Only the Villainous Lord Wields the Power to Level UP

I



Waruiotoko

illust. raken


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Only the Villainous Lord Wields the Power to Level Up: Volume 1 [Complete]

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Chapter 1: The Villainous Lord

You have reached Level 99!

You have successfully unified the land.

The in-game messages sparkled. This was my current obsession—a game set in another world's warring states period. I'd been playing it extensively since launch. Now, finally, I had succeeded in unifying the land under my control.

You have a message from the management.

The moment I finished clearing the game, a message window that I'd never seen before popped up. Did the game management team really send direct messages to players?

This was a single-player game, but it did have a leaderboard which tracked players' conquest scores. It required internet connection for that, which meant it was certainly possible they could have sent me a message.

Do I get a bonus of some sort? Like an item?

My curiosity piqued, I decided to just click the message and see what it was about. Once I did, another message filled the screen.

The management team highly approves of your strategy. Now try for glory. This is a bonus given only to the number one player—you.

Reward Details

Once you have prepared yourself to go for glory, the first thing you will need to do is to acquire the bonus. This can be done by Exploring on the first map.

Glory, you say?

Was there a sequel, or something? I'd completely cleared the game. My

character had started in a rural village, become a king, and then successfully unified a land torn apart by war. I didn't think a second playthrough would be much fun, so I hadn't planned on doing one, but the word "bonus" caught my attention.

If they were going to come out and say it so obviously, I was starting to think that there might be some sort of secret story content.

Where on the first map do I need to Explore?

I was bursting with curiosity. I couldn't be satisfied with just clearing the game anymore. I looked around, searching for the bonus. But for all my searching, I couldn't find any bonus on the in-game map.

Is the management team pranking me?

It was the only thing I could imagine at this point. I pulled up the company's homepage on my PC. It had a contact form, so I shot off an email asking them what that in-game message had been all about. Just as I was thinking about how I was going to lay into them if they said it was a joke, I looked down at the clock.

My sense of accomplishment at clearing the game had vanished—no thanks to that message from the management team—leaving me with only my exhaustion. *It's already three in the morning.* This wasn't the time to sit around waiting for a reply.

"Aaah-haaa!"

I was yawning now, so I turned off the game. No, I tried to turn it off. The moment I did, I felt faint. Darkness closed in on me, and an intense dizziness overcame me.

*

I woke up.

Today started like any other day. I yawned and stretched, as was my habit. It helped clear my head a bit when I'd just woken up.

"Huh?"

What I saw in front of me, however, was completely new. I closed my eyes,

thinking I must still be a little sleep-addled. Then, after rubbing them, I tried taking another look.

However, the unfamiliar scenery remained unchanged.

Is this someone's house? I've never seen this bedroom in my life. It's got this luxurious, Middle-Ages-era Europe vibe. I don't think *I'm drunk. Ah!*

That's when I remembered. When I tried to power off the game, my vision had gone dark, and I'd passed out after a horrible dizzy spell.

What? Am I still out cold dreaming, then?

I pinched my cheek in an attempt to wake myself up.

"Ow!"

It hurt. I'd pinched too hard.

But one thing was certain. This wasn't a dream.

There's no way it'd hurt like this in a dream!

Someone must have moved me after I lost consciousness.

Shuddering, I looked around me once more.

Have I been kidnapped? Where am *I?*

I walked to the window in front of the bed, and opened what looked like curtains.

I'll open the window and look outside.

Outside the window was...

"What the heck?"

The absentminded words escaped my throat unintended. My jaw dropped. This wasn't the kind of scenery I knew—the urban jungle. No, there were just clusters of one-and two-story buildings here, surrounded by a castle wall. The sun shone over the wall, making the entire area look like something from a foreign country.

But this was no time to stand around sighing at the beauty of the place. This was reality in front of me—not something on a video game screen.

The situation was utterly incomprehensible.

I'd heard some towns in Europe still looked the same as they had in the Middle Ages, but that wasn't the sense I got here. There wasn't even a hint of modernity. Not in the outfits people wore, or in the fact they went around on horses and in carriages rather than driving cars.

Also, I was in a castle. The biggest building in the city. I had to be, since I could see the whole city from here. I was standing by the window in that castle bedroom, when...

"Have you awoken?"

...a knock came at the door, disturbing my panicked thoughts.

Thinking it might be whoever had set up this situation, I raced over to open the door.

"What's going on?! Why am I here?!" I demanded of the old man on the other side.

He looked at me questioningly. "Master?"

Now I had an old man calling me "master" too.

"Who're you calling 'master'?! And who the hell are you?!" I demanded, unable to figure out the situation. The maids standing behind the old man looked at one another, absolutely terrified by my questions.

"I am your head chamberlain, Landers. And you are Lord Erhin, the master of the Eintorian Domain. What manner of jest is this?"

The head chamberlain looked bewildered. But *I* was the one who was really confused. Me, joking about this? Get real.

No, wait. Erhin...Eintorian? Eintorian's a name that shows up in the game that I was playing right before I passed out. No, that can't be it, can it?

A lot of pretty important late-game events took place in the Eintorian Domain. Come to think of it, I seemed to recall the name of the lord of Eintorian who appeared near the beginning of the game was Erhin Eintorian.

He says I'm *Erhin Eintorian?*

“I doubt it, but is the Eintorian Domain, in the Runan Kingdom?”

“Yes, of course. It is indeed the Eintorian domain in the Runan Kingdom.”

“And you’re telling me I’m Erhin, the lord of that domain?”

“Yes, Master. What...do you intend to do today?” the head chamberlain asked, his face still fearful.

I’m being deathly serious here, so what’s he talking about? No, it doesn’t really matter. Basically, as far as they’re concerned, I’m Erhin Eintorian, the character from the game? So does that mean I’m inside the game? Impossible.

It was impossible, yes, but looking at the head chamberlain, the maids, and everything else around me, I had to admit that it made the situation seem a lot more realistic.

It’s still too absurd to even consider, though.

“A mirror... Is there a full-length mirror anywhere?”

“On the floor below this one, master!” one of the maids answered.

“*Where* on the floor below this one?”

“W-We will bring it at once!”

The maids ran off, probably having mistaken the question of where one was for an order to go fetch it. I was in a hurry to see myself, so I didn’t stop them. Why in the world did they think I looked like Erhin Eintorian?

“And a map! Do you have a map of this country?”

“A map? But of course. Please, wait just a moment,” the head chamberlain responded, then took off at once. He was incredibly quick about it. Well, he *had* been calling me “master,” so I suppose that it was only to be expected.

I returned to the bedroom and sat on the bed.

Astonishing as it seems, I’ve clearly entered the world of the game I was playing.

Eventually, the maids returned. They entered carrying the full-length mirror between them, their expressions still as frightened as ever.

But I don't have time to assuage their fears now.

I looked at the mirror.

My body stiffened at the shocking facts. I was speechless, unable to hide my bafflement.

The reflection in the mirror...wasn't me.

It closely resembled the in-game graphics of Erhin Eintorian. Tall and slender, but also boasting attractive muscles and a high nose. A pretty boy whose sharp eyes went well with his silver hair stared back at me.

I was definitely Erhin Eintorian, only I looked like a live-action adaptation of the drawing.

"*This* is me...?"

"Master?"

"I'd like to be left alone."

"Y-Yes, at once!"

The maids obediently scurried off. Not long after, the head chamberlain returned with a large map.

"Master, I've brought the map you—"

I held up a hand to silence him in mid-sentence.

"Leave it there. Also, see to it that no one enters this room until I call for them."

"Understood."

The head chamberlain reacted the same way as the maids had, vanishing in a hurry. The large door to the bedroom closed, leaving me in solitude once more.

I'm a 25-year-old video game enthusiast. Now, all of a sudden, I'm in a scene out of a game. I've even become one of the game's characters.

As unbelievable as it was—and I didn't *want* to believe it—it was plain to see that I was inside the game.

Don't tell me this is what they meant by "glory." Are the game devs gods or

something?

The reality I was being presented with was impossible. Unless the game devs were omnipotent. Considering I wasn't surrounded by 2D or 3D graphics, but a real world built to the game's specifications, that only made it that much more likely.

The head chamberlain's expressions, the way he acted, and the maids' fearful reactions...they were all so human.

Is this what they meant by glory? The game becoming real? I love games, so if this were a normal game, I'd be beside myself with glee about now. It's not like I was all that attached to the real world anyway.

But there's a problem. This is a war game—a game where your life is at risk as you try to survive in a chaotic era of bloody conflict.

I was getting a headache. No, I'd had one for a while now, but it was reaching new heights.

I tore at my hair as I laid out the map the head chamberlain had brought me.

The names of the regions on the map, the countries... They're all exactly the same as in game.

"Hold on, then that means...!"

That's when I realized the biggest issue. If I was the same Erhin Eintorian from the game's main scenario, I had a major problem.

Erhin Eintorian's not the protagonist. No, worse than that, he's not even a side character. He dies right at the start of the game. I'm that guy, *of all people?*

This game was the story of how the countries were reunified after a civil war broke up the ancient Eintorian Kingdom centuries ago and created a situation akin to the warring states period.

The Eintorian Domain was one of the most important regions in the game, and there are frequent struggles to gain control of it. But the key thing here was that, at the start of the game, Erhin Eintorian—which now meant me—was immediately killed in a surprise attack by his neighbor, the Naruya Kingdom.

His death marked the start of the game.

In the game's backstory, after centuries of war exhausted all belligerents, the rulers agreed to an armstice in order to prevent an outright collapse, leading to nearly two decades of peace.

However, just as people are getting used to peace, the ambitious young king of the Naruya Kingdom starts a war. And Erhin Eintorian dies in the opening hositilities of it.

On top of that, Erhin Eintorian was a villainous lord. He liked wine and women, and had no compunctions about killing the innocent. That was the kind of guy he was.

That's gotta be why the maids were terrified by every little thing I did.

But why, out of all the characters, do I have to be a guy who dies at the start? What happens if I die in this world? Do I die in real life? Or just go back to it? That's the biggest question. No, odds are, I die, right? I mean, I feel pain in this world, so that'd make sense.

If that's really the case, I can't be careless with my life. If there were no death, there wouldn't be pain either. I feel real pain when I slap or pinch my cheek. Which means I might really *die. If the gods are the ones who brought me here, maybe that makes it even more likely?*

Though, that's assuming my soul's been transferred to the world of the game they created.

Sigh...

My head was killing me. I was going crazy. Basically, I needed to escape the demise fate had in store for me.

Can I use the system, maybe...?

The game had a level up system that only the protagonist could use.

There was no equivalent system for NPCs.

The game's real now, but what if only I, the player, can use its systems? That'd give me some hope. Yes, so long as I have the systems! Players can level. The leveling system allows the main character to achieve rapid growth that no one

else can match. If I've got that, then maybe I can survive!

I set about trying to check this theory, since it felt like it might help my headache to subside a little.

System. System. Yeah, I don't really know how to use it. How should I, assuming I can? Normally, I'd use the controller, but I don't have a gamepad here. Then, what about stats...? That'd be a reasonable bonus! Gimme the stats!

Ryuichi Hasegawa/Erhin Eintorian

Age: 25

Lv. 1

Status

Skill: Check Information

Items

When I cried out internally with all my heart, surprisingly enough, stats appeared. The moment I saw the status window, I felt like I was going to tear up at my reunion with a long-lost friend. That's how elated I was. On top of that, it looked like the status window in the game had. No, it was completely identical.

No doubt about it, this is the status window I know.

I pointed at Status with my finger.

Martial: 58

Intelligence: ??

Command: ??

Faction: Eintorian Domain, Lord

Faction Opinion: 10

It brought up my stats. Just like in the game. Thanks to that, I could see Erhin's ability parameters.

He had a starting Martial skill of 58. *Tyrant or not, he's still a lord.* As a member of the high nobility, he would have learned the sword from a young age, which would be why he had a higher Martial stat than the common soldier.

On the other hand, his Opinion sat at 10. Since he was a lord, that was a combined score based on the soldiers', retainers', and people of the domain's opinions of him. Basically, it was about as bad as it can get.

Given his infamy, that's to be expected. If the system is here, there should be level ups too. With each level, I'll have points to spend on Martial, items, and skills, letting me build myself however I want. With the system in place, I'll be the only one to level up. I'll just keep on getting stronger and stronger.

It seemed to me that it would be the same way even now that I'd started out as Erhin Eintorian.

Just like the game!

Past accomplishments show up in the numbers for Intelligence and Command scores. If you use smart strategies, you get an equivalent Intelligence rank. As for Command, that's a numerical representation of the ability to lead soldiers and retainers. The higher it is, the more obedient they are. Having a high Martial stat but a low Command stat means you're still not fully-fledged.

Will other people's Intelligence and Command display properly too? They did in the game.

I opened the door to the bedroom to find out.

There's always a maid waiting outside the door. Probably to run errands for

the lord.

I didn't hesitate to use the basic skill Check Information.

I'm only Level 1, so I have no other skills.

At the moment, Check Information was my only skill, but it was a fairly useful one.

Gaen

Age: 18

Martial: 5

Intelligence: 31

Command: 10

Faction: Eintorian Domain, Castle Maid

Faction Opinion: 50

I can use Check Information to pull up a person's abilities. Yeah, it's just like in the game.

"Pfft! Ha ha ha! Ga ha ha ha!"

I see how it is. Instead of a mainstream story where the hero works his way up from a small town in the countryside, I need to start as a villainous lord, using the game's systems to my advantage. That's the "opportunity to seek glory," right? Not that I have any clue what "glory" is supposed to mean here.

"M-Master...?"

The maid shuddered as she watched me cackle like a madman. I must have looked like I was off my rocker to her. My reputation for killing people couldn't have helped that impression.

"It is nothing you need worry about," I replied, trying to sound as much like a lord as I could, so as not to make her think that anything was amiss. Then I closed the door and returned to the bedroom.

Oh, right. There was one other thing I needed to check.

I opened the door again immediately in order to ask her what I'd forgotten to

ask before. The maid, who was wiping the sweat from her forehead, stiffened when she saw I'd appeared again. Her reaction really made my infamous reputation hit home.

Just how villainous do you have to be to make people this scared of you?

"What day is it today?"

"T-Today?"

"Yes, today."

"February 2nd!"

"February 2nd?"

"Y-Yes!"

"Of what year?"

"Erm, it's Year 202 of the Runan Kingdom Calendar!"

"Oh, okay. Thanks."

"Huh...?"

I closed the door on the maid who looked very confused, possibly because my thanking her caught her off guard. Once I'd shut the door, I slumped down to the floor. My jaw had dropped when I heard the date.

February 1st of Year 202 in the Runan Calendar?

If that's true, then it's tomorrow!

That was when the Naruya Kingdom would trample the Eintorian Domain underfoot and lop its lord's head off!

I had no time to prepare for battle.

Redeem my reputation, train the soldiers, and raise my level. I could do all those things, and still have no guarantee of survival, and I have to do it by tomorrow?! *I have no luck! This is the worst! Shit!* Shit! *How do I even survive this...? I'm only going to be able to enjoy strategizing and receive whatever glory they're talking about if I survive. Assuming I even go along with the gods' plan, that is.*

My mind raced. *Okay, let me think about this. This game proved popular because it allowed players to try out their own unique strategies. And despite being a single-player game, there's a world-wide ranking based on the scores players earn in battle.*

Yeah, like how there's high scores at the arcade. And I was number one. So, I need to come up with a strategy befitting my top rank! I need to come up with a way to survive. Not dying has to come before having fun. Okay, time to come up with a strategy.

I peered down at the map spread out in front of me once more.

The only details on the war that kills Erhin Eintorian were in the few lines of prologue text that show up at the start of the game. I know the army of the Naruya Kingdom invades, and Erhin gets beheaded, but none of the finer details of their war. That's because everything I know about Erhin comes from the protagonists' perspective.

