abundance of caution. The guard claims he was back to full health after the potion. It seems that the three were apprehended by your tame beast." **Butler**

"Hmm? Pi-chan got them?" **Patrick** asks as he glances at Pi-chan

Pi-chan took the chance to slither over the floor to me, I rewarded the action by stroking the snake's head.

"Did Pi-chan catch them?" **Patrick**

When I uttered the question I was inundated with images of the event. I saw Pi-chan knocking down one of the spies with her tail before wrapping up the other two. It's like I could hear the bones break of the two that were constricted.

Crazy, is my pet able to telepathically send me information?

"Yeah, that's great Pi-chan! Tomorrow, we can go to the forest for an all-you-can-eat buffet!" **Patrick**

I turned my attention back to the butler at this point.

"So, anything from the interrogation?" **Patrick**

"We tried, but they wouldn't reveal anything." **Butler**

"I can't do all the interrogations myself, I can spend this one teaching you, are you up for

it?" **Patrick**

"Uh, well. Do you really think I can handle your style?" **Butler**

"You'll get used to it quicker than you'd expect." **Patrick**

My butler seems a bit apprehensive, but he can't say no.

"Oh..." **Spy**

I heard a small sob from one of the spies.

My butler turns his head as he sticks a needle under the spy's fingernail.

"Hey! Don't turn your eyes away! You can't know if you're hitting the right places if you don't watch! Eyes on the prize! Make sure to wiggle the needle after it goes in! Then the pain stays sharp instead of fading! No, that's not the right way!" **Patrick**

I will try to demonstrate the technique for a second time.

"Remember this! When you go to peel the fingernail, you start from here...

It's time to move onto breaking the finger bones, you'll want this tool and you'll hit here...

You've got to check the victim's face, he's saying that you haven't done enough there!

Priority one is to monitor the bleeding so they can't bleed out. If they lose too much, a potion isn't going to do shit..." **Patrick**

I continue with my explanation while encouraging my butler to follow along. We are forced to listen to the screams of the three spies as they continue to keep their secrets.

I don't really care about the screams, but my butler seems increasingly spooked.

"So this guy has gone for two rounds without breaking, very admirable, but annoying. We'll need to add in something new, unfortunately it's a bit risky.

I'm going to take this needle here and stab it right into his vein. Now, we'll let it drain into this container, it's gotta be a glass container. See this mark, that's when he's a goner. Lose that much blood and there's nothing that can bring you back.

As the jar slowly fills up, it's a countdown of his remaining life! When pain doesn't work, this always works! Nobody has been able to withstand this!" **Patrick**

After my lecture, my thankless butler collapsed on a couch. A few minutes later, the gatekeeper came in to give a message.

"Master, a messenger from Count Abbott is here to see you." **Gatekeeper**

When I hear the knock, I respond with "Come in."

I check the messenger from Count Abbott, he's a sharp-eyed man of around 50 years old, a little shorter than me. He's got short brown hair with brown eyes.

"Oh, it's Conan? Long time no see." **Patrick**

"It has been a long time. I hoped that I would never need to see you again, but the Count ordered me to be his emissary." **Conan**

Conan is a servant of Count Abbott, who was previously caught by me while he was trying to spy in my territory.

"Well, don't be so downbeat. You made it longer than the rest of the spies from that incident, I admire your backbone. What are you here for?" **Patrick**

"The Count has an urgent matter he needs to deliver face-to-face. He can visit here or you can visit his mansion." **Conan**

"I'm in the middle of an interrogation session, so I would kindly ask him to visit here." **Patrick**

Conan turns a bit green at my response, but collects himself to give an answer.

"I hear your answer, sir. I will let my master know you wish for him to visit. Excuse me." **Conan**

Conan turned and hurried as fast as etiquette would allow him out of my mansion.

Less than an hour later, Count Abbott arrived at my mansion.

"You just returned from the Northern expedition, and found some spies had snuck in?" **Count Abbott**

"Yes, my Pi-chan, the snake you saw when you entered, she caught them." **Patrick**

"Well, I may have some information on their masters. My Intelligence Department identified some people who are after Count Snake and Her Royal Princess Sonaris. Here's the details we have on them." **Count Abbott**

I take a few sheets of paper from the Count.

"I'll take a look." **Patrick**

I quickly skim the pages.