And since Erhin's survival would completely change the story, what I knew now would become meaningless. Still, knowing the prologue was a major asset, because so long as I knew my enemies, I could prepare countermeasures against them. *Try to remember the prologue.*

From what I could recall, the Royal Naruyan Army invaded the Runan Kingdom with a two-pronged attack from the north and west. But their main force appeared in the *north* of the Runan Kingdom, while the Eintorian Domain was on the *western* border of the Runan Kingdom.

That means their advance here was a distraction.

The Naruya Kingdom first send a vanguard force to the Eintorian Domain. Then they send their main force across the northern border while the Runan Army's focus is on the west. They used this strategy because the capital of the Runan Kingdom was fairly close to the northern border.

And the Runan Kingdom falls to the Naruya Kingdom.

The Runan Kingdom is confused when the Eintorian Region falls without being able to put up any real defense. They hurriedly prepare for war, and the nearby regions mass their trops in the west. Unaware of the main force that's been

moving covertly.

This battle showed off how inept the Runan Kingdom was at gathering information, and the Naruya Kingdom's ability to move their main force covertly showed off how excellent their strategy was. They were able to move that many troops to the north completely unnoticed, after all.

This difference wasn't purely Erhin's fault, I thought*. It's also because the king of Runan was a tyrant ruling over a corrupt system.*

Still, there's a path here for me to survive. Basically, since the real war happens up north, if I can just drive off this diversionary force, it'll give me time to breathe. Yeah, time I can use to level up and prepare for war. If I can just manage to live through the battle tomorrow, then the future will open up to me.

That was the one thing I was sure of.

*

The problem is how to survive. Basically, I need to come up with a strategy. I do have some ideas. The key thing is that the Naruya Kingdom is completely unaware of my existence, which means they also don't know that I *know that they're planning a surprise attack. I've got to take maximum advantage of that.*

But my main concern is the state of my own forces. Given how their lord's been up until now, there's no way he's got a proper army serving under him. In the game, he actually loses without putting up a fight, so it's gotta be bad. My first priority needs to be getting a handle on what the situation is. Knowing yourself is more important than knowing your enemy. That's one of the basics of the art of war.

I started by calling in the head chamberlain and telling him, "Head chamberlain. I am going to go manage the troops."

"Manage the troops? If you've some business with them, I will summon your commanders."

"No, I'll go in person."

"Then I shall prepare a carriage at once," the head chamberlain said before he rushed from the room.

My infamous reputation came in handy. It looked like some people had probably lost their lives for careless remarks before. Even if something I said or did seemed weird, no one would bring any attention to it. I wasn't going to have time to explain every little thing I was doing, so that was pretty helpful.

Eventually, the head chamberlain returned. I followed him to an enclosed carriage—with a roof and everything!—that waited outside the castle. I was fascinated by it because of how showy it was, but climbed aboard without letting that show. It wasn't that big on the inside, maybe about the same size as the interior of a small car that seated four people.

The head chamberlain didn't climb in, perhaps because he planned to drive the carriage himself. I took the liberty of looking around inside.

The carriage set off immediately. There was a loud clank and I felt myself lifted up. This was the worst ride I'd ever had—it was bad enough to make me instantly nauseous.

Blech! This shaking is awful. This carriage has nothing on a car. Well, that's the difference technology makes.

The carriage came to a stop a short while later while I was still desperately fighting my nausea.

"We have arrived, master."

I stepped out at once. The fresh air helped me feel a little less sick to my stomach. *This is gonna take some getting used to.* I looked around as I took a deep breath.

My eyes settled on a wooden barracks. To the best of my knowledge, the barracks inside cities in this game were tasked with public order. They were also command centers for the domain's army. It was presumably the same here in Eintorian.

I used my skill Check Information to get my bearings.

Eintorian Domain Barracks

Troop Strength: 1200 men

Morale: 20

Seeing that info left me involuntarily clutching my head. I let out a dismayed laugh.

Only 20 Morale. It maxes out at 100, so 20 is about as bad as it gets.

Little wonder, seeing these are the villainous Erhin's troops. Little wonder they get wiped out by a diversionary force. That figure for Troop Strength isn't the entire Eintorian Army, but the number of men guarding the city. It's a good number, not too few, or too many.

There are barracks all over the Eintorian Domain. The city is the center of the domain, where the lord's castle is, but there's a vast territory around it used for farming. Well, this is an agricultural society, after all.

Although I couldn't imagine the morale of the other barracks was going to be any higher, I somehow managed to keep that fact from overwhelming me as I headed inside. There were soldiers gathered in various spots around the training grounds. I guessed they might be practicing, but soon realized how foolish I'd been.

No, the soldiers were gambling. They were playing a gamut of different games, everything from dice to cards.

I doubted my eyes for a moment. Was this really the barracks?

Their lord had just arrived, and yet there were no guards around, and no one seemed to have noticed. I stopped the head chamberlain, who looked ready to run and fetch someone, and instead grabbed the lapels of a soldier who was about to roll the dice and pulled him close.

"What's your problem?!" the soldier shouted, dice still in hand, as he turned his head.

Then our eyes met.

"*Eeeek!* M-My lord! Forgive me! H-How long have you been here...?!"

The man recognized me at a glance and was soon prostrating himself on the ground. It looked like the lord's infamous reputation was highly effective against the soldiers too.

“Never mind that. Call your commander here at once.”

“Y-Yes, sir! Wahhh!”

The soldier ran off screaming. His screams alerted the others to my presence, causing them all to hurry to their feet in surprise and stand at attention. *Aren’t they treating me more like a natural disaster than a lord at this point?*

Well, the key thing’s the commander. I walked over to the building in the center of the training grounds, the army’s command center. That was where the soldier from before had run off to too.

“Hey, what’re you bothering me for when I’m having a good time?”

“Umm... His Lordship... His Lordship is here to see you!”

The commander and his men were playing poker. The amount of money on the table was on a different scale than the petty gambling going on outside. *If the commander is like this, then no wonder his men outside are gambling first thing in the morning. There’s really no future here.*

“His Excellency is here? ...Ah! Y-Your Excellency!”

When the man who looked to be their commander noticed me, he shoved the other soldiers aside and rushed over. The other high-ranking men who’d been gambling with him stood at attention when they saw me.

Also, “Your Excellency”? That was a style used by dukes and counts. But only between fellow members of the nobility. The common folk called me “Your Lordship” instead. Erhin Eintorian was a lord with a noble title. Yes, incredibly, I was now a count.

And being a commander in the army, this guy was a noble too. Only a petty one, though. Probably a baron or something like that. And he was also a vassal of the House of Eintorian.

Berk Gordon

Rank: Baron

Age: 38

Martial: 33

Intelligence: 23

Command: 20

Faction: Eintorian Domain, Army Commander

Faction Opinion: 10

I checked his information.

He's about what I expected: incompetence incarnate. The man's a commander, and yet his Martial is lower than the rank-and-file soldiers. I'll bet he was only made commander because of his noble birth. Still, while I can see hiring an incompetent noble as one of his retainers, he went and made the guy a commander? Even if the original Erhin was incompetent, this is awful.

"Did you need something so early in the morning? Heh heh."

Berk walked over to me rubbing his hands together with a smile. That told me everything. It seemed like Erhin had appointed him commander because the two of them were close. Had he just wanted one of his close vassals in the position, and didn't mind if that threw his forces into disarray?

Also, given the guy's close to Erhin, that's proof in itself that he's scum.

"Was the gambling I saw outside your orders?"

"Yes, of course. You gave us permission, Your Excellency. Since the gamblers have a duty to pay a gambling tax to me. Ha ha ha!"

Gambling tax? What nonsense. I shook my head and whispered into the head chamberlain's ear.

"Head chamberlain."

"Yes, master."

"Has this man always been a commander?"

"No. Under the previous lord, there was another..."

"Did I replace them?"

"Yes. I-Indeed, you did."

So that's how it is.

The former lord—that'd be Erhin's dad—passed away due to illness a few years ago. It hasn't been long since Erhin became head of the house, and once his old man wasn't around to keep him in line anymore, he took to villainy like a fish to water.

"Then where is the former commander now?"

"Come again...?"

"I asked you where the former commander is now."

If Erhin swapped him out, then he's gotta be better than this guy.

Stupid rulers always want to distance themselves from loyal retainers, don't they?

"Baron Hadin is in prison."

"Oh, he is, is he?"

Lucky for me, he's not dead. Was it because he's a noble? Well, that bit doesn't matter. It'd have been tough to find a capable commander in just one day, but if there's already a persuasive candidate for the position, that changes things. Of course, I'll still need to thoroughly investigate before deciding.

"So, what I'm hearing is you've been letting them use the time that ought to have been spent training to gamble, huh?"

"Y-Y-Yes, I suppose?"

He probably hadn't overheard my little chat with the head chamberlain, but Berk's face grew suspicious as he realized something was up.

"Throw Commander Berk in prison at once! He'll answer for the crime of disrupting military discipline!"

I gave the harsh order right before his eyes. Berk jumped into the air in surprise.

"Y-Your Excellency! What is this about?! Lord Erhin! It's me, Gordon!"

Yeah, and so what if you are? I don't need to answer him.

The man didn't merit any further attention.

*

The prison was a brutal place.

It had been built underground, illuminated only faintly by candlelight. No one could continue to remain sane for long locked up in such conditions.

“Hey, let go of me! Your Excellency! Your Excellencyyy! Why are you doing this to me?! Your Excellency!!!”

I ignored Gordon as he was chucked into a cell and went to see the former commander. The warden, who was perhaps spooked at seeing the commander of the army getting jailed, moved like a robot as he led the way, his back ramrod straight.

“Th-This way to Baron Hadin’s cell!”

“There’s no need to raise your voice. Just shut up and open the cell door, would you?”

The warden covered his mouth with both hands at my barked command. Then, obsequiously doing as I said, he opened the cell door and backed away.

When I entered, I saw an emaciated man sitting against the jail wall.

“Your Excellency...?”

I used Check Information immediately, and looked at his info with all the urgency that came from knowing my life hinged on tomorrow’s battle.

Hadin Meruya

Age: 45

Martial: 60

Intelligence: 57

Command: 70

Faction: Currently Unaffiliated

Faction Opinion: 75

Huh. Well, he’s not bad.

Maybe because I'd just seen Berk's stats earlier, the numbers here were like salve to my eyes. The average soldier had a Martial score of 30 to 40. 60 wasn't all that impressive, but it was a bit of a relief just knowing there was *someone* who could command the waning Eintorian Domain Army.

In this game, it's unusual to find A-class units with an ability score over 90. And S-class units with a score over 100 are really precious.

Besides, it was his Command stat that really mattered. What I needed pronto was a commander that could bring together the unruly mass my forces had devolved into, and his 70 Command more than fit the bill.

"Your Excellency! What brings you here? Can I help you with—"

"Baron Hadin," I interrupted him. "Tell me, do you have any experience fighting in a real battle?"

I don't have time to persuade him to join me. So it'll be faster to order him around with my authority as a lord. Winning him over completely can wait until after tomorrow's battle.

"A real battle? Of course I do. Twenty years ago, there were all sorts of battles, big and small, and I was in the forces then, so..."

That makes sense. He's forty-five years old now, so he'd have been twenty-five two decades ago.

Lots of lesser nobles served in the military, so in a way, the answer should have been obvious.

"Good, Baron Hadin. I hereby reinstate you as commander of the Eintorian Domain Army, effective immediately!"

"Huh? Y-Y-Your Excellency! Do you mean it?!"

"Your first task as commander will be to amass all Eintorian forces, with the exception of those on border patrol, at the castle's west gate."

Maybe his brain had seized up out of shock. Hadin simply blinked at me as I gave him that order and then left the prison.

A lord's word is absolute.

In a class-based society, hierarchy was everything, and I was a high noble—a count. Even if someone were to stage a revolt and overthrow me, they would be chased from the kingdom for their crime. No one in their right mind could object to an order from a lord.

So I'll use that authority and my infamy to their maximum extent as I put together a strategy.

To ensure my survival.

*

A man with copper-colored skin threw a soldier to the ground.

"Okay, next! Next!"

He threw the soldiers down one after another. The remaining soldiers grimaced.

"Captain, let's give it a rest. Why should we train when no one else is...?"

"What'd you say? Stop flapping your gums and come at me!"

This was Bente the tenman—the leader of a ten-man unit. He beckoned the complaining soldier with a curling motion of his index finger. There was a smile on his face, but the man he'd set his sights on looked ready to burst into tears at any moment. Bente quickly put the soldier in a headlock and began choking him.

"U-Urgh... I give, Captain... I give..."

"I've told you never to say such a thing."

"Why are we the only ones who have to go through all this when everyone else's always taking it easy? I hear they've even set up a gambling den over there..."

"Don't give me that drivel. We're going to train even if we're the only ones doing it. And it's training time, isn't it? Am I wrong, huh?"

"Well, no, you're not wrong..."

The soldier Bente had put on the spot looked ready to cry again. Bente grinned.

Left with no choice, the soldiers all came at him. And were summarily thrown to the ground.

Each of Bente's men owed him a debt of gratitude for something, and they also looked up to him like a big brother, so despite their grumbling they would still train.

"I don't care about gambling or whatever else it is they do. I'm a soldier, so I train. That's it. Soldiers are supposed to defend the domain, so us going into town every day to shake down the people for money, even if it *is* at a noble's command, is outrageous, right? That's why we're gonna train all day until we collapse, and then drink hard at night! That's how we live! That's life, right?! Hey, you louts! Where do you think you're looking when I'm talking to you?!"

The soldiers' eyes went wide. They shook their heads and pointed off into the distance.

"Isn't that Lieutenant Commander Garne?"

"Are you looking to get punched? I'm not falling for that."

"But it's true..."

Finally, Bente turned to look where his men were pointing. There was his direct superior, Lieutenant Commander Garne, coming this way. The two of them got along terribly because of Bente's dissatisfaction with the current policies towards training.

Because of that, Bente's brow furrowed when he saw him. But he couldn't ignore the lieutenant commander, so Bente strode over confidently.

"What brings you here, when you never go outside?"

"There's an assembly. Playtime's over. Get ready to move right away."

Bente stopped thinking about what he was going to complain about today and cocked his head to the side.

"What did you say? An assembly during training time? This is why our men lack the strength to fight worth a damn. Why, just the other day..."

"Shut up," Garne, who always prided himself in how pale his skin was as a result of never leaving the barracks, interrupted Bente. "Commander Hadin's

been reinstated, and he's ordered all troops to assemble in front of the western gate. Now, move!"

Bente looked back to his soldiers. "What's going on? The former commander's back? Does anyone know anything?"

The men just looked at one another.

*

I was in front of the west gate, which was the main gate of the city, built facing the border. This castle town and the lord's castle were also our final defensive line.

I had given the order to gather everyone here, but once I realized they couldn't even form into ranks properly, I had to question if my forces were even fit to be called an army.

This isn't a town hall meeting. What a sad sight. But there's no time left. I need to enact my plan at once. As long as I begin preparing now, there's gotta be something I can do. This is depressing as all hell, but I can't just sit and mope.

With one sweeping glance, I took in my forces.

5,200 men in total, with a Morale of 20. First, I need to survey my personnel, then do mock battles to test the battle system. After that, it's time to put the strategy into action immediately. The enemy crosses the border tomorrow. That leaves me twenty hours to work with. Once you take into the consideration the time needed to lay traps, there's not a moment to spare.

I started my review of the army personnel by checking the information of the hundredmen. Of course, they completely betrayed my expectations.

Considering the state of our forces, the most important stat is going to be Command for controlling the troops. Each hundredman needs to have a good enough Command score to keep their hundredman unit under control. Without that, their units won't even do as ordered once they're deployed to the battlefield.

However, the reality before me was as miserable as I expected.

Not even one of the hundredmen had a Command score high enough that I

could trust them to lead troops.

30 Command. 40. 28. They're all awful. What a mess. I'm not asking for Martial. Because no one with a high Martial stat is going to be wasting away here. Lots of people have a higher Command than Martial. That's just how this game is. But their Command scores are so low... I have no words.

My one salvation was that Hadin's former subordinates were more capable than the hundredmen who served under Berk. I had them reinstated at once. But aside from them, there was no one of merit.

Honestly, I need more personnel—people I can trust to handle this plan.

That said, it would've been inefficient to check the information of all 5,200 soldiers. That's why I planned to have them fight mock battles before the operation. Because maybe—just maybe—there were some good people here.

I'll hire any soldier who seems usable.

Also, the mock battles doubled as combat training for me.

"We will now hold mock battles between each hundredman unit! Each unit is to choose one man, and then we will select five from those fifty-two!"

Honestly, it must have felt like a hassle, but no one dared object. I didn't bother offering prize money. I was looking for the kind of guys who would jump at participating in these meaningless mock battles.

I soon had a bracket drawn up and the battles got underway. I was just going to watch quietly until they whittled the number down to five. *Looks like they're all pretty awful,* I thought. They had such weak wills. No one was trying to show off their real power.

And so, roughly two hours later, the five were finally decided. I deliberately chose *not* to check their information.

"Your Excellency! These five have been chosen. Would you like to have them compete with each other at once?"

"No, that won't be necessary. I'll check them for myself."

My Martial's 58. If anyone here can beat me, that's actually good luck.

Which is all the more reason not to check their information.

The soldiers faced me, still looking unsure as to the point of these mock battles.

“Come at me one by one!”

When I grabbed my sword, the Attack command appeared.

Yeah, it’s just like the game’s system.

It felt strange seeing the word Attack floating in front of my eyes in real life, but considering I had no idea how to fight for real, having this system was really saving my butt here.

It’s incredibly important that I get used to the battle system in time for the war tomorrow.

When I used Attack, my body moved on its own in a manner corresponding with my Martial score, dominating the soldiers with swordsmanship the old me would never have been able to pull off. Basically, all that I needed to do was keep using the Attack command as the situation warranted.

Obviously, if I had skills, I’d be able to use the Skill command to unleash more devastating attacks, but I didn’t have any just yet. For now, it was all just the basic Attack command.

Shing!

I swung my sword hard enough to cut a man in two. The shocked soldier instinctively tried to block it, but the force of the blow knocked his weapon out of the way. I stopped with my blade leveled at his face. On the battlefield, I’d have finished the strike, but this was training.

“I-I yield!” The soldier groveled before me, trembling.

He seemed completely unwilling to fight for his life.

“Next!”

Swords crossed again. This soldier was also overwhelmed and disarmed by my Attack. He instantly surrendered. I was so exasperated that I kicked the man as he lay on the ground and sent him rolling and thrashing about in agony.

“Give me all you’ve got! Approach this training like your life’s on the line. You’re all slacking too much. You think you can fight properly on the battlefield like this?” I shouted angrily, but it seemed to backfire.

The matches continued, but my Attack command went on defeating the soldiers one after another. If anything, my words had only intimidated them more. They looked at me with dead fish eyes. I could only sigh.

With four men dispatched the same way, the last soldier stepped up.

“Next!”

I’ve given up on them at this point.

I crossed blades with the last soldier. Like all the others, his sword was knocked away by the force of my Attack command. It felt like such a hollow victory, I went to kick this soldier away too.

Huh?

And yet, my leg caught nothing but air. The man had rolled to the ground, and was picking up his fallen sword. *Nice moves.* But I was on him again in a second. I launched another Attack. The soldier’s sword flew high through the air, and then buried itself point-first in the ground a good distance away.

But this soldier wasn’t like any of the others before him. I tried to get a look at his face, but he charged in, not giving me the time. I met the charge with my own Attack, and the force of my sword swing sent blood spurting from the soldier’s arms.

I stopped my Attack to avoid slaying him.

And yet...

The soldier grabbed my leg, attempting to bring me down with all his might. Even as he continued bleeding from his arms.

Honestly, I was surprised.

He didn’t have any great ability. But he had an uncommonly strong will to fight. On the battlefield, this guy might keep going after the enemy even after they’d chopped his limbs off.

“Enough!” I shouted at the soldier.

After all, it was entirely possible that he was coming at me like this because he’d lost control of his anger when I attacked him. I had no use for that sort of mindless battle lust. But, no, it seemed that wasn’t the case.

“I’m terribly sorry, my lord! I’ve shamed myself!” the man shouted, still bravely clinging to my arm.

Yeah. This is what the will to fight looks like.

The man was in possession of a truly indomitable spirit.

It might be weird for me, someone relying on the system, to be evaluating a true man like him, but I need guys like him in order to survive.

“You, tell me your name.”

“I am Bente, my lord! It is an honor that you would face a fool such as myself!”

I immediately used Check Information.

Numbers may not be everything, but the numbers also don’t lie.

Bente

Age: 25

Martial: 49

Intelligence: 38

Command: 82

Faction: Eintorian Domain Army, Tenman

Faction Opinion: 94

What’s this? He has a Command of 82? An Opinion of 94?

His stats made my eyes go wide. *His Martial’s not high, but he’s B-class in Command! When you consider how rare A-class and S-class commanders are, people with B-class abilities are valuable.*

“Heh heh heh heh, bwa hah hah hah hah!”

My sudden outburst of laughter made the nearby soldiers and the head chamberlain, who was next to me, look at one another in fright. A villainous lord's cackling probably never portended anything good.

"Bente!"

"Y-Yes, sir!"

"From today on, you're a hundredman!"

A lord's word was absolute in his domain. No one was going to directly refuse my arbitrary commands. No matter how unprecedented the promotion might be.

*

The battle system was the same as in the game. You couldn't die to an attack from an enemy with lesser Martial there. Yeah, Martial was what guaranteed your life in this world.

My next order of business was to check my stats with the system. Nothing had changed there, as I expected. That meant training like this wouldn't make my level go up. You might say this entire exercise had been to prove that.

Regardless, I'd gotten Bente out of it.

Hadin reinstated all of his former subordinates, and Bente appointed each of the tenmen who had been in his ten-man unit as tenman in his new hundredman unit.

No matter how high their Command scores are, it's going to take some time after their sudden promotions and reinstatements to gain full control. That's why they need their former subordinates under them. Maybe some people will be dissatisfied, but I'll suppress them by taking advantage of my infamous reputation. I don't have time to peacefully resolve everything.

Time's up. There's no room left to work with. The war's starting now.

I stood before the assembled soldiers and explained the strategy for tomorrow's war, then gave the commanders their orders. The expression on the soldiers' faces changed. Still, no one openly complained. *This is a lord's power in action,* I thought.

My forces all moved about busily, executing out my commands.

They're probably all thinking the same thing. "Our lord's playing war now." And to be fair, their lord always did like his games.

I had no intention of disabusing them of that thought.

In fact, it might even be better to have them thinking that way, considering the current situation. If they were to realize there really is an invasion coming, they'd probably flee. They've only got a Morale of 20, after all. In which case, having them dig pitfall traps and lie in wait for the enemy while thinking it's all just for fun is way better.

Anyway, as long as they follow orders, it's fine.

This was the plan I came up with:

The Naruya Kingdom's main force was massing in the north. In order to hide that, a diversionary unit would appear in Eintorian, which was on the Runan Kingdom's western border. The diversionary unit's course was clear: there was a massive mountain range between the Naruya Kingdom and the Eintorian Domain.

Actually, it was the existence of this mountain range between the Eintorian Domain and the Naruya Kingdom which led to the civil war that broke the country, leaving Eintorian as the border. The mountains were steep and hard to cross. There was a strategic pass on the sole road through the mountains. So an army needed to pass through the gate there to cross the border.

There was also the option of crossing the steep mountains like Hannibal crossed the Alps in the Second Punic War. That, or maybe taking the long route around them.

But there's no record of that in the game's history. No, the Royal Naruyan Army should do the simple thing and attack us through the strategic pass. The diversionary unit's whole purpose is to draw attention. So there's no need for them to avoid detection. Besides, Erhin's incompetence should be well known to the Royal Naruyan Army, so they'll take the quickest route to attack us. I know the history, so I don't need to think about anything else. I just need to pay attention to this road.

Obviously, under normal circumstances, the battle would break out at the strategic mountain pass. But the gate collapsed in an earthquake during the previous lord's reign and has been left unrepaired since. From what the head chamberlain told me, Erhin pocketed the funds the kingdom provided for its repair. But even if the gate were intact, it would still be cleverer not to deploy people there and use the mountain area instead.

Looking at the troops' morale and degree of training, an ambush using ranged attacks is going to be far superior to getting them involved in melee combat.

That was why I planned to settle things here, in this mountainous area that they would have to travel through on the way from the mountain pass to the flatlands of the Eintorian Domain. There were a lot of long, narrow roads along this route, and a narrow road at the bottom of steep cliffs was ideal for an ambush.

I already know where the enemy are going to be coming from, so I'd be an idiot not to use that.

Ambush them on a narrow road. Then, set up pitfall traps where the road opens up into the flatlands. *This* was the start of my strategy.

*

"What exactly is he trying to do?" one of the soldiers grumbled as he dug.

"The lord's probably just playing around," a hundredman explained. "I guess he wants to play war this time."

"Who would make a game of war? That's awful," the soldier replied, shaking his head. He just couldn't understand it.

"Hey, he's going to hear you!" the hundredman warned. "If the lord gets wind of you talking like that, we're all finished. He hates insubordination more than anything. Now, dig like you mean it!"

"Sigh... Luck seemed to be on my side today, but now we've gotta do this instead of gambling. What the hell, man? Damn it all!"

Despite all of their griping, the soldiers kept digging the pitfall traps they had been ordered to. None of them had the foggiest idea that the traps were going

to be used in a real war, of course. They figured it was just another whim of their tyrannical lord. But they did it nonetheless, and did it seriously, because if they did a half-ass job, they'd be killed on the spot.

Defy him, and he'd kill you. That was Lord Erhin Eintorian's way. Every person in the Eintorian Domain knew that. The soldiers would whine and complain, but they had no choice but to dig those holes, and do it fast.

Of course, in some places, things played out differently.

Bente's unit approached the digging differently from any of the others. Bente was a very simple man, and had never even heard his lord's infamous reputation. More than that, now that his lord had acknowledged him and given him the great authority of being a hundredman, he was grateful. That was why he threw everything he had into encouraging his men.

He busied himself leading by example.

"You dig a hole, lay rope netting over it, and then cover it with straw. Got it? Hey, watch it! You're gonna hurt your hand!"

Some acted out of fear of their lord. Others out of loyalty. Each person's feelings were different, but the unit kept working busily.

*

Hadin, who was commanding troops in an ambush on a cliff overlooking the strategic mountain pass, couldn't believe his eyes at what he saw.

The Naruya Kingdom really showed up!

The men couldn't hide their unease. Everyone thought their lord was just playing games, so they never expected the Royal Naruyan Army to turn up for real.

Of course, their lord *had* told them they were preparing against an attack from the Naruyan army. It was just that nobody believed it would actually happen.

"Did he genuinely know they would be launching a surprise attack, then?"

Even Hadin had thought this was mere lark. But he'd also been glad to see his lord taking an interest in the military. That was why he agreed to command this

operation. Not as a game, but as practical training in laying an ambush. Hadin had been ready to get hauled back off to jail as long as he could stress the importance of training and convince his villainous lord to change his ways.

But now you're telling me it's a real war?

The soldiers, despite their lack of training, had been fine as long there were no enemies around. Now that they saw there were, they panicked. Some were even about to let loose with their arrows before it was time.

"Commander! This is crazy... There's way too many of them!"

There were agitated murmurs between the soldiers.

"Would you all shut up?!"

Hadin was surprised, but quickly feigned calm and stopped his men. Nothing good would come of panic. Because he had actual combat experience, Hadin's first thought was of the need to keep a level head in this situation.

He exchanged glances with one of the former subordinates that he'd reinstated as a hundredman as they observed the Naruyan army advancing along the bottom of the sheer cliff walls.

The more he saw, the more he broke into a cold sweat.

"Commander... Are you all right?" his long-time subordinate, Norstin, asked in a low voice. He'd made the man his lieutenant as soon as he was reinstated.

"Don't worry about me. But surely..." Hadin, who remembered fighting against the Naruyan army over two decades ago, stared in blank amazement. "Surely that can't be Randall of the Mighty Spear, can it?"

The enemy he had once seen on the battlefield was down there. He'd been quite young at the time, but still boasted more than enough martial prowess to merit being called a commander.

"The same Randall who's one of the Ten Commanders of Naruya, sir?" Norstin asked in response. Hadin nodded.

"Yeah, that's right. They call him that now too. If it's really him, we're in trouble. We don't stand a chance of winning this thing..."

“Commander...!” Norstin shouted, snapping Hadin back to his senses.

“We wait until the smoke goes up, as the lord ordered. That smoke signal is our sign to act. Don’t any of you dare move until then!” Hadin ordered calmly, even though he was drenched with cold sweat. He was completely lost as to what was going on at this point, but it looked to him like this ambush. What he’d only assumed was his lord playing around, was now their only plan with any hope of catching the enemy unaware.

Hadin clutched his sword tight.

The enemy’s forces... The enemy commander... They’re so overwhelming.

Meanwhile, his own forces’ training was the worst. On top of that, the men who had been loyal to the former commander, Berk, had kept silent when the lord was around, but acted insubordinate now that he wasn’t. Even if the ambush succeeded, as things stood, it looked unlikely they could stop Randall outright.

Still, Hadin had to do what little damage he could to the enemy forces in order to protect his country. The one redeeming factor in all this was that the enemy didn’t see the ambush coming in the slightest.

As he was waiting, breath held, the smoke signal finally went up. Just as it did, the enemy force stopped moving. Their advance stopped.

“All right, now’s the time. Loose your arrows! Kill as many of them as you can!” Hadin shouted at once. The arrows flew on his command, and rocks rolled down like a landslide.

The Naruyan army scattered, dashing this way and that as they underwent a baptism by arrows and rocks.

However, things went as Hadin had feared. A number of the hundredmen who’d served under Berk slinked off into the shadows to hide as soon as the enemy appeared, able to accomplish little more than quaking in fear.

That hampered their ability to launch multiple attacks at the same time. Their force was diminished. On top of that, once the enemy were shaken by the arrows, some of the hundredmen lost their heads and gave reckless orders.

“Ch-Charge! The enemy are confused!”

“No! The lord’s ordered us to refrain from direct attacks!” The tenman beside the man tried to stop him, but the hundredman had lost all sense of reason and wouldn’t listen.

“That’s situational! Charge!”

The lieutenant commander raced down the slope, and the rest of the men had no choice but to follow.

The Naruyan army was confident their enemies had no idea they’d crossed the border and were heading their way, so they fell into an ambush and were starting to take damage. But because there was discord within the Eintorian Army, it hadn’t grown beyond that.

*

A few hours ago, Randall Ebbhan, one of the Ten Commanders of Naruya, had advanced his forces with a look of boredom on his face.

His second-in-command, Lieutenant Commander Getan, looked equally unamused, grumbling, “It’s just not fair, them putting you in charge of the diversionary unit like this instead of the main force.”

Randall didn’t respond, but neither did he reproach Getan for the remark.

“Let’s focus on the task at hand. I’m told that Eintorian has a pitiful excuse for a lord?”

“Yes, Commander. Our informants report that the domain’s forces are nothing but trash.”

Randall chuckled darkly. “Then I’ll bet the lord’s off womanizing now, without a clue what we’re about to do with him, huh?”

“That’s about what I’d expect. The man is practically drowning in booze and women.”