"I see, you've got much more here than what I got out of that flunky! So helpful! Those captured spies only had a vague idea of their employer.

Oh, where did these idiots get the nerve to pick a fight with me? I'll show them a good time. Well, I'll be the one having the good time." **Patrick**

"Are you sure the spies are connected to this matter?" **Count Abbott**

"Definitely, the plan was to attack when I was tired after returning home. Count Abbott, you don't need to accept, but would you like some of these tasty morsels? As a sort of thank you?" **Patrick**

"Are you comparing this to food?" **Count Abbott**

"Well..." **Patrick**

It seems I frightened Count Abbott with my metaphor. I'll need to keep this in mind for future interactions with him.

"I know you're tasked with skullduggery operations, but will you be allowed to pursue this?" **Count Abbott**

"Hmm, I'm pretty sure I can swing this. I'll have to get permission, but I think it'll get approved without a second thought." **Patrick**

"Well, I don't think I'll get any blowback, so I can assist somewhat. My bigger question is can you handle the hit to your already tattered reputation?" **Count Abbott**

"I don't think I can redeem it at this point. The worse choice would be to let them think I can be attacked without repercussions, I'm a young head of a new house, so I have to err on the side of action!

So don't think too much on it, I'll jump right into the dirty work." **Patrick**

Oh, I should probably check with the captured spies about the new information...

"By the way, do you want to observe an interrogation?" **Patrick**

"No thanks..." **Count Abbott**

The next morning, I load Pi-chan into my largest carriage for a free-range meal.

"Hey, go on." **Patrick**

I gestured to Pi-chan that she was good to leave before climbing a nearby tree for a vantage point.

After about two hours, Pi-chan returned after her all-you-can-eat buffet. She's twice as thick as normal this time.

"I'll have to look into getting you a larger carriage, you'll barely fit into your current one on the way back." **Patrick**

After a bit of shoving, Pi-chan is crammed into the carriage and we head back to the mansion. When we get there, I find my butler Astrea sitting on the front steps with his head in his hands.

"I can't stop remembering it! Grab someone else next time! Please! Please! I'll do anything else! Yesterday, I couldn't sleep, that voice kept ringing in my head! I can still hear it now!"

Butler

He seems on the verge of tears. I can guess what he's imagining right now.

"It can't be helped, I'll find someone else for that task. Can someone bring Ein here?"

Patrick

Ein is one of the captured spies that accepted my most generous offer of employment. He's only twenty years old, but he was the toughest of the 29 new hires. How did I determine he was the toughest? He made it through two laps of interrogation, truly a man worthy of respect.

"Master, did you call for me?" **Ein**

Ein is a red-haired slender man, about the same height as me, short. His piercing blue eyes are his distinctive feature.

"Oh, Ein, glad you're here. I need someone to take point on interrogations, especially when I'm not around. I think you're the best man for the job, you've got some experience on the receiving end, and that's how I learned it. Astrea just gripes about the job, so you get it. I'm raising your salary by a gold coin for the increased duties!" **Patrick**

Ein looks a bit confused, he's scratching his head.

"Master, I'll follow your orders, but can I get an assistant?" **Ein**

Seems he thinks it's too big of a job for him alone, I guess.

"That's fine, I'll let you choose your assistant." **Patrick**

"Thank you very much, I'll take my leave." **Ein**

"Oh, I'll need to assign some work to your infiltrator group, how soon can they assemble?"

Patrick

"It's going to take a few days, will that be fine?" **Ein**

"Can you get them in five days?" **Patrick**

"I'll see what I can do." **Ein**

"Sounds good, hop to it." **Patrick**

That afternoon, Count Abbott and I visited the royal castle to meet with the King.

"Your Majesty, Count Snake and Count Abbott are seeking an audience. Do you wish to see them?" **Prime Minister**

"That's an unusual combination. Did Abbott mess with Patrick?" **King**

"I haven't heard of any feuds between the two, not that they have any interests in common in the first place. Their territories are nowhere near each other and they didn't fight together during the recent tribal invasion." **Prime Minister**

"Well, send them in." **King**

"Yes, Your Majesty." **Prime Minister**

"Your Majesty, I hope you're having a good day." **Patrick**

"Thank you for seeing us." **Count Abbott**

"Oh, hmm? What brings the two of you together here today? Is one of you in trouble with the other?" **King**

"No, we have no complaints with the other. Count Abbott, can you give His Majesty the documents?" **Patrick**

Count Abbott hands the documents to Prime Minister Bendrick, who skims them before handing them to the King. The King started to read through the documents.

"Really? Hmm... What is this!" **King**

"Your Majesty, what did you see?" **Prime Minister** asks as he moves to the throne.

"Read this part!" **King**

He hands a few pages to the Prime Minister before looking to Count Abbott and me.

"Is this all true?" **King**

"Yes, my men came upon this information very recently. Since it was related to Count Snake, I chose to discuss it with him before coming here." **Count Abbott**

"This is what I don't understand, you could have just given me this information, but instead you went to consult with Count Snake first?" **King**

"We have formed an alliance that includes exchanging information that involves each other between our two families." **Patrick** interrupted

"An alliance?" **King**

"Yes, Your Majesty. I formed an alliance involving trade rights and information exchange with Count Snake." **Count Abbott**

"Well, I'm not sure how this came about, but you're allowed to do that. There's a bigger issue here at the moment! Patrick! What are you going to do in the face of this information?" **King**

"Your Majesty, since the subversive elements are not only targeting me, but also my fiancée Princess Sonaris, they're engaging in something akin to rebellion against the Royal Family. I've already been attacked by an agent that revealed he had been hired by Viscount Hunterly under interrogation.

Wasn't the Hunterly family a branch family of the Newgarden house?" **Patrick**

"Ugh! Those twits forgot my grace of passing them by!" **King** shouts as he clenches his fist

"Well, it seems their main target is me, but it's outrageous that they're looking to target Her Highness Sonaris simply because we became engaged. Well, the intelligence suggests it was primarily Count Busch who organized the attempt to kidnap Princess Sonaris. Apparently, he's been known to proclaim that he thinks the Princess should have become his wife." **Patrick**

The King looked like he bit down on something sour.

"Yes, he did ask me for her hand. I considered him much too old, plus Sonaris immediately rejected the idea when I mentioned it. I made it clear my refusal was not going to change as well. Even then, he continued on thinking he had a chance?" **King**

"It seems that Count Busch is refusing to abide by Your Majesty's wishes, tantamount to rebellion. What does Your Majesty wish for him?" **Patrick**

"What do you think about the other houses?" **King**

"Well, I'm planning to crush them, if given permission." **Patrick**

"Bendrick, are all of the houses mentioned part of the Anti-Royal faction?" **King**

"Yes, that's right. It's not entirely surprising." **Prime Minister**

"Call in the Minister of Justice and Baron Keselowski!" **King** orders

Soon, the Minister of Justice enters the room. He's a slender man with gray hair and blue eyes, around 60 years old. Baron Keselowski showed up a little later.

The Baron is the father of Kyle Keselowski, who I had worked with during the Agriculture Minister investigation. I'd say he looks like Kyle, wait, no, Kyle takes after his father.

"Justice Minister Gibbs, read this and tell me what you think!" **King**

The Minister of Justice takes the documents and begins to read, you can see him getting angry as he moves through the pages.

"What..."

Oh my god!

You blithering idiots!" **Minster of Justice**

The Minister of Justice hands off each page to Baron Keselowski as he works his way through the report.

"Huh, so absurd... Have they really gone this far?" **Baron Keselowski**

The two look up at the King after they're done and didn't leave any chance of discussion

"Your Majesty, if even half of this is true, it's high treason, but we don't have any evidence at the moment. It all depends on whether this document is true." **Minister of Justice**

"I'm sorry we can't confirm or refute this document, the Intelligence Department has only handled oversight of court aristocrats! I will submit a proposal to add in territorial aristocrats tomorrow morning!" **Baron Keselowski**

"We'll need to gather evidence, but once you have it, Minister, I don't think I need to say anything, right?" **King** says while staring at Patrick

"Of course, my lord." **Minister of Justice**

"Keselowski, go ahead and bring on more people to investigate this Anti-Royalist faction!" **King**

"Yes, sir!" **Baron Keselowski**

"Good! Well, here's what I'd like to see. Patrick and Count Abbot, I charge you two to

assist the Kingdom Intelligence Department with gathering evidence against the traitors! You two should be plenty to make sure the evidence appears!

Prime Minister Bendrick! Order the King's Guard to increase the guards on Sonaris!