“It galls me to think that cur’s blood will be staining my spear. But the king’s orders are final... Fine. Let’s destroy Eintorian quickly. That will show them just how great I am!”

*

Royal Naruyan Army: 12,241 men

Eintorian Domain Army: 4,914 men

I'd used Check Information to scan our Manpower. Being able to check the Manpower counts like this was one of the game's strong points, and that had carried forward into its real world incarnation. But I wouldn't expect us to be taking these kinds of losses if the men were following orders. And yet, the number on my side suddenly dropped.

Eintorian Domain Army: 4414 men

I sighed. *I was worried about this. There was no way this unruly mob were going to follow orders perfectly. But there was no way to train them perfectly in a day. So be it.*

Still, they were steadily dealing damage. The enemy's Manpower was definitely down from the initial 15,000.

So, things are going to plan.

I had considered this possibility. In truth, this ambushing operation was part of a larger stratagem that was meant to do more than just whittle down the enemy's numbers. I didn't know if it would work, but my entire war hinged on it. That's why the signal went up the moment the enemy's vanguard entered the flatlands and fell into my pitfall traps. The hail of arrows would make it difficult for them to get out of the mountain area.

After all, there was no point in any of this if I couldn't win here. No way was I going to be fighting a defensive battle once they'd assembled all of their Manpower. The truth was, I couldn't expect to defend for long with my poorly-trained-Morale-20 forces.

That being the case, my best strategy was to kill the enemy commander while the enemy's Manpower was split up.

That's why I had appeared in front of the pit traps, leading a decoy force of just 1,000 men while the remaining 4,000 served as ambushers. I didn't plan to fight here, of course. The enemy still held an overwhelming numerical advantage, even after falling for my ambush.

What if the enemy commander appeared here, separated from the main body of his troops? I couldn't ask for a better outcome than that. It would make it far more likely that we could wipe out the enemy force and kill their commander.

Killing a commander in an enemy force of 1,000 men would be much less difficult than killing a commander in a force of 10,000. That's why I needed to lure the enemy commander out.

While it didn't apply to the units led by kings or dukes, because of their size, it was commonly understood that the commander of a smaller unit had to lead from the front.

The enemy cavalry were the ones who'd fallen into the pit traps. Their commander should have been with them. So, as they tried to get back in formation, I raised my voice and shouted, "To think you'd try to invade *my* lands. Listen well, Naruyan army. I'll make you answer for this folly!"

Once I was done shouting from a short distance away, I looked around, searching for their commander's banner. My eyes stopped on the man who was standing beneath it, wearing a particularly noticeable suit of armor.

Randall Ebbhan

Age: 37

Martial: 85

Intelligence: 59

Command: 70

Faction: Naruya Kingdom 2nd Army, Vanguard Commander

Faction Opinion: 62

"Gah ha ha ha ha!" the man bellowed. "You've underestimated me. And now you'll be wiped out for it. Any horseman who can still move, follow me!"

The enemy commander, Randall, took my bait. He was a prideful character in the game too.

It was possible he was dissatisfied with being put in charge of the diversionary unit instead of the main force. He probably wasn't going to be able to tolerate

his ambitions being further frustrated by failing here. Now, he'd taken an unexpected blow from a foe he'd underestimated. That had to be infuriating. Momentary rage could rob a man of reason. Especially in battle.

The problem was his whopping 85 Martial.

He's a famous soldier. I'd anticipated this, at least to some degree, but seeing the number 85 was still a bit of a surprise. Still, there's no time to hesitate. I need to move forward with the plan for now.

"Bente! We're retreating!"

I fled with Bente in the face of the enemy commander's charge. A retreat meant to lure him in.

Royal Naruyan Army: 1,221 men

I used Check Information as I ran, a cavalry unit of 1221 men pursuing us hot on our heels. Over ten thousand enemy soldiers were still delayed in the mountains.

I'll never have a better chance than this.

If the enemy commander's Martial were just a little lower, I'd probably have let out a shout of triumph at this point.

"Spring the trap!"

My forces were going to be completely unreliable in a melee, so there were more traps laid at the spot I lured them to.

When I shouted to the soldiers lying in wait as I fled, the wall of bamboo spears that were buried in the ground came up. Behind me, I heard the cavalry unit's horses whinnying as they impaled themselves on the spears or tried to avoid them, and carnage unfolded.

"Okay, now! Give 'em a hail of arrows!" Bente shouted, urging the soldiers on.

Then, taking his own bow in hand, Bente put arrows through several of the incoming cavalry before drawing his sword, still not satisfied, and racing in to cut down one man after the next. Between the bamboo spears and the rain of

arrows, the onrushing cavalry started dropping like flies. In no time, my own force's Morale was rising.

Royal Naruyan Army: 902 men

The enemy's numbers had dropped considerably, but the problem was still the enemy commander. He thrusted his spear about blindly as he charged, destroying every arrow or bamboo spear that came at him. And, with excellent command of his horse, he leapt over the top of the bamboo spear trap and began cutting down the men of my army.

Eintorian Domain Army: 700 men

On top of that, the forces close to him started putting up a spirited fight, rapidly diminishing the numbers on my side.

He was strong. Oh, yes, he most definitely was. A commander of his caliber undoubtedly had a special skill. But at my current level, the system wouldn't display it, and I had to defeat that powerful enemy.

My victory was contingent on it.

Why, of all the possible opponents, did I have to face a monster with a Martial of 85?!

"Hey, you there! Are you the lord? Die!"

When he found me barking commands, he just threw his spear at me. It spun rapidly, like he'd used some sort of skill on it, as it flew my way.

If I remember correctly, a difference of 27 points in Martial is insurmountable in this game. In order to defeat a commander with this high of a Martial score in battle, I need an overwhelming Manpower advantage. If the enemy has around 700 men left, then I need at least five times that many. That's just how important a high Martial is in this game.

But I can stop him. Well, at least I think I can! I've prepared for this.

But it was Bente who stood in the way, prepared for death, who stopped

Randall’s spear.

“Step aside, Bente! That’s an order! Believe in me!”

He’s defending his master. That’s an admirable display of loyalty, of course.

But it was also blatantly a hindrance to me.

My Martial might be abysmal right now, but I still have a way of fighting Randall!

I called up the item at once.

In a sense, it was thanks to this item that I could be so reckless as to take part in this battle that I needed to survive at all costs.

My mightiest weapon, and my insurance policy!

Will you use the bonus item Daitoren?

The message sparkled before my eyes, and the bonus item activated as soon as I nodded.

*

After ordering the soldiers to set up pitfall traps the day before, I had returned to the castle for a time. I had remembered something. Something important. My thoughts raced as I recalled it.

The system had told me I would have the chance to seek glory. The next thing I knew, I'd awoken to find myself transferred to this world.

Basically, that means the situation I now find myself in is the chance to seek glory. Whatever glory is. Anyway, the key thing right now is that the message about a bonus should also be true.

The night before the transfer, the chance at this so-called "bonus" had tempted me into an all-night gaming session. But ultimately, search as I might, I had never found it. If it was meant to be acquired *after* I was transferred to this world, though, then it was little wonder I'd been unable to locate it in the game.

I remember the message saying that the bonus could be found by exploring the first map. That means it's not distributed automatically. In that case, there's got to be a bonus hidden somewhere.

So, where exactly is *the first map? It's supposed to be in the first map, so...how about the place where I first opened my eyes? The lord's very own bedchamber?*

I entered the bedroom and looked around. Despite my thorough search, I hadn't come across anywhere that they could have hidden something.

Since it's a map, does that refer to the whole of the castle, not just my bedchamber?

I'd immediately began searching all over the castle. The bedroom, the study, the chamberlains' and maids' quarters, and the kitchen. No matter how high or low I searched, I found nothing in any of them fit to be called a bonus.

*

"Head Chamberlain, is there any place inside the castle that's special?"

After much searching to no avail, I had tried asking the head chamberlain, who was the most familiar with the castle. I was starting to think the bonus

would be hidden somewhere significant, like an old building, or something like that.

“A special place...? The mortuary tablets of all the former lords, going back to the ancient Eintorian Kingdom, are stored in the basement. You might call that special, in a way.”

Mortuary tablets for the former lords? Yeah, that does sound special.

I had been so convinced that I ran off before the head chamberlain could even finish speaking.

“Master?”

I could hear the head chamberlain’s voice following me distantly, but I was focused exclusively on that bonus. I ran like a madman until I reached the basement, where I came across two large, iron doors. I opened them made my way inside, finding a large, open space before me. There were a large number of mortuary tablets stored here, just as the head chamberlain had described. But they didn’t only include lords from this domain. Some of these mortuary tablets dated to a time when the Eintorian family ruled this ancient kingdom.

“Hmm...”

As I examined the line of tablets, I discovered something a bit strange. There was a long, thin box in the middle that stood out from everything else. There was obviously something special about it. I unconsciously reached out towards the box. The moment my hand came in contact with it, a light sprang forth, and a message appeared.

You received the bonus.

Daitoren

Martial +30

Effect Duration: 30 minutes. Cooldown: 5 hours.

Weapon Skill: Crush/Once per 30 minutes

Daitoren? That’s a mythical sword from Japan’s Otogi-zoshi stories, isn’t it? If the game management team set up this preposterous situation, then did they

use the Daitoren as a bonus because they're gods?

Well, name aside, it most certainly had stats befitting of a bonus item.

I've never seen an item with a +30 bonus to Martial. Even special S-rank items are +10 Martial at most, and there was only one special S-rank item in the game. Yet this thing grants +30?

I couldn't help but smile.

Sure, it's got a cooldown on it. But if I use it only when the situation calls for it, then this thing is absolutely busted. It turns me from B-rank to S-rank.

With +30, my Martial goes from 58 to 88. After a little leveling up, I can get it up to over 90. There'll be almost no enemy in this world who's a match for me!

If I leveled my Martial to 70, then this broken item could take me to 100 Martial for half an hour. That's just how good it was. I couldn't stop grinning.

Now this *is a proper bonus for helping me clear the game. Well, given my life's on the line and all, I wouldn't settle for any less.*

*

I equipped the Daitoren in front of Randall.

It lasts for 30 minutes!

Ryuichi Hasegawa/Erhin Eintorian

Age: 25

Martial: 58+30 (88)

Intelligence: ??

Command: ??

My Martial score had jumped—from a low-grade 58 to the high end of B-class.

I shoved Bente aside, and executed the Attack command while facing the enemy spears that were still flying towards us. My hands moved by themselves, swinging Daitoren to bat away all the incoming projectiles.

Claaaang!

My fingers throbbed slightly, but I thought it actually felt pleasurable. I'd just stopped a B-class enemy's attack with ease.

"What?!" Randall gave me a look of incredulous indignation as he tore through my soldiers, advancing towards me. Not one person in my army that stood a chance against a half-crazed commander with a Martial of 85. No, not a single soul, not even among the tenmen or hundredmen.

"Wahhhhh! H-He's a monster! Save us!"

All he could do was throw spears, yet the rank-and-file soldiers fled or were impaled as they tried to. Some of them even pissed themselves out of sheer terror.

"Your lordship! Please, flee this place! That's Randall of the Ten Commanders of Naruya! He's merciless! You must flee!" I heard one of Hadin's hundredmen shout to me from the other side of the traps.

I see Hadin's noticed Randall too.

The Naruyan commander was living up to his reputation.

Well, that's good for me. Now's the time to show my forces the power of their lord.



“It doesn’t matter if he’s one of the Ten Commanders, because he’ll be facing me now!” I boasted as I sent my horse galloping towards Randall.

Just as everyone who had witnessed Randall’s feats of martial prowess started thinking I was a reckless idiot, the two of us collided.

“That was a cowardly trick you pulled. You cheeky little wretch! I’ll kill you now! Gah ha ha ha ha!”

Sneering, Randall swung his spear at me with all his might. It was a heavy-looking iron spear, but he made it look effortless.

He’s pretty confident.

And, fair enough, he had the skill to back it up, but he was still no match for me as I was now.

When I executed the Attack command with Daitoren in hand, my blade crossed with Radall’s spear.

Randall swung like he intended to slay me with just one stroke, and a look of disbelief crossed his face as he followed through with further attacks. Obviously, I used the Attack command and stopped all of them from meeting their mark.

In melee battles, long weapons have a reach advantage. But I’ve got the higher Martial score. Besides, my weapon is a super special class.

Because of that, my attacks started to push Randall back. The man swung his spear down at me with mounting confusion evident on his face.

“Die, die, dieeeee! How dare a mere lord thwart me like this!”

I stopped this attack with the Attack command too. It was clear I had the upper hand, but we were at a standstill. My attacks were pushing him back, true, but I couldn’t go for the killing blow either. If he managed to run out the clock and last for 30 minutes, then I was a dead man.

Well, in that case, I’ll use my skill. I’ve got a weapon skill now. One that I can only use with Daitoren.

Rend through everything you touch while swinging.

Will instantly kill or incapacitate an enemy with a Martial score of up to 5 points higher than your own.

Usable once per 30 minutes.

My skill could take out anyone with up to 5 more points of Martial than me in one shot, and *it even came with the option to decide whether I wanted to kill or incapacitate them.* Normally, insta-kill skills only let you kill your opponent, but there was a good reason why this one gave me the choice. This was a game about war and conquest. The devs had added this Incapacitate function in response to gamers demanding the ability to capture and hire enemies they liked.

That feature was faithfully replicated in this world too.

Also, the scary thing about Crush was that it allowed me to kill any enemy with a Marital score up to 5 points higher than my own with one attack.

I can only use it once every half an hour. It won't do me any good if there are two powerful enemies. But this skill gives me the ability to walk around the battlefield. It's a huge lifeline. I can make it through this battle because of the bonus. Without it, I bet I'd already be dead by now. Heh heh!

I had no intention of recruiting Randall, so I resolved to use Crush for the one-hit kill.

Whoosh!

The moment I did, my hand threw Daitoren at Randall on its own. The weapon smashed through the enemy's spear with a white flash, then buried itself into the man.

"Wh-What?!"

Incaution and arrogance were killers on the battlefield. Daitoren violently impaled Randall's head.

"I-Inconceivable...!"

And so, with one final dying scream, a fountain of blood erupted from his head. I must have looked like a coldblooded slayer, but I hadn't been swinging

the sword of my own volition. You might even say it was the Crush command that murdered him.

Besides, this is a game world turned real, and I'm in a warzone. I'm not going to be stupid and start hesitating to kill people on the battlefield. Yeah, I just have to think of this as a game!

Randall's fall immediately fell from his horse. The area went silent once he hit the ground with a heavy thud. Everyone, enemy and ally alike, stopped fighting and turned to stare with their mouths hanging open. I'll bet no one thought Randall would bite it just like that.

Now's the time!

If I was going to break their momentum, the opportunity was now, while their morale was at its lowest.

"What are you doing?! Their commander's dead! Mop up the rest of the enemy army!" I shouted in the vague direction of my forces with a yell that came from the very bottom of my stomach.

"Yeaaaaaaaaah!" came their triumphant cheer in response.

Morale is now 90.

My forces, now with a Morale of 90, loosed their battle cries as they charged towards the enemy. Their opponents, shocked by the loss of their commander, began to retreat, lost and confused in the chaos.

This was just what I'd been waiting for. I wasn't going to let them leave here quietly.

"Bente, raise the signal again. It's time for the second ambush!"

"Finally, huh?! Gah hah hah hah hah!"

Bente looked overjoyed as he ran off to light the signal. Soon, I could see its smoke rising high into the sky. When Hadin saw this signal, he'd send our retreating foes into further confusion. I had some help from the system, but I'd just won a real-life war! And my greatest prize from the battle was my own life,

which, by all rights, I should have lost today.

Those two facts had me really worked up.

The sense of tension was so much greater than watching it play out in a game, and so I felt all the more excited by having won. It filled me with a sense of satisfaction, knowing that the bonus I'd received made it entirely possible that I could unite this warring land under my control.