Minister of Justice Gibbs! Make sure all crimes discovered by the investigation are properly prosecuted!" **King**

"Your will!" **Everyone**

"Patrick, make sure to visit Sona before you leave. She's in a bad mood." **King** sighs

"Acknowledged." **Patrick** says with a bitter smile



"Count Abbott, I have something to discuss with you personally." **King**

Patrick and the others exit the room, leaving just Count Abbott and the King.

"Your Majesty, I am always your servant. What more do you need?" **Count Abbott**

"How exactly are you connected with Patrick? What are you two doing together?" **King**

"Oh, so that's what you're... I made a mistake, do you want to hear about it?" **Count Abbott**

"Yeah, I was mystified. He's not exactly known for his social skills." **King**

"Sure, I'm essentially a noble person, but abhor the unknown, it's a family trait. So I made a blunder while trying to learn more about Count Snake, but he reacted differently to what I expected..." **Count Abbott**

Count Abbott explained what had occurred with Patrick's train of captured spies and recovering his own spy, and how that had turned into a trade deal and friendly relations between the two families.

"Well, I guess I was in the wrong place at the wrong time or something." **Count Abbott**

"Some would say that was true, but in the end it seems you've formed a valuable trade alliance. Well, it seems more of a disaster for the other noble families involved..." **King** remarks with a bitter smile

"Your Majesty, the Abbott family might be called as the Northern Foxes, but we have strong loyalty to the Royal Family. Any sort of deal with the Snake family would come after our loyalty to you. Rest assured I would discontinue my alliance with Count Snake if

you ordered it." **Count Abbott**

"Well, you deserve credit for investigating the other aristocrats to this degree without a formal decree. I will be counting on you to continue your work." **King**

"By your will!" **Count Abbott**

"Your son named Ryan, have you had the courage to introduce him to Patrick?" **King**

"No, not yet. I've been waiting for the right moment, it seems like that may be now." **Count Abbott**

"Oh, that wasn't an order, I was just curious. I am currently looking for husbands for my other daughters. Some feel I should spread out the betrothals to different families, but I would feel safer with my oldest daughter Closia marrying into your family." **King**

"Are you sure my son measures up?" **Count Abbott**

"I heard he is fairly talented. If he inherits most of your skills, I wouldn't be worried." **King**

"Thank you for your kind words. I will discuss this with my son after this matter is cleared up. I don't want him to rush and make a faux pas." **Count Abbott**

"Yes, that is reasonable. Please do so." **King**

"Thank you, Your Majesty." **Count Abbott**

I took some time to sit down and chat with Sonaris. At first, we were having a normal conversation, but now I've become a mannequin.

Sonaris seems to have run into an issue with her armor design, but she wants me to model the custom military uniform first.

Normally, military uniforms are supplied from official purveyors, but some aristocrats and wealthy officers will commission custom-made uniforms. Their complaints boil down to whether the normal cloth's quality isn't very good or the design isn't flattering to a noble's sentiments. The military didn't press the issue and instead set a list of requirements for any custom uniforms to meet.

Those rules boil down to the custom uniform must not deviate significantly from the look of the standard uniform and the position of collar, armband, pockets, etc. must be the same as the standard uniform. I never cared that much about the design, so I've always just worn the uniform I was issued. Sonaris is insistent that I must wear a custom uniform, so she is working on one for me.

Is this something that can be made as quick as she's claiming?

She's using top quality fabric, but the collar is a bit tall and I can't close the front. It seems she intends the uniform to be worn in that way.

She's added silver details all over the uniform; they all incorporate designs that resemble Pi-chan's head. The length of the hem resembles a long coat. She used the Eighth Army's black for the outside, but the lining is a bright red while the embroidery is Pi-chan in green thread. To be honest, there's a lot of detail packed into the outfit.

"It's perfect for Patrick, who is called the Bloody Grim Reaper!" **Sonaris** laughs

I can't refuse my beautiful fiancée...

"Thank you, I'll wear it today during my duty." **Patrick**

To be honest, she had my current uniform taken away by a maid, so if I didn't wear her custom uniform, I'd have nothing.



Five days after my audience with the King, all the people I called had assembled in the main hall of my mansion. My servants were in attendance, of course, but the 29 spies I employed were also present. They have recently been dubbed the Dark Serpent Corps. There were 100 members from my territory's militia as well.

"Listen up! His Majesty has given me a Royal Decree! It has become clear that certain aristocratic families are planning on assaulting this house! But they don't plan to stop there, they also want to kidnap my fiancée, Her Royal Highness Princess Sonaris! This is high treason against the Kingdom!

The Dark Serpent Corps is to scout and gather information from the identified rebel houses. You will be working with the intelligence operatives of the Count Abbott house as well as the Kingdom's Intelligence Department!

The 100 members of the Viper militia are to guard the mansion and support the Dark Serpent Corps as needed!

Keep this in mind, we must have hard evidence! We cannot just rampage around without evidence of wrongdoing! We must make the fools regret their idiotic actions!

Let them know that they provoked a den of vipers!" **Patrick** declares

My forces broke up to follow their orders. Some went to hide in the capital, others went to spy on various noblemen's estates. My mansion is now guarded by a sizable force of militia members in green military uniforms, watching 24 hours a day for suspicious events.

Of course, I'm on the move. For these sorts of things, I'm the most skilled.

A certain nobleman's mansion

A few days after the meeting among the King, Count Abbott, and I, I was spying on a meeting among the identified plotters.

Several men are standing around a table, most of them have the expression of a man who just found half a worm sticking out of the apple they were eating.

"What happened to the assassins that were supposed to infiltrate the Snake mansion?"

Plotter A

"Today, I saw the kid walking nonchalantly in the Royal Castle? I want to see him dead!"

Plotter B

"Well, maybe the assassin is still planning the hit. After all, he's only been paid the advance fee and the contingency deposit, as I had to bargain him down from the full fee." **Plotter C**

"Why are you bargaining with an assassin?" **Plotter A**

"Because there's not enough money! What am I supposed to do? My coffers only have 20 gold coins left." **Plotter C**

"Ugh" **Plotter B**

"Right? None of us have the kind of assets we deserve. That's why we have to be patient, we don't have the money for speed." **Plotter C**

None of the men here know it, but the assassins were captured the day after they had accepted the assignment.

"Well, I'm not worried. This guy came highly recommended. That kid may be good at sneak attacks, but he'll have a hard time fighting that experienced assassin. He might survive a one-on-one, but our guy knows to bring enough backup to make it a three-on-one." **Plotter B**

"But what about the Princess, Sonaris? Doesn't it make more sense to kidnap her and kill her in front of the kid? Shouldn't it be a two-part job? Kidnap then assassinate?" **Plotter A**

"No, Count Busch insisted that Sonaris can't be killed. He wants her kidnapped and brought to him." **Plotter B**

These men are so disconnected from reality, they're talking nonsense.

Hello, this is Patrick, listening in from the corner of the room.

I'm desperately suppressing my urge to behead everyone in the room. It's not because I'm being called various horrible names, I'm used to being abused, verbally and physically. However, these cowardly fools are involving Sonaris and talking about enslaving her and worse. I need to keep my bloodlust in check and find some hard evidence.

After 30 minutes or so of useless posturing talk, they leave the room together. I followed carefully and quietly behind the group. When they arrived at the office, there was a magic contract on the desk.

"I swear on the blood contract!" **Plotter A**

"Swear!" **Other Plotters**

"Squash the Snake under a mallet of justice!" **Plotter B**

"Justice!" **Other Plotters**

I rub my forehead with a hand, they're all terrible. I watch one of the men take the contract and hide it in a desk drawer, then lock the drawer. I wait for them to leave, then I try the drawer, sadly it's been locked with a good lock. I pull a wire and turner out of my pocket.

I hope my skills from my last life haven't faded.

I insert the wire and turner into the lock and start picking the lock. It took me an hour, but lock was rough and my tools weren't very good. The lock rattles as it opens.

Ugh, my hand has dulled. It used to take less than five minutes. Maybe I should get better tools made for next time.

I pull out the drawer and check the contract. All the names are properly lined up and each has a thumbprint of blood. None of them are going to escape from this...

I guess I'll give this to His Majesty tomorrow morning. Wonder what he'll do?

A few days later, I was attending a meeting at the Royal Castle. There was the King, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Intelligence Director, General Andretti, Count Abbot and me.

"Well, we've got all the evidence we could need." **King**

"The blood contract is airtight, they won't escape." **Prime Minister**

"Indeed, the evidence in this case is overwhelming." **Minister of Justice**

"How does Your Majesty want to proceed?" **Intelligence Director**

"The Royal Guard should keep up the escort level around Sonaris until this is dealt with.