*

The enemy had broken ranks and began fleeing down the narrow pass that cut through the mountains, which actually ended up causing them to take even greater losses. I had my forces pursue them all the way. Dawn had broken by the time we'd fully seen them across the border.

I ordered my men back to barracks. Once they'd been instructed to get some rest, I returned to the lord's castle by noon. Once there, I entered my bedroom, informing the maids and head chamberlain that I was not to be disturbed, and set about checking my level-ups at once.

You are victorious.

You received experience for winning the battle.

Experience List

C-class Strategy *etc.* x1

Victory Against Enemy With 3-1 Advantage x3

Victory Against E-class to B-class Enemy x4

The Strategy etc. experience reward is based on how efficiently I carried out my strategy. And they're giving me a C? Was there a superior strategy?

I want to score As, not Cs. Well, no, as a gamer, what I really want is to score an S-rank, but this was a battle with my own life on the line. I don't get any do-overs.

So, I'm pretty satisfied.

Having defeated a force three times the size of mine and killing Randall

provided me extra experience.

From that, I can conclude that even if I use Daitoren for the +30 bonus, the calculation for the experience points needed to level up is still based on my original Martial of 58. One of the basic rules of this game is that you gain more experience for beating enemies that are stronger than you. So, the bonus let me earn a whole bunch of experience.

You are now Lv.2.

...

You are now Lv.8.

I've leveled up all the way to level 8.

You received level up points.

Points in reserve: 700

You get level up points for every level. I went up 7 levels at once, which gives me a whopping 700 points. These points are really precious. There's a whole mountain of things I ought to use them on.

Purchase Skills

Martial Enhancement

Item Enhancement

I can use points in these three categories. But that's not all. Activating the skills I purchase also costs points. I can't use them if I run out. Obviously, that only applies to normal skills, and the skills included with weapons have special limitations not related to points.

Leveling up from 90 to 91 provides a ton of points because it's such a high level, so I won't really need to worry about points so much once I get there. But at my current low level, I've got to plan things out and use them cautiously.

For now, strengthening my weapons is the priority. Just being stronger lowers the risk of dying. Because might makes right on the battlefield.

Martial Enhancement

Will you enhance your Martial? It will cost 200 points.

Currently, my Martial score sat at 58. When it reached 60, the point cost would go up. So, raising Martial wasn't as easy as it sounded. It was going to get pretty expensive. But you only live once, and Martial's important, so it had to be my top priority.

Once I accepted the message inside my head...

Your Martial is now 59.

...my Martial immediately went up by 1. Then, since my target was 60, I raised it again.

Your Martial is now 60.

I expended a total of 400 points raising my Martial by 2. I had a simple reason for not going beyond 60. When I used the bonus, it would take me to 90. That put me in A-class. There was a considerable difference between B-class and A-class.

Once my Martial was 60, I chose Weapon Enhancement.

Will you enhance your weapon? It will cost 300 points.

I did this to check the cost. The price had risen from 200 points to 300. That'd be because I was now in D-class. I had 300 points left at the moment.

Hrm, what should I do...?

My Martial's hit 60 for now, so do I want to buy a skill? They're pretty

indispensable on the battlefield. They let you use special abilities, so having a number of them and using them effectively will save my hide in dangerous situations.

Of course, weapon enhancement's not a bad idea either. The stronger my weapons, the less likely I am to die. Of course, I expect enhancing Daitoren to eat a ton of points.

Daitoren Lv.10/10

Will you enhance this item? It will cost 5,000 points.

I checked, just in case. I could only laugh. I moved over to Purchase Skills without hesitation.

The people of this world use a special power called mana to execute their skills. The more powerful a commander, the more special techniques they tend to have. Obviously, there's some guys who are just strong without skills too. I can't use mana because I'm not from this world. But in my case, I can use skills through the system.

Attack Skills

Defense Skills

Special Skills

There are three types of skills. I could probably use an attack skill right now. Offense is the best defense.

Will you purchase an attack skill? It will cost 200 points.

I bought the skill, and the message instantly refreshed.

You have gained a skill.

Sweep Lv.1

Works on enemies with a Martial from 0 to 40

Massacres enemies within a 2-meter radius

Costs 50 points per usage

It created a basic skill that would sweep away large numbers of enemy soldiers in one go.

This'll be really useful on the battlefield.

It cost 50 points, and I had 100 points left, so I could use it twice.

Two times isn't going to save my life. That's why leveling up is going to be so vitally important. Anyway, I'm the only one in this world who can level up, which means I'm also the only one who can rapidly raise my Martial score.

That was the kind of world I'd been transferred to all alone.

*

The enemy withdrew, and I was victorious. There were less than 2,000 survivors on the opposing side, and we were able to wipe out much of their manpower on the mountain roads.

Having seen all this, Bente had drunk himself stupid. Not that he was too inebriated to keep his hands from pouring yet another glass down his throat. His face burned bright red now.

"Hundredman! You've drank more than enough!" one of his subordinates shouted as he shook Bente's shoulder, unable to just sit back and watch any longer.

"If I can't drink on a day like this, then when can I? Ah hah hah hah!" Bente responded, his words slurred with inebriation and punctuated by a garrulous laugh. Then stripped his clothes off and went totally wild.

"Hey, old man. Get this. Our lord wiped those Naruyan bastards right the hell out. He's nothing like the lord you all used to know anymore. He took down one of the Ten Commanders of Naruya with one blow! Gah hah hah hah!"

Bente started putting on a nude show. His subordinates rushed over, risking their lives to stop him. Word of Bente's behavior would spread throughout

Eintorian.

“Did you hear? We were almost in big trouble.”

“The Naruyans invaded again, right?”

“They say the lord stopped over ten thousand men.”

“My son saw the battle, you know. Never would have thought our lord had it in him...”

“I heard it was fifty thousand, not ten.”

“He stopped fifty thousand men with only five thousand?”

It was mainly Bente who exaggerated the story. Thanks to his bragging, the story of the lord’s exploits rapidly spread throughout Eintorian. They’d thought their lord could do nothing but fool around and make his people suffer, and yet now they learned he was strong enough to keep out an enemy invasion.

If he’d lost, the Naruyans would have plundered all the towns and cities inside his domain, killing the men, and raping the women. It was a vicious cycle that had repeated time and again.

Infamous as he was for his past behavior, fending off this invasion undoubtedly did wonders for the lord’s reputation with his people.

*

I just won the battle. I’m sure having protected the people will leave a strong impression on them, but nothing else has changed. My reputation as a villainous lord hasn’t been wiped away.

I need to take the people’s opinion of me into account, since it’s going to be vitally important as I develop this domain.

I laid in bed thinking about this stuff, and just as I began to yawn—suddenly, the window shattered as an intruder burst through it into the room and leveled a sword at me.

This came out of nowhere, and I hurriedly got out of the way as I activated the system and checked the person’s information.

If I had to guess, someone might have sent an assassin after me.

Euracia Rozern

Age: 20

Martial: 87

Intelligence: 57

Command: 95

But I was completely wrong. My intruder was a beautiful woman with blonde hair. I knew Euracia Rozern's name well. The game's history called her a hero. But what was she doing, bursting into my bedchambers?

87 Martial. 95 Command. Her stats were top tier in this game.

The unexpected guest kept her sword pointed at me as she asked, "You're Erhin Eintorian?"

It was a question she knew the answer to. Given she'd been able to target my room with pinpoint accuracy, she must have investigated already.

"What if I am...?"

"Then you have to die."

I have to die?

Who'd just go along with that?

"And why should I have to die?"

"Because you're a villainous lord who makes his people suffer. I believe that's reason enough."

A villainous lord, huh? Yeah, that'd be true. If I were the same Erhin Eintorian from the game, that is. But I'm not.

"You're making a fundamental mistake here. I'm no villainous lord."

I gave a disinterested shrug despite her blade being mere inches from my nose. No matter how this played out, I wasn't going to die.

With a Martial of 87 she was stronger than Randall, making her one of the mightiest people on this continent, but she was still less powerful than I was

when using the bonus. I could also knock her out easily with Crush.

“Not a villainous lord, you say? You’d claim that, in spite of how far word has spread of your misdeeds? How shameless,” she said, her brow twitching.

Her expression remained as cold as ever. Yet her long, blonde hair and beautiful countenance oozed nobility. The cold look suited her captivating eyes, so beautiful they would make you gulp. If I kept staring into them, I was going to fall in love. *Wait, no, this isn’t the time for that.*

Right now, I needed to escape the threat of her blade. She might not be a danger to me, but it’d be hard to talk with her sword so close to my throat I could feel it, right?

If she’d just settle down, I knew she could be reasoned with. The game called her a hero, after all. I summoned Daitoren to my right hand, preparing for battle, just in case it came to that.

“What kind of villainous lord would risk his life on the battlefield to protect his people? If you were in Eintorian, then there’s no way you didn’t see that battle, right?”

“Weren’t you fighting to save your own hide?”

Yeah, that’s one way to look at it.

“But it gave you pause, right? If it didn’t, you could have slammed that blade through my neck without stopping to have this little chat. Isn’t that right, Miss Intruder?”

Her info didn’t tell me anything about her personality, but I tried this line of questioning for a start.

If she intended to kill me immediately, she’d have run me through as soon as she entered the room.

It seemed there was something on her mind, as she stepped back and bit her lower lip.

“It was a good strategy, even if you are a villainous lord. Good enough that it made me want to learn from you. But knowing the way you exploit your people, I have no intention of having you teach me!”

“Hold on!” I shouted, raising my voice as I attempted to clear up this misunderstanding which wasn’t a misunderstanding at all. “Listen, I’m not an evil lord! Have you, personally, ever seen me exploit my people?”

She paused a moment. “I’ve heard things, here and there. Your infamy is known even in Naruya.”

“Yeah, and they’re wrong about me. If you want to argue about justice, then why not see for yourself? If you rush ahead like this, you’ll be making a horrible mistake.”

Her brow furrowed when I asked if she’d seen it herself.

“Well, no, I haven’t seen it directly, but...” She trailed off.

Sensing my chance to win this argument, I loudly countered, “See? I told you so. Watch me for yourself, and if you see that I’m a villainous lord, then kill me. Why not give it a week? I think you ought to act on what you see, not just what you’ve heard. Not everything you hear is true, right? I mean, there could always be false information mixed in.”

I made this suggestion rather than immediately use Crush on her because of her stats and the portrayal of her in the game’s history.

I dunno what she’s doing here, but this is an opportunity. I want to get her on my side if I can.

“If, after you’ve watched me, you decide that I really am an villainous lord, then I’ll offer up my head without any resistance.”

“And if you’re not...?”

“Then we both go back to our ordinary lives. I’ll expect an earnest apology for this misunderstanding though, of course.”

I knew I couldn’t make her my subordinate immediately, so I decided to propose this one-week period as a way of keeping her tied down.

First thing to do is set up the event flag. This isn’t a dating sim, but event flags are still important when it comes to recruiting personnel. So, yeah, I need to set things up for the future.

“Very well. There’s some logic to what you’re saying, so I will see for myself.”

With that declaration, she exited through the window, even though the room had a perfectly good door.

But then she came right back in—through the window, of course.

“I’m sorry... I don’t suppose you’d happen to have any spare rooms, would you?” she asked, her expression remaining as impassive as ever.

*

Martial: 60

Intelligence: ??

Command: ??

Faction: Eintorian Domain Lord

Faction Opinion: 40

I was an ordinary human being. I could use the system and bonus to raise my Marital, but that did nothing for my physical stamina. And so, having been up all night fighting, I was spent. After parting ways with Euracia, I went to bed and passed right out. By the time I woke up again, a whole day had gone by.

Also, I wasn't sure why, but my Opinion score had risen from 20 to 40. I didn't recall doing anything special. Well, okay, I *did* win the war. I guess that meant that, even with my reputation as a villainous lord, I could win some acclaim by fending off an invasion? If the invasion succeeded, the people of my domain would have been killed or taken prisoner, so, yeah, it made sense that it would improve their opinion of me somewhat.

Anyway, the key thing was that Eintorian didn't fall.

I'd survived. Now I had to figure out how to live as Erhin. I also had no idea how the Naruya Kingdom would act now that I'd rewritten history. Would they still try to force through the invasion from the north, like they did in history?

That remained to be seen.

I'm not going to be able to see the butterfly effect of the changes I've made right away. I'll develop my domain until I can confirm what the situation is. In order to clear the game, which means uniting the land under my rule.

"Head Chamberlain."

"Yes, Master."

"Could I ask you to bring me all documents concerning the financial state of the domain and our tax rate?"

“Our financial documents, sir?”

“Yeah. I need to study up... What’re you staring at me for? Hurry up and go,” I said, urging the head chamberlain to get on with it because he was gawking instead of moving.

“Yes, sir! At once!” He turned and was soon out of sight. It was clear he’d wanted to say something, but what? I decided to ask him when he returned with the materials.

“Did you have something you wanted to say to me, Head Chamberlain?”

“No. Not at all.”

Once the head chamberlain set all the materials down, he and the other chamberlains bowed their heads and took their leave.

Was I imagining it? Well, whatever.

I decided to start by examining the tax records for the domain.

This takes priority for now.

I needed to get a grasp of the current situation if I was going to rehabilitate this domain after the villainous Erhin allowed it to rot. The writing wasn’t in Japanese, but I was mysteriously able to read it, and quite quickly too. That was probably the system at work.

“Wow... I’ve got no words for this. He sure was a villain, I’ll give him that.”

I found myself shaking my head as I looked over the ledger.

This is the agricultural era, when farming is everything. Yet he was taxing the farmers in his domain eighty percent. This is just atrocious. I ought to make it so my people aren’t struggling to survive, at least. Taking eighty percent of their harvest is not *normal.*

In the Runan Kingdom, the tax rate set by law was fifty percent. And of that fifty percent collected, twenty percent was offered to the king. However, in Eintorian, they were currently taxing eighty percent of everything.

It’s the domain’s tax officer who’s been doing it. One of my vassals, of course.

“It seems the rumors that you’re a villainous lord were true.”

As I was perusing the documents, Euracia, who had been reading over my shoulder since who-knows-when, pointed her sword at my neck.

Is she a ninja? The study window's open, so she must've come in through there. I was so fixated on the documents I didn't notice. This is clearly a problem.

The system may have made me stronger, but I'm still very much an ordinary person. I need to be planning ahead for surprise attacks. I mean, I trust her for now, but still.

"Uh, no, that's not how it is. In fact, I was letting the retainers who've been robbing the people go free up until now so that I could round up the ringleaders. When I inherited the domain from my father, I played villainous lord so that I could find these kinds of scoundrels and then bring justice to my lands by eliminating them."

"You're making excuses again...!"

"Ultimately, what we have here are just words on paper. You still haven't seen anything for yourself, have you? The man who's been at the head of all this extortion, the tax officer? I intend to investigate him."

"You claim it wasn't on your orders, then?"

"Of course not. Swear to God."

Yeah. I'm totally innocent. The problem is this Viscount Bold Den. He's been extorting the people alongside Erhin. It's clear he's one of the retainers I ought to remove first. Anyway, I've got to meet him and see what he's like.

"Head Chamberlain."

"Yes, Master."

I called the head chamberlain back in. If I had one suspicion about the man, it was that while I initially thought he was frightened of me, he didn't seem to actually be. But he *did* do everything he could to curry my favor. Well, he was fast and capable, so I wasn't going to let that bother me.

"Could you call Viscount Bold for me? I have questions for him."

"I'll summon him at once."

Obviously, the head chamberlain took a sidewards glance at Euracia, but he held his tongue and left without asking anything.

“Are you planning to stay there the whole time?” I asked her once the head steward left the room.

Euracia shook her head, then vanished from the window once more.

Seriously, the woman acts like a total ninja.