Send the First Army alongside the Intelligence Department to capture Count Busch! Then half the Second Army moves with Count Abbott while Patrick leads the Eighth Army. Split up the targets between those two groups and capture them! If they refuse to surrender quickly, just kill them! Capture not just the heads, but the whole family if possible.

Disband the militias of each family and leave a force to monitor the territories." **King**

Count Abbott and I start to split up the list. We should start with any of the treasonous nobles that are still in the capital, then we'll head to the territories. We will start tonight!

As the Royal Capital falls asleep, part of the Second Army and the Eighth Army move out. Before the sunrise, the aristocratic district hadn't started the normal hustle and bustle. Then the quiet of the night is broken when the gate of a mansion is broken and soldiers invade the grounds. Guards attempt to fend off the soldiers in the yard.

Soon, the soldiers subdue the guards and reach the bedroom of the mansion's owner, but someone has already visited. The owner's corpse is found, wrapped in rope with the head lying ten feet from the rest of the body.

This was the noble that wanted to kill Sonaris in front of Patrick, perhaps that played a part in his fate. In another room, the soldiers found the rest of the noble family, with signs of torture evident on their bodies. The floor was covered in blood.

The other houses reacted in different ways. Some family heads came out and surrendered, claiming innocence the entire time. Others claimed they were being set up by someone or there was a mistaken identity. Some even chose to fight, though they didn't last long against the army soldiers. A few even attempted to flee, but were quickly apprehended before they could leave the city.

As the sun rose on a quiet aristocratic district, many Kingdom Army carriages moved out from the Royal Capital. They're going to visit the territories of the listed nobles.

Of course, some of those carriages were for the Eighth Army. I'm riding on horseback next to one of them. I'm focused on speed this time, less on stealth. The long coat Sonaris made flutters in the wind as my horse galloped with my black garbed troops following.

Soon the Eighth Army arrives at the first territory on their list. We overpower the gatekeeper of the town to prevent a warning from going out, then run to the lord's mansion. As we surround the residence, the lord appears on the balcony.

"What is this commotion? This is the residence of the honorable Baron Pagenou. I have no business with you!" **Baron Pagenou**

"By the order of His Majesty the King! Baron Pagenou has been identified in a plot to rebel against the Royal Family! You are ordered to stand down and be taken into custody awaiting trial!" **Patrick** shouts

"Hmm, I disagree! You, soldiers! This man has no sense of proper decorum and sensibility! Cut down that cur and follow a proper aristocrat!" **Baron Pagenou**

"Eighth Army! This one shouldn't take five minutes! Take it down!" **Patrick** grins

At my command, black dressed figures hop the fence and race into the mansion, easily capturing the Pagenou family. Well, excepting one.

"You, Patrick No-Name! So you aren't satisfied with stealing my rank and demoting me to Sergeant, but now you attack my family? Augh! I demand a duel to regain my honor!" **Scott Pagenou**

It's the son of the current Baron, Scott Pagenou. It seems he misunderstood his demotion and decided to blame me for it, instead of the person who actually decided it.

"Are you daft? The person who demoted you was Colonel Reedon! I was not told anything about the rank changes until it was announced! You were the one to turn a regular expedition into a meat grinder! Accept your failings!" **Patrick**

This man had been asked to investigate and subjugate two trolls early on in my Army career. Instead of following Army doctrine, he caused mass casualties with an impromptu nighttime assault.

"That wasn't my mistake! I was stuck with a group of worthless weaklings! Just because you had some talented soldiers, I was made to look bad! If I had subordinates of your quality, my plan would have worked! It was a conspiracy!" **Scott Pagenou**

"Your house has been assisting a plan to kidnap a member of the Royal Family and has failed to report it to the King. That's the issue at hand and that's why you're being treated as rebels!" **Patrick**

"It wasn't my idea, so I can't be found at fault!" **Scott Pagenou**

"That's not how that works, you don't know how anything works!" **Patrick**

"Shut it! We're going to duel!" **Scott Pagenou**

"Why would I waste my time dueling an idiot when I can just capture you and hand you over to the Justice Ministry? Were you dropped on your head?" **Patrick**

"This is such a bother! I just need to defeat the upstart then I can move onto your lazy soldiers! I want to wrap this up before tea time!" **Scott Pagenou**

"Huh? Your whole conspiracy is being unraveled right now? The First Army is riding to

capture Count Busch while the Second Army is going for the Hunterley's. Who is going to help you now? Your top supporter, Major General Newgarden, has already failed and been removed?" **Patrick**

"Hm! Those nobles are no weaklings and will emerge stronger than before! But your fate ends here, I'll take you out!" **Scott Pagenou**

"Oh fine, I'll have you tell me all about it later. This was a boring conversation anyway." **Patrick**

"En guard!" **Scott Pagenou** shouts while running at me with a spear

I easily break his grip with my shortsword then sever his right wrist.

"So weak..." **Patrick**

I didn't mean to comment, but I was surprised. I thought he would have picked a move that played to his skills, but his attack was truly woeful.

"I was wondering if you had some trick to the attack, but you're just completely disconnected from reality. I think this farce of a duel can end with the loss of your right hand." **Patrick**

"Auugh!" **Scott Pagenou**

The cretin won't stop screaming, so I yakuza-kick him in the back of the head to knock him to the ground.

"Someone, stuff a shoe in this bastard's mouth to shut him up! Tie off and wrap his arm so he won't bleed out before he can be punished! What a loud idiot!" **Patrick**

My first target ended without any issues.

We then went on to the other noble territories on our list. A few nobles gave up without a fight like proper adults, but there were several that chose to engage in battle. Since they don't have many soldiers stationed in their house, the fights have ended quickly without any casualties to my army.

There were a few that had been proactive and stationed their militia around their town to intercept any Kingdom soldiers.

"Eighth Army, our aim is to capture the aristocrat and his family. If you don't need to fight someone on the way, just evade or subdue them and continue to the main target. Follow your commander's orders in the thick of things!" **Patrick**

After a short volley from our archers, the cavalry charges at the outmatched militia soldiers. They try to bring out long spears to fight the cavalry, but I had units deploy to the left and right of the militia while they were distracted.

The territory militia continues to desperately resist, but there's a clear difference in power between the Kingdom soldiers and the militia. We easily entered the town and arrived at the mansion. We broke down the gate and entered the grounds. Obviously we found guards and more territory militia, but it was not an issue for the Eighth Army.

We kick in the door of the mansion and capture the bewildered servants without any issues. One or two chose to resist, but they were soon subdued. The aristocrat was arrested in his office.

"I don't want to be captured by a Grim Reaper. Is this a prelude to the world I'm going to..."

Aristocrat

Since we haven't been able to return to the Royal Capital, the Eighth Army's carriages are packed full of captured aristocrats. They regularly complain that the road is rough, they're thirsty, or they want to be untied.

It's annoying, I need to make an example of someone so we don't spend too much time getting back.

I have the carriages stopped, remove the aristocrats, and then start cross-examining my victim, Scott Pagenou, in front of everyone.

Since he doesn't have a right hand anymore, I have to start with the left hand, putting a needle under his fingernails. It looks like the aristocrats aren't scared enough, I'll have to go further. When I get to peeling off a second fingernail, Scott can't stand it and vomits over himself. The motley nobles look sufficiently cowed, all the women and children are crying, except for the ones that fainted, some of the men had incidents of their own.

As a result, the captured aristocrats quieted down, but I'm still feeling impatient.

I have the aristocrats shoved back into the carriages, then have everyone move at a high speed back to the Royal Capital.

"I've got to go faster, I can't shake the feeling that something terrible is going to happen!"

Patrick



Color Illustrations





tensei shitara heishi datta?!
akai shinigami to
yobareta otoko

Editor's Notes

Hello readers!

This is volume 1 of the webnovel version of Red Shinigami, with the full title "When I Reincarnated I Was a Soldier?! ~A Man Called the Red Shinigami~". I hope you enjoy this release, and you can always [purchase](#) the Japanese release to show your support.

I wasn't sure the project I started in April would still be going, or that I would spend a bunch of time turning it into a novel-quality ebook. Does this series deserve all the work I'm putting into it? Maybe not, but there will be another series, when I wrap up this one. Daily chapters will continue with chapter 142 on July 22, so you can find out what Patrick's bad feeling was about. I much prefer the daily cadence as opposed to the every couple months (or yearly) cadence of full releases.