Also, I had asked her if she planned to stick around because I was asking if she wanted to meet Viscount Bold with me, but now that she’d taken off, it didn’t really matter.

I can’t tell what she’s thinking.

Soon, Viscount Bold arrived in my study. Seeing him for the first time, he just looked like a regular fat guy. As for his base stats they were, uh, kind of terrible.

“You called, Your Excellency?”

This old guy is one of the key figures who’ve been tormenting the people of this domain? Was it on Erhin’s orders, or did he put Erhin up to it? That’s the key thing. Was Erhin the only villain, or were they both evil?

“It seems you were victorious in the battle with Naruya. I should have expected no less from you, my lord!”

Viscount Bold suddenly started bowing and scraping, then moved on to showering me with praise.

“To think, a lord taking to the field of battle himself! Oh, I simply cannot describe—”

“Anyways,” I interrupted, unable to take any more of his obsequious babbling. “I want to talk to you about the taxes.”

“Yes, Your Excellency. What about the taxes?”

“Can we raise them further? I’ll be needing funds for my lobbying efforts in the capital, after all.”

“Ah, yes... I believe that it might become problematic if you were to raise them any further, my lord.”

Oh. He's going to push back on that, is he?

"We've been exploiting the people with all of the different taxes you've invented before now, haven't we? What harm can one more do?"

"Well..."

"Take care of it for me, Viscount Bold."

"But we are already bleeding them for copious amounts of money, I'm not sure they *have* any more to extract..."

"Oh, I see. Well, in that case, I suppose there's nothing we can do. I'll have to reconsider."

"I should have known you would be so quick to understand, my esteemed lord!"

Maybe Viscount Bold's not such a bad guy? Was Erhin the only villain here?

"You are free to go."

"Yes, my lord."

It's too soon to make a call one way or the other. I need more evidence.

I decided to start by looking through the documents again.

Yeah, these taxes were all from Erhin and Viscount Bold scheming together. Viscount Bold was definitely the one who came up with all the different tax categories. After all the collaborating he's done, it'd be hasty to assume he's a good guy just because he opposed raising the taxes further. It was a mistake for him to help with it in the first place. But by that logic, wouldn't the only thing a good person could do be to say what's right and be jailed for it?

I was starting to confuse myself. It was possible that the guy was just good at doing what he had to in order to get by in the world.

I'm getting a headache. Probably because I've been staring at paperwork all day.

"Head Chamberlain! I'll be using the bath!"

So, I decided to take a bath. Baths are the best. I soaked for a while to soothe my exhausted body. With my mood brightened somewhat, my headache

started to subside by the time I finished dinner. That's how things were when I headed back to my bedroom.

If this were just an ordinary game, then I wouldn't have so much to worry about. In a game, you can always just do things over. But here, one mistake could put me in an unsalvageable situation. That's why I'm getting headaches from stressing over things.

Damn it!

I walked through the darkness and sat down on my bed as I brooded over my current situation. As I did...

Squish.

...I thought I felt my hand touch something incredibly soft and pulled it back without even meaning to.

"Huh...?"

I looked around the bed with surprise. There was clearly someone there. I'd just felt myself touching them. And in a rather soft, bouncy part of their anatomy, at that. I found my resolve and pulled back the covers.

I was half-way to triggering the Attack command when I saw who was under there and froze up. There were two naked women lying in my bed.

Yes, two beauties, without a scrap of clothing on either of them. Both of them were incredibly busty too. I backed away, unable to cope with the situation. If I kept looking, I was going to get a nosebleed.

"Y-Your Lordship?"

The women sat up and looked at me. If anything, they seemed shocked by my reaction. The way their bosoms bounced as they moved was driving me crazy. Thankfully, they both hid themselves under the covers again out of embarrassment. It got their breasts out of sight at least, but they still looked too sexy. *Wait, no, no, no, no!*

"Head Chamberlaiiin!"

"Yes, Master."

I summoned the head chamberlain once more. It felt like I'd been doing that all day today, but this time I *really* needed him. I don't think I'd ever been more desperately in need of his assistance.

"You called?"

"What are these women doing here?!"

"I prepared them for you, as per usual. 'Have two naked women ready for me in bed.' Everything is as you instructed. Tonight's women were provided by Viscount Bold, of course. He said he was confident that you would be satisfied with them, and left with the most boisterous of laughs..."

As per usual? Oh... I totally forgot. That's right. I'm Erhin. Erhin had been drowning in women. He was even captured fooling around with them on the day Eintorian fell and he got decapitated. So, I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

But still, he was doing this kind of thing every night? With a woman on each side of him? Sighhhh. Just how long has he... No, no, that's not the point.

So, he's been calling women to his room like this all the time? It sounds like Viscount Bold sent these women to me in an effort to curry my favor, though. I can't go acting like Erhin did in the game right when I'm trying to shed his reputation as a villainous lord. If I was going to embrace it, then that would be another story, but I'm not going to.

Of course, the one good bit of news is that Viscount Bold sent me these women, since it's proof that he's not a decent guy.

"Head Chamberlain. You may go for now."

"S-Sir...?"

"What is it? You look like you have something to say."

For just a moment, a look of mild surprise crossed the head chamberlain's face. Normally, he just nodded, so this was the first time he'd reacted to something I'd said this way. That didn't stop him from quickly putting his poker face back on, though.

"N-No, not a word!" he stammered, and then rushed out of the room.

What was that about? Well, I've got other things to deal with at the moment.

I turned my eyes back to the two women. Now that my excitement over their unexpected nakedness had subsided, I noticed they were trembling beneath the blankets. They'd likely been brought here and stripped at least half against their will, like in the absurd old custom of offering virgin sacrifices to the gods.

I kept my distance, so as not to agitate them unnecessarily, and asked my questions from a distance.

"Just calm down for now. Who are you two?"

"W-Well..."

The two of them exchanged glances before opening their mouths almost in unison.

"I am Nera from the village of Melan."

"I am Nara from the village of Yurta."

Then, after giving their names, they burst into tears. I'll bet that would have only served to please the original Erhin more.

"Viscount Bold sent you here, yes?"

"Yes..."

"And you meekly did as he said. Do you have any idea what kind of place this is?"

"Yes. We know..."

What're they crying for? That's not the answer I wanted to hear. Looks like I need to change the question.

I approached the bed.

"You two haven't heard the rumors, have you?"

The two started trembling as I walked closer.

"R-Rumors...?"

"The rumors that say Lord Erhin's a sadist who gets off on tormenting women as they cry. Your tears are only going to get me more riled up."

I sat down on the edge of the bed they were lying in, and gently grabbed the

woman closest to me by the head.

“And the rumors that he’s a real cruel bastard. The kind who’d violate you in front of your parents to see them suffer, and then kill all of you. Well, is that tasteless or what?”

“N-No!”

“Y-You wouldn’t...! P-Please! Spare us! We beg of you!”

The women shook their heads and wailed.

“You’re going to tell me everything Viscount Bold told you before having you come offer yourselves to me. And if you don’t, I’ll have your parents summoned immediately. Hopefully, you understand that I’m far more terrifying than Viscount Bold ever could be. Got it?”

Word of my infamy had spread far and wide. The two horrified women looked at one another, overcome by tears, until a small, weak murmur escaped.

“B-But... But...”

“I don’t know what he’s threatened you with, but I’m more than capable of protecting your lives. *If* you’ll tell me the truth, that is. Or would you rather we enjoy a *fun* night together? Who’s up for a mad display of blood and screams? Heh heh!”

“Eeeeek! N-Nooooo!”

“If we talk, will you...will you really spare us?”

“I’ll keep my word, but you’re going to have to choose between me and Viscount Bold. This is your only chance. Even a child could tell which of us holds more power.”

The two of them cast their eyes around evasively until, finally, one of them cracked and confessed the truth.

“O-Okay. I’ll talk... Viscount Bold swore us to silence, saying he’d kill our families if we didn’t do as he said. He also told us to...to make you drink this once you fell asleep!”

Huh?

The woman produced a small vial from somewhere on her person and then prostrated herself before me.

What is this...? Poison? No way.

“P-Please, spare me. I beg of you... I don’t want to go through that hell. Please, just kill me and get it over with. No, please, spare me! I don’t want to die!”

Well, damn.

Honestly, I never had any intention of sleeping with these girls, so there was no way they could have slipped me the poison, but that was still a close call. And here I’d just been hoping to shake them up a bit and see what information I could get out of them on Viscount Bold.

So, he wasn’t just sending me women to curry my favor. He was plotting to poison me all along?

“That’s not poison, I hope?”

“P-Please, spare us. We were told it’s not poison, just a nutritional supplement, but it would render you unconscious for a few days...and then, once he became lord, he would rescue us.”

Yeah, as if he’d ever help them. Given all they’ve said, that’s definitely poison. And the lethal kind, at that. Once they knocked me off, the first order of business would probably be for him to kill these women as assassins. So they couldn’t divulge their puppet master.

“Sigh... Not this again.”

That’s when it happened.

I felt the tip of her sword at my throat again.

To tell you the truth, I was waiting for it from the beginning this time. There was no way she *wouldn’t* show up. Yeah, this was a scene she couldn’t possibly miss, and couldn’t help but misunderstand.

“I don’t think there’s any reason to conclude I’m the evil one here.”

If she’s been watching me this whole time, the misunderstanding should have

been cleared up.

When I pushed her about it, the cold steel was retracted.

Then, standing beside me, she asked the women, “Is Viscount Bold the mastermind?”

When they nodded in response, she turned to go. I grabbed her by the arm.

“I’ve kept quiet until now because I needed decisive proof. Are you going to spoil it for me? Your task is to watch me. You can make your judgment after that.”

“Is that right?”

She came to a stop. Fortunately, it seemed I’d persuaded her, so I shouted, “Head Chamberlain!” in the direction of the door. We needed to make sure the two women were protected.

The head chamberlain soon rushed to my side.

“Master! Is something the matter?”

“I want you to protect these two women. It appears that Viscount Bold was trying to assassinate me.”

“M-My word!” the head chamberlain exclaimed, blinking in surprise.

“First thing’s first. I need you to protect their parents as well, to make sure the viscount doesn’t do anything to them. Oh, and don’t go letting women into my bedroom anymore. My womanizing days are over now. If I were to continue the way I have been, my dreams of helping our domain recover will never come true.”

“Come again...?”

I seemed to have surprised the head chamberlain again, but in a different way from last time.

“Fooling around with women is not how a lord should be. You understand what I’m saying, yes?”

“Well... Er, um, I’ll see to your request at once!”

“And one more thing. Pass a message to Hadin for me. He’s to bring the

domain's forces to the front of the castle immediately."

It's a good thing I changed the commander of the barracks and secured my control over the military. Looking at Hadin's record, he's the polar opposite of guys like Berk or Viscount Bold. In a way, maybe the viscount resorted to this kind of skulduggery because I suddenly assumed control of the military?

Well, even if they'd been able to stay in control of it, there's no one in the Eintorian Domain who's a match for my Marital when I use the bonus. That includes this woman here too.

"You know, I'm impressed. You did well to restrain yourself earlier, when I was threatening the two of them."

"I was so furious that I was about to burst in on you, but then I went and dropped my sword in my anger. By the time I had picked it up, the conversation had turned in a strange direction, so I decided it was better to keep quiet and listen."

"What? So it was only out of sheer coincidence?"

"It's a good thing too!" she exclaimed, then, murmuring to herself, repeated, "Yes, a good thing," with a firm nod. Her face remained impassive, but there was conviction in that nod.

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Hadin led the domain's forces to surround the residence of Viscount Bold, easily putting down his personal forces. When I entered the house and had the viscount brought before me, he acted almost as if he were blameless.

"What is going on here, Your Excellency?! Why would you do this to me?!"

"Playing dumb, are you? The women you sent me have already confessed everything."

"N-No!" Viscount Bold went pale as a sheet for a second, but quickly regained his calm demeanor and shook his head. "This is a misunderstanding! Why, I would never attempt to poison you, my lord! They must be the ones who plotted all this!"

"Poison me? I believe I only said they had confessed to everything?"

"..."

Caught in a lie, the viscount fell silent.

He looks aghast at his own ineptitude. Not a surprise, given that he just confessed to the crime without meaning to. But, hey, now I can extirpate the cancer that's been infecting my domain, so that's nice.

"W-Well... I-I heard a rumor about it!"

"Even if you weren't responsible, I was already thinking there's something fishy about you. Now, stay quiet while we investigate."

"This is tyranny! Hey, unhand me!"

Obviously, he didn't stay quiet, and instead decided to start throwing a tantrum.

"Bureaucrats, you comb through the Bold estate's ledger and other documents. And Hadin, you work with the soldiers to find and confiscate all of the viscount's assets!"

"Yes, my lord!"

As my men began turning his house upside down, I could see Viscount Bold's pallor getting worse and worse.

"E-Enough of this! Begone from my house this instant!"

In short order, we had confiscated a number of gold bars and other treasures, as well as the deed to the property. Other than that, there was a warehouse full of grain, and more luxury goods than I could possibly count.

And so, once we checked Viscount Bold's ledger against the one in the castle, we found a number of discrepancies. In short, that meant that the viscount had been embezzling a substantial amount of tax money.

There was a reason he'd pushed back against me when I said we should raise the taxes. He'd not just been taxing the people at eighty percent, he'd been taking more from them in secret, bringing the tax rate to over ninety percent. And those extra taxes had all been going directly into his own pocket.

Yet, despite all this heavy taxation, the people never revolted because of the

fear instilled in them by a powerful class system. If they rebelled and killed their lord, the king would get involved, and that could only mean their deaths.

Even so, if taxes this heavy had been leveled against them for a long time, something would have happened already, but Erhin had only become lord recently, so discontent was still just beginning to mount. Or rather, his father had only just died, and Viscount Bold hadn't started exploiting the people until after that.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Your Excellency!" Hadin stammered, spittle flying from his lips, as he raced over to me. The way he looked at me had changed since the war. I could sense the respect in his eyes.

"What're you so worked up about?"

"Look at this. It's a secret letter from Viscount Bold to the Naruya Kingdom!"

Oh, okay. Yeah, that's something to get worked up about. Nothing I hadn't anticipated, though, of course. He'd need outside support to become lord after he killed me. So, I guess that means he used the embezzled funds to lay the groundwork for that with the Naruya Kingdom, not the Runan Kingdom? Was he hoping to offer the domain up to the Naruyans in exchange for them making him lord?

"So, to summarize... Viscount Bold raised the tax rate to eighty percent, but still wasn't satisfied and continued secretly exploiting the people for more. Then, on top of that, he was conspiring with a hostile nation?" I said as I looked down at the secret letter.

Hadin nodded profusely.

"Heh heh! I see how it is! Have the viscount thrown in prison for assassination, tax theft, and attempting to overthrow the state!"

Even if I was mad at him, the guy was still a noble. Also, this wasn't my country, it was a domain of the Runan Kingdom, so I was going to need the king's permission in order to execute him for plotting a civil war.

Well, with all this evidence, even the corrupt Runan Kingdom is going to have to hand down the death sentence. Because, everything else aside, his collaboration with the Naruya Kingdom is a serious case of treason. Of course,

I'll need to make up a story where it was all Viscount Bold's doing, and the newly appointed lord Erhin knew nothing of it.

"And, in accordance with the laws of the kingdom, all of the assets he embezzled will be returned to the domain!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Make it known throughout the domain that any vassal of mine who makes the people suffer like this will receive the same punishment. You are to report all of Viscount Bold's schemes to His Highness."

With Viscount Bold disposed of and his assets seized...

Domain income increased.

+15,000,000 runan.

The income of my domain had just risen massively.

The runan's the currency of the Runan Kingdom. That's fifteen million runan, and it costs ten million a year for the domain's upkeep. Which means I've got enough to run the domain for a year with money left over.

The current assets of Eintorian amounted to roughly thirty million runan, and once I added Viscount Bold's fortune to that...