If you aren't aware, this is a "novelized" version of the webnovel chapters, not a light novel translation. The extra light novel stories aren't here, but my own "novel-like" changes are. A few sections were reordered and two or three additional rounds of editing were done.

Why did this come about? I wanted to learn about epub creation, and I wanted a better binging experience for the series. This is provided **100% free** on my website, cahaba-ts.com.

See you next volume,

Cahaba Translations



Army Information

Unit Sizes

- **Squad:**
 - Two privates and a commander
 - Commanders can be Sergeants, Corporals, or Private First Class
 - 3 people
- **Platoon:**
 - Three squads and a commander
 - Commanders can be Sergeants or Master Sergeants
 - 10 people
- **Company:**
 - Three fighting platoons, a logistics platoon and a commander
 - Commanders can be Second Lieutenants and Master Sergeants
 - 41 people
- **Battalion:**
 - Three Companies, with a single shared logistics platoon
 - Commanded by a Lieutenant or Major
 - Around 100 people
- **Brigade**
 - Three Battalions
 - Commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel or Major
 - Around 300 people
- **Division**
 - Three Brigades
 - Commanded by a Colonel
 - Around 1,000 people
- **Army Corp**
 - Two Divisions
 - Commanded by a Major General or Colonel
 - Around 2,000 people
- **Army**
 - Two Army Corps
 - Commanded by a Lieutenant General or Major General
 - Around 4,000 people

Not everyone in the larger units is represented in the above counts. An Army might only have half of its personnel represented by the unit number, the other half never sees the actual battles and instead handle supplying the front-line soldiers.

Just because a soldier is dedicated to transport, doesn't mean that person isn't able to fight. Thinking back to the bandit subjugation event, it was a clever ruse to have trained soldiers that were also serving as transport guards.

Ranks

- **Private:** This is where a commoner recruit begins
- **Private First Class:** A Private that has survived two battles
- **Corporal:** A distinguished commoner soldier
- **Sergeant:** An aristocrat starts here, or an experienced and distinguished commoner soldier
- **Master Sergeant**
- **Second Lieutenant**
- **Lieutenant**
- **Major**
- **Lieutenant Colonel**
- **Colonel**
- **Major General:** Can command a border Army
- **Lieutenant General:** Commands an Army, border or internal
- **General:** The top commander of the First Army and the highest military rank, excepting the King

Kingdom Armies

The First through Third armies protect the Royal Capital or maintain internal security for the Kingdom. The Royal Guard, who are assigned to ensure the safety of the Royal Family, are organized as a regiment of the First Army. All three armies are based out of the Royal Capital, but will move to deal with issues as necessary.

Then there are the border armies, The Fourth Army guards the Eastern border, the Fifth Army is the Western border, the Sixth Army is the Southern border, and the Seventh Army guards the Northern border. Each border army is responsible for the upkeep and staffing of forts and fortresses in their area and the defense as well as security of their assigned border region. Nobles with lands in border areas will assist with their private militias from time to time.

The three central armies are commanded by the General and two Lieutenant Generals. For instance, Lieutenant General Simon is the leader of the Second Army. The border armies are commanded by Lieutenant Generals and Major Generals.

Noble Ranks

At the very top, you've got the Royal Family, below them is Duke, Marquis, and Count. These are the senior aristocracy.

Next there are the Viscounts and Barons, these are the intermediate aristocrats. These ranks are inherited from parent to child, in Agnatic-Cognatic Primogeniture.

Then there are the lower aristocrats, Baronets and Knights, neither are inherited.

A Knight is a commoner soldier that has been recognized and appointed by an aristocrat. There are many knights that learned their skills from their father who was a knight, and managed to secure a knighthood of their own.

A Baronet is awarded by the King to a commoner who is skilled in management duties. They are sometimes hired by higher aristocrats to manage towns, but they also serve in various parts of the Kingdom government. Both Baronets and Knights receive a stipend from the country, Knights get 5 gold coins a year while Baronets receive 6 gold coins.

These ranks are sometimes called honorary Barons. Many Knights are the sons of Knights or Baronets.

Now, as for territory, a Duke would get a region, like Kanto. A Marquis would get two prefectures or so. A Count gets a single prefecture. Viscount would be about half a prefecture or four or five towns and villages. A Baron would get something like three towns or villages.

Baronets and Knights are not given territory, but sometimes manage a single town or village on behalf of a higher noble. The aristocrats that are not given territory are called court aristocrats.