45,000,000 runan.

...was the sum total.

That's a lot of money for one person, but not a whole lot for funding an entire domain. If I could put it all towards managing the domain that would be one thing, but when you consider I also need to develop the army to prepare for future wars, it's a piddling sum.

Even just drafting men costs money. And there're limits to how many I can draft too. If the domain's population is small enough, it may not even be possible to raise the size of our levies. If I build a domain that's easy to live in,

word will spread and population will drift here from elsewhere, so I need to develop the farmlands even if it ends up costing a lot to do it.

Which means money is everything when preparing for war.

Obviously, the additional funds will help a lot. Because what my domain needs most right now is Manpower. We lost a lot of soldiers in the battle the other day. The current size of my domain's forces is about three thousand. That's nowhere near enough to defend it.

Will you raise troops?

Current recruitment limit: 15,000 men

I activated the system just to check what drafting troops would cost, and tried setting the value at one thousand men.

This will cost 2,000,000 runan.

If a thousand men costs two million runan, then ten thousand men will cost twenty thousand runan. Yeah, that's as obscenely expensive as I expected. But it's an investment I should make. If I'm going to put together an elite force, I need at least ten thousand men as a starting point. And when I consider my current finances and population, ten thousand men is exactly what's realistic.

But Opinion's going to drop the moment I draft them. I need to be prepared for that.

"Hadin."

"Yes, Your Excellency?"

"The Naruya Kingdom's invasion has left us with no choice but to restore and increase our manpower."

"I agree," Hadin nodded.

"I'm thinking of drafting ten thousand men, and I'd like you to be the one to train them."

“Ten thousand, so suddenly?”

“If it’s rations you’re concerned about, we’ve secured enough supplies from the assets we confiscated here. Our top priority has to be defending the domain. I assume the people don’t want to become slaves to Naruya, right?”

“Of course not. If you’ll trust me with the task, then I’ll work myself to the bone building a strong army! I’ve been saying that since before I was dismissed as commander...”

Hadin had been about to say more, but he suddenly fell silent. He must’ve felt he was prattling.

Well, considering Hadin’s Command score, I think I can more than trust him to handle it.

“Okay. I’ll trust you. Enlist those ten thousand men at once, and train them thoroughly, along with the existing three thousand!”

“Yes, Your Excellency!”

No need to hesitate on drafting troops, then.

Will you use 20,000,000 runan?

The Eintorian Domain’s Manpower changed by +10,000.

The domain’s forces’ Preparation decreased by 10.

The domain’s forces’ Morale decreased by 20.

The domain’s Opinion decreased by 20.

The people’s opinion of me had been improving a little, but it now took a precipitous drop.

There’s no way of avoiding that with a sudden mass mobilization, even if we did just have a war with the Naruya Kingdom. Especially when you consider that the sudden boost in Opinion was representing their gratitude over me preventing the invasion, not a change in the way they saw their lord.

On top of that, half the domain’s funds are gone in an instant. Sigh... Just goes to show that money’s important in this world too. Incredibly important. I can’t

keep ruling like a villainous lord, but if I adjust the taxes to fifty percent, it will eat into my funding. It's good to be rid of Viscount Bold, but there's still no end of problems to deal with.

To that end, the need to raise the people's opinion of me was becoming a new and pressing concern.

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If I'm going to conquer the land, then ten thousand men isn't going to cut it. But they'll have to do for now. There are all sorts of limitations to deal with. For one thing, I don't have the population to raise more. As a dangerous border territory, Eintorian's not that populous. Which means there's more than a few things I'll need to do before I can unite the land beneath me.

Where do I even start? I'm short of personnel, money, and levels. In order to develop the domain, I'll need to raise my level first. There's a mountain of things to do, and no preset route to take, which makes it even harder to decide.

I returned to the castle, my head hazy with thought, and headed straight to my bedroom. I'd been up working all night instead of resting, so I felt like I was going to nod off the moment I lay down.

And yet, at that moment, the head chamberlain, who had been walking behind me, suddenly stepped in front of me and then got down on the floor, kowtowing.

"Master..."

This was unexpected.

What's he groveling for all of a sudden?

"What are you doing, Head Chamberlain?"

"Well... I've heard that you will be dismissing Viscount Bold and reforming the tax system!"

"Uh, yeah, that's the plan. But what's it got to do with you groveling in front of me?"

Don't tell me he had ties to Viscount Bold. Is that it, and he's turning himself in due to a guilty conscience?

“I believe you also said earlier that you would end your womanizing ways and devote yourself to restoring the domain...”

“What of it?”

Instead of answering the question, the head chamberlain just looked up at me.

“Were you doubting me because of my sudden change in behavior?” I asked, thinking that might be it, and scratched the back of my head.

It was true that the head chamberlain should’ve had ample opportunity to notice the discrepancies between me and Erhin.

“I’ve been thinking about this since I was a kid. I figured I ought to experience all sorts of things. By acting the villain, I could weed out the other scoundrels, and that would allow me to revitalize the domain. That’s why I’ve endured until now. Also, if word spread that I was incompetent, people would start to underestimate me. That’s exactly what I wanted. It’s what let me pull out a victory against the Naruya Kingdom. Now that I’ve shown my true colors in the recent war, I intend to keep them on display permanently. I’m done deceiving all of you!”

“I’ve felt the great change in you of late, Master. It’s absolutely moving... If you wouldn’t mind, would you tell me what your aspiration is?” the head chamberlain asked, still on his knees and making no attempt to stand back up. I couldn’t imagine he had any ties to Viscount Bold. He’d been serving since the previous lord’s reign, and came from a house that had been loyal to the House of Eintorian for generations.

“My aspiration, huh? I guess that’s gotta be restoring the Eintorian Kingdom. My plan is to build a domain where everyone can live lives of plenty.”

“Ohhh, Master! It is just as the former lord said! He told me that, as you were his son, surely the day would come when you would carry on his will...!”

There’s no need to cry over it.

Looks like he bought my weird excuse. Of course, the way I act may have changed, but my voice and appearance haven’t. So it’s not realistic for him to imagine I’m a totally different person. I’m sure he’s never even considered that

sort of supernatural explanation.

Well, that works out fine for me.

“Oh, get up already. What if the other servants see you prostrating yourself like that?”

I put an arm around the head chamberlain and helped him to his feet. Then he bowed his head to me again, saying, “In fact, there is something that the former lord told me I was to give you once you became a man who could carry on your ancestors’ will. It has always been on my mind... I’ve longed for the day when I could finally give it to you!”

Something the former lord left for Erhin? It looks like he had his own concerns about his son’s profligate behavior. That’s gotta be why he didn’t give it to him directly, and instead left the head chamberlain with instructions to do so when Erhin started to show better judgment.

But what is it? His last will and testament? Or maybe a memento?

“You have something for me from my father?”

“Yes. This way. Finally, the burden is lifted from my shoulders...”

The head chamberlain began walking and indicated I should follow, so that’s what I did. He headed down the stairs, and we didn’t stop on the first floor, but continued to the basement. I saw the big iron door that led to the place where I’d previously obtained the bonus, but the head chamberlain didn’t stop there. It looked like our destination was elsewhere.

“This appears to be a dead end?” I said, describing exactly what I saw.

The head chamberlain shook his head. “It is true that the hall ends here, but there is a secret to this place that only the former lord and I knew about,” he explained, holding a pendant he had been wearing up to the wall.

As he did, a giant mana circle—something like a magic circle—appeared.

They usually showed up when you activated a skill in this world. When the mana circle vanished, the wall did too, and behind it there was a set of stairs heading down.

“This way, Master,” the head chamberlain said, calmly descending the steps.

There was a place like this hidden in the lord's castle?

I stared, absolutely speechless, at the space that had suddenly appeared for some time before hurrying after the head chamberlain. It was a pretty long staircase.

It's so dark here. Pitch black.

The only thing shining was the steps, which made it seem pretty indisputable that the space had something to do with mana. In front of me, the head chamberlain finally came to a stop.

Looks like we've reached the bottom.

Once I moved up to stand beside the head chamberlain, he pointed at what was in front of us.

"It is over there, Master. The fortune that your family has amassed in order to restore their nation in all the time since the Eintorian Kingdom fell to other states, reducing them to mere counts of a border province!"

I tried to look in that direction, but it was so brilliant that I couldn't keep my eyes open. Squinting until I adjusted to the blinding light, I was finally able to see exactly what was there—a massive fortune in gold and treasure.

"So, basically... You're telling me the House of Eintorian has been dreaming of restoring their kingdom for generations...and these are the war funds for that?"

"That is what I was told. Please, understand how the former lord must have felt, Master. If you will, then I could die right now with no regrets!"

Could it get any better than this? Who knew a character like Erhin had this kind of massive fortune. It's going to be real convenient when it comes to covering the costs of my conquest.

I smiled despite myself.

This changes all sorts of things. One of my worries is essentially resolved now. The need to both manage the domain and prepare for war, the need to amass strength... This can more than pay for all of it!

I stared at the treasure for a time, thinking. Then, accepting the pendant from the head chamberlain, I became its absolute owner.

The best thing about this secret place is that, even if another country were to seize this domain, they couldn't get in here without the pendant I now hold.

If I have the servants move the treasure out of here, then its existence will become public, but only I, the one with the pendant, can get into the place where it's hidden.

I let out a cheer of glee before ordering them to spend the rest of the night carrying out one tenth of the treasure.

It was roughly a billion runan. Combined with the domain's existing funds, that came to... 1,025,000,000 runan. If I used it to develop the domain, the population would grow, allowing me to recruit more soldiers, and they would eventually provide military power.

The House of Eintorian was originally a royal house. That's why they had been preparing for generations, raising war funds in order to restore their kingdom. With my funding secured, a plan immediately came to mind—a plan for raising Opinion. I called Euracia in order to put it into action.

Hey, if I can put her to use, then I should, right?

"Now that the guy who was exploiting them's gone, I need to improve the people's opinion of me. I've gotten my hands on some money too."

Obviously, the fortune left by my ancestors is far more massive than what I seized from Viscount Bold, but there's no need to go out of my way to reveal that.

"You're going to raise their opinion of you?"

"That's right. In light of the situation, I need to raise popular sentiment, and use the power of it to train more soldiers to resist the invasion. Is that not what a lord ought to do in these chaotic times we live in?"

When I turned the question on her, Euracia quietly nodded. I could probably take that as agreement.

"I'm heading to the central plaza to do that. Will you come?"

"I will. I'm interested."

Euracia followed me there.

I'd given the head chamberlain his orders in advance, so there was already a large crowd gathered in the plaza. Euracia and I stood before the people together, and I announced my very important new political strategy.

"My people, who have been tormented by Viscount Bold, know that all of the evil you have suffered to this point were by his design, and I merely acquiesced in order to gather evidence of it. But now, the evil one has been captured. To apologize for what you've all been through, I hereby exempt you from all taxes for the next year!"

I'll improve the people's impression of me by pinning all of the crimes on Viscount Bold. It's a total villain move, but, well, I'm sure it's fine just this once. As long as I can use what I've gotten my hands on to raise the public's opinion of me. I have plenty of money, so I don't need to worry about taxes.

The people of the domain had been worrying that I was about to announce another outrageous policy, so it took them some time to process what I'd just said. Once they did, though, it didn't take long for them to start cheering. That's because the quickest way to the people's hearts was exempting them from a year's taxes.

Up to this point, the fruit of their toil in the fields had largely been stolen from them, but now it was all theirs to keep. It was more than enough to instantly change their feelings toward their villainous lord.

Opinion has risen to 70.

Opinion increased by +10 due to a high Charisma score.

Opinion is now 80.

Yeah.

That's what I brought Euracia for. It was important to change how she thinks about me, but I also wanted to recheck the relation between ability scores and Opinion.

Her high Charisma raised Opinion by a full 10 points. Just having her at my side made it a joint ability check. Euracia's Command score of 95 was born of

her high Charisma. Her Charisma score functioned just like in the game, and provided a +10 to Opinion.

Of course, she was just happily watching the people cheer, completely oblivious to that fact.

*

Tutankha, King of Runan, wanted to tear his hair out. He seemed absolutely terrified as the eyes of all the nobles gathered in the audience chamber focused on him.

“Your Majesty, they’ve already come as far as the Deran Region and the Ruon Domain...” said Duke Ronan, the commander-in-chief of the army.

“The enemy is almost upon us! How long do you people intend to keep letting them beat us?”

The Kingdom of Naruya’s invasion had begun in the north, and the unprepared Kingdom of Runan had lost battle after battle. Obviously, the northern territories had fallen hopelessly, and now the Naruyans’ army of conquest was nearing the capital. The incompetent King Tutankha was most concerned about his own safety, and lambasted his nobles as he desperately tried not to die.

“Come to think of it, I heard the Eintorian Domain was also invaded?” Tutankha said questioningly, having managed to recall a report from the other day despite his stupidity. This was an incredible surprise, given that he often forgot reports he’d heard only an hour ago.

“Indeed. Yet Eintorian is fine. There was no further invasion, and the enemy’s forces are focused on the northern front.”

“Which means the lord of Eintorian won the battle with the Kingdom of Naruya, right?”

“Yes. For now, at least...” Ronan furrowed his brow. That’s because he’d heard rumors about Erhin, the lord of Eintorian. People said that, after inheriting the title a few years ago, this Erhin fellow had proved to be an incompetent lord who did nothing but misgovern his domain.

“Based on the reports we received from the domain, he held back a force of fifteen thousand from the Kingdom of Naruya with only five thousand men. Honestly, I find it hard to believe. I can only assume he’s inflating his accomplishments...”

“But he still stopped them, didn’t he?”

“Either he got lucky, or it was a scouting party at the largest.”

Tutankha shook his head at what Ronan was saying. The capital was about to be invaded. If they had a lord who had experience winning battles, he needed to stand on the front line. Now was the time to take any action that even marginally improved their chances.

Tutankha immediately commanded, “His experience winning battles is important. Send him to the front lines to protect the nation at once!”

“But sire. Erhin’s abilities aside, as a lord of the frontier, he has the important task of defending our border...”

“Damn the borders! Our capital is threatened! I’m giving you an order as your king!” Tutankha roared. As a retainer, Ronan was ultimately forced to nod his head. It would be treason to go against his orders.

“I-In that case, we should leave his soldiers on the border and call him here on his own.”

“That makes sense. Leave the border to his troops while we have the lord prove his ability on the front line!”

Having declared this as if it was the epitome of good policy, Tutankha rose from his seat and left the audience chamber.

Chapter 2: Personnel: The Hidden Gems Only I Can Find

Eintorian Domain Army: 13,432

Training: 50

The troops' level of training had decayed considerably, but thanks to Hadin's efforts, it was now steadily rising. I was confident that with a few more months of hard work, the new recruits would turn into a competent military force. I'd been maintaining my policy on taxes too, so the people's Opinion still remained unchanged at 70.

"Your Excellency!"

I was sitting on a chair in the shade of the trees, watching the soldiers train with satisfaction over how smoothly things were proceeding, when Hadin rushed over with a look of shock on his face.

"S-S-Sir! We've just received reports of an invasion from the northern border... The front collapsed, and now the enemy have pushed as far as the Ruon Domain!"

Hadin told me nothing I didn't already know. Defeating the Naruya Kingdom here didn't seem to have generated any sort of butterfly effect just yet, so their invasion of the Runan Kingdom was proceeding along its historical route.

That was actually convenient for me, though. It meant I could take advantage of what history I knew.

"Is that true?"

"Yes, and they've brought a great army. I'm told that the enemy number in the hundreds of thousands!"

"Huh. Well, all we can do for the moment is devote ourselves to training. Buck

up, Hadin. What's going to happen to us if our commander loses his head?"

"R-Right... Forgive me my lapse of composure!"

"Master!"

Now the head chamberlain rushed over to me. From the way he was calling out to between ragged breaths, it looked like he'd come here in a hurry.

"You don't need to run around like this yourself. You know you could just send someone to deliver a message..."

"There's no time to talk about that now, Master. A-A messenger has come bearing orders from the king!" the head chamberlain exclaimed, pointing in the direction of the barracks. I could see a commander riding a horse bearing the king's standard and his troops there. The man on the horse was carrying a scroll of some sort.

Orders from the king? Well, this is unexpected. The war up north has been following the history I know, but elsewhere things are going differently. Not that I can be sure if that's good or bad for me just yet.

Anyways, since there was an envoy, I went to go see him. Unless I wanted to commit treason, I needed to show the royal messenger every respect that I would the king himself. That was the law. Once I arrived at the entrance to the barracks, the man dismounted from his horse.

"You are Erhin Eintorian, Lord of Eintorian, correct?"

"Yes, I am."

Hearing my response, he unfurled the scroll.

"The Lord of Eintorian must serve the king's command!"

I dropped to my knees at the sound of his powerful voice. It was, of course, law that a lord must bow before the royal envoy. Once he saw that I had done so, the man began reading aloud.

"Count Erhin Eintorian, allow us to praise you for your victory over the Kingdom of Naruya. We hold your abilities in high esteem, and therefore we order you to join the royal army and put your skills to use at once. In light of the present crisis, you are dismissed from your post as a border lord. Leave the

border to your troops, and come defend the country by leading soldiers on the front line."

What? So, basically, he wants me to go to the front line and serve as a commanding officer there? The royal army is basically an upgraded version of the individual domains' armies. Normally, they call the forces that defend the king in the capital the royal army, but when there's a war, they gather the troops from across all the domains to form a united military.

But the border regions are exempted from that due to the constant risk of war breaking out on the borders. Their manpower isn't moved around even in times of war. Obviously, in a more dangerous situation, all forces would be mobilized to defend the capital, but things haven't degenerated to quite that point just yet. That'd be why they're only calling me and not my entire force.

What do I have to gain from going to the front line? I have all the money I need to revitalize my domain. I need to increase my population to be able to raise more troops. I'll use the money to suck up population from other regions, train troops, and then rebuild the domain. My current situation allows me to do that as much as I want.

Right now, my biggest problem is a lack of capable personnel. They're going to be essential to bringing the land under my dominion. And yet, I don't have a single person in my army that I'd consider excellent. But what about on the front line? Lots of commanders are going to gather there, and I'm sure many of them will be superb. I need to look for potential allies among them. That's a must.

Besides, staying in Eintorian won't afford me many opportunities to level up. I don't even know when the next battle will break out. Meanwhile, there's battles every day on the front line. That means I can aim to level up. That's the biggest thing. Obviously, there'll be risks. But I've got the bonus!

I had a weapon to defend me, so it was worth trying it. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

In the game's history, Eintorian loses, and then this war destroys the Runan Kingdom. I've stopped the first part of that, for now, but if the Naruya Kingdom take the capital, they'll be back to invade Eintorian again. My domain here in Eintorian isn't powerful enough yet.

I needed to prevent the destruction of the Runan Kingdom to buy time so I could develop more manpower.

Basically, I need the Runan Kingdom to act as my shield for a little longer. If I can go to the front line and delay their destruction, then that will give me time to build up my domain's power. Personnel, level-ups, and time. I stand to gain plenty.

There was no need to hesitate.

Having made my calculation, I respectfully accepted the written orders. "I, Erhin Eintorian, Lord of Eintorian, do humbly accept His Majesty's command!"

*

"Did you call for me?"

Euracia wasn't in her room when I went there, so I'd asked the head chamberlain to call her to the study. For some reason, she appeared through the window.

Use the door, would you? The door.

"Where've you been?"

"I was looking around the domain. Seeing the way your policies are put into effect, the soldiers training, and all sorts of other things."

"With all you've seen, you must have changed your opinion of me by now, right?"

If she hasn't by now, then she's never going to.

Fortunately, she answered me with a nod. "I admit it. I was wrong about you. I really do need to make up my mind based on what I've seen and experienced for myself, not just what I heard. Just like you said."

"Well, yes, but...even once you do see things and experience them yourself, there are times when you still might have misconceptions. If you witnessed a scene without knowing what's been going on in the background, for instance. Like with the women in my bedroom. I think it's never good to rush to a decision. So, maybe the most important thing is to have a wealth of information."

“I see. You could be right about that.”

“So, can I expect an apology, then?” I said, raising my shoulders with a swagger.

Euracia nodded, then, just as quickly, knelt down before me.

“I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience that my misjudgment caused you.”

Uh, there’s no need for her to go that far. Especially considering her position.

I quickly took her by the shoulders and pulled her to her feet.

“I never said you had to kneel. The first princess of the Kingdom of Rozern shouldn’t bow to others so easily, now should she, Your Highness?”

Yeah, that’s right. She’s a princess of Rozern, and the elder sister of the current king.

Their previous king died suddenly, leaving a fourteen-year-old to ascend the throne, and she’d been supporting him since.

Rozern was a small tributary of the Runan Kingdom, and, in the actual history of this world, they got wrecked pretty badly. Right after the Kingdom of Runan fell, most of the Rozernan nobility fled out of fear of a barbarous invasion by neighboring Brijit.



Still, they weren't destroyed easily.

That's because someone roused the fleeing people to fight back and resist to the bitter end. Someone who'd had the support of the people ever since they were young.

Using her inborn charisma, she gave speeches that were received with unending applause, and her popularity grew by the day. She never betrayed the support they showed her. In order to defend her country, she rallied the people of Rozern after most of the nobility fled, and stood on the front lines personally.

Obviously, since she was leading the charge, she ultimately fell in battle.

From the fact that, after her death, Rozern fell within a week, you can see that it was largely her strength that had preserved them in the months before that.

Before war broke out with the Naruya Kingdom, she'd been traveling the world in order to strengthen the Rozern Kingdom. That's what led her to hear about a certain villainous lord and visit Eintroian.

Her personality won't let her abide injustice.

Looking at her ability scores, her high charisma made soldiers obey her, which manifested itself in her Command score. She'd used that strength when fighting Brijit. Also, looking at her high Martial score, she probably had potential to use mana too.

You might say she's more of a pure fighter type than a politician.

Of course, she never expected me to know her true identity, so she rose to her feet with a look of considerable shock on her face.

"How do you know about that...?!"

"I just told you, the most important thing in the world is information."

"If you knew everything, then why play dumb?"

"Because I didn't think you'd want it known?"

"I'm thoroughly defeated..."

Euracia bit her lip in chagrin. *No need to get so bent out of shape over it.*

“By the way, is it true that you’ll be going to the front lines?” she asked.

“Of course,” I replied. “In the same way that you’re traveling the world to protect your country, I’m obligated to defend mine. If they say I’m needed, then I have to go.”

“I heard that Runan has been losing battles day after day. They say that Naruya has far greater manpower.”

“I’m gonna win. Watch me pull it off.”

“Oh, you will...?” Euracia said, trailing off with a look on her face as if she were agonizing over something. Then, after a moment’s silence, she asked, “Could I join you, perhaps? I wish to learn about war, and I believe my skill with a sword can be of use to you. I know I shouldn’t boast, but I can assure you I’m not weak!”

If she was willing to fight alongside me, she’d obviously be useful. I’d already seen that for myself when I used her 95 Command to raise the people’s Opinion. But I couldn’t do that now, because she couldn’t take part in Runan’s war due to historical events that were yet to occur.

“I can’t let you do that.”

“Why not?”

“Watch me fight instead. There’s no issue with you watching from a distance. After that, you should return to Rozern by next month. If the information I’ve received is correct, Rozern’s territory is about to be threatened by Brijit.”

“N-No!”

“I can’t make you believe me, but that’s all the more reason for you to watch. If I’m able to defeat the Naruya Kingdom, then won’t that mean I’ve got the intel and tactical mind to pull that kind of thing off? Once I’ve proved that, you’d better listen to me and hurry back to Rozern.”

She couldn’t respond.

Based on the serious expression she’s making, it doesn’t look like she’s going to dismiss what I said out of hand, but, well... In the game’s history, she’s supposed to die fighting to defend Rozern. I intend to make it so she can protect

her country, of course, but there's no way I'm going to let her die. The game's history exists to be changed, after all.

Regardless, I needed her to go back to Rozern for the battle that would follow if I defeated Naruya.

If things go as planned, we'll meet again in due time.

In the capital of Runan.

*

The interim headquarters of the Royal Runanese Army had been set up at Lynon Castle in the Lynon Domain, not far from the capital. Their commander-in-chief was Duke Ronan, who could be said to be the leader of all the other lords.

Ronan was holding a meeting with the advisor to the royal army, Heina, on the topic of personnel assignments. As commander-in-chief, he was in charge of giving orders to the commanders of all the individual units. Directly beneath him was his lieutenant commander, but the advisor was the one in charge of planning the army's strategy.

This prestigious post had already changed hands three times in the course of the Kingdom of Naruya's invasion. The first died on the battlefield. The second had gone missing.

The third appointee was Heina Berhin, widely known in the capital for her brilliant mind. She also happened to be a relative of Ronan's. Under normal circumstances, her position would have been widely coveted. However, with the defeats piling up, no one wanted to touch it now. In all likelihood, they'd go down in the history books as the advisor who let the country be destroyed.

"Where can we even put Count Eintorian?" asked Ronan.

"I've thought about that a bit myself..." Heina replied, pausing for a moment before she addressed their biggest headache. "I believe a supply base would do."

"Are you serious?" Ronan asked, his expression dubious. That's because the supply unit was incredibly important, delivering provisions from the royal

capital to the battlefield.

“I intend to have the current commander of the unit assume the position left open when Count Nolan died up north.”

“No, there’s no way we can allow someone with as vile a reputation as Erhin assume such a vital post,” Ronan protested, but Heina continued explaining.

“Commander! Can we send him to the front and trust him with thousands of soldiers’ lives? Weren’t you so worried by the prospect that you asked me to find a suitable place to put him?”

“Because it’s an order from the king. But giving him the supply unit? Is there nothing better we can do?”

“There won’t be any issue with the supply unit, whereas if we sent him to the front line, there’d be no controlling him. He might get the unit we put him in charge of wiped out. With that in mind, I believe it’s better to send him to the supply unit where we can monitor him. I’ll watch him like a hawk. If he does anything strange, I’ll report it to the king, and have him rescind the order to put him in an important position. I have this all planned out. Trust me.”

By the king’s command, they were forced to give him a position. However, he was a count. He had to be given a post higher than unit commander. That was how class worked, so this was Heina’s only solution. Because, in this situation, there was no position to be given to a profligate count who did nothing but fool around.

*

I left Hadin to defend the domain.

What if something happens while I’m away? That’d be terrible. But so long as the treasure remains intact, I figure out a plan. Besides, I’m the only one who can access the treasure. No one can get into the sealed room but me.

Knowing I had a lifeline let me head north without reserve. On the way there, I spotted a long, snaking line of refugees.

It stretched on, seemingly endless. From the northern border to Lynon Castle to the capital, where they thought that they might be at least somewhat safer.

With the country at war, in some ways, I should have expected to see something like this. Refugees were an inevitable byproduct of conflict.

The procession of refugees was an obvious display of just how dangerous things were in the Runan Kingdom now.

I followed the flow of refugees upstream until Lynon Castle finally came into clear relief. In the narrow definition, Lynon Castle referred to the castle belonging to the lord of the Lynon Domain, but in a broader sense it could also refer to the castle city surrounding it as well. Generally, during wartime, people used the broader definition.

The castle walls enclosing the city had a total of four gates, one in each of the cardinal directions. When I arrived at the west gate and identified myself, I was escorted into the interim command headquarters. I was met there by the advisor to the royal army.

Heina Berhin

Age: 27

Martial: 60

Intelligence: 81

Command: 55

Her Intelligence score is superb.

She was a highly capable woman.

Must be a noble, given she's been appointed advisor.

"You're Count Eintorian, the lord of Eintorian, are you?"

"Indeed I am, Advisor! It's an honor to meet you."

If this were a company, then she'd be my superior, several levels above me. I tried to show her the proper respect when I greeted her, but all that got me was a glare in response.

I guess I'm not welcome here, huh?

"Good of you to come."

“The very existence of the state is at risk. If there’s anything I can do for you, I’ll do it.”

That response made her brow twitch as she gave me a look of contempt.

Uh, I don’t think I said anything wrong there.

But it was at least in part because she knew well Erhin’s infamous reputation.

Womanizing and debauchery. That’s what Erhin Eintorian’s known for, after all. Looks like I was called here solely on the decision of the King of Runan. The royal army has no use for a man of my horrible reputation. Well, I’ll just have to make them thoroughly reevaluate that opinion going forward.

“How is the situation?”

Listen, you really don’t have to give me that look of contempt every time I say something.

But getting the information was more important than pointing that out to her.

“Not good. The Manon Domain’s fallen, and now the enemy are marching on Ganen Castle and Bern Castle. There’s an ongoing battle outside Ganen Castle. If those two castles fall, they’ll arrive here at Lynon Castle in no time. Then next will be the capital, and Runan City will become a battlefield. We’re resisting with all our might to keep that from happening, but we were pushed back too much in the early stages, widening the gap in our manpower levels...”



Ganen Castle and Bern Castle?

That meant the enemy were already a stone's throw from the capital. If I were trying to come up with a title for this, it'd be: The Runan Kingdom, A Desperate Situation!

"Well, not that it does any good telling this to you. You won't be going to the front line, after all," Heina said, abruptly stopping her explanation.

"But where else would you send me in a situation this dire?!" I asked, unable to understand.

I get that I'm not welcome here, but there's been a royal order so they can't not *use me. Where exactly is she planning to send me?*

"One of the front-line commanders died, so I sent the commander of the supply unit to replace him. I'll be having you serve as his replacement."

The commander of the supply unit? Huh? That's not the front line, but it's still just as important. You look at me with that kind of contempt, and then you're going to send me to the supply unit? Supply is one of the most important roles in war.

Well, okay, yeah, it is *an important role, but, looking at it another way, it's also one where all you have to do is follow orders. She's so transparent. "The royal army has no use for incompetent commanders." That's what she's saying, right?*

I could only assume I was being made a fool of here.

"I see. The supply unit, is it?"

"It is. Now head to the supply base."

"Very well. By the way, where can I find His Highness, the duke? No, I mean where can I find the commander-in-chief? I'd like to pay my respects."

"The commander is incredibly busy. You should keep your mind on the supply unit!"

Oh, yeah?

There was nothing more to be said. I mentally clicked my tongue at her, then

left behind Lynon Castle and the cold, no, downright icy reception they'd given me.

If that's how they're going to be, I'll have to develop my forces in the supply unit until my chance comes. I'll absolutely need the unit to be loyal to me if I'm going to intervene in this war, after all.

*

Inside the supply base behind Lynon Castle, Yusen the hundredman was unable to sleep at night for just one reason. He was worried for his widowed mother, who was deathly ill. It would have been so much easier on him if he could have watched over her final moments before the war broke out.

Were he on the front line, he'd be able to forget it all and fight to defend the nation, but here in the rear, his feelings for his mother were becoming the more pressing concern. She'd raised him all by herself. She was everything to him.

"You all right, captain? You haven't been looking so good lately..."

"I'm fine. Don't worry."

Yusen had a temperate personality and had always looked after his men, but the dark look that had fallen over his face the whole time they'd been stationed at Lynon Castle concerned them. One of the other soldiers who saw this exchange jabbed the questioning soldier in the ribs and shook his head. It was a sign that he shouldn't be bringing it up.

When they finished sorting through the supplies and it was break time, the onlooker hauled the questioning soldier aside.

"What?"

"Gibun, you really shouldn't ask the captain that."

"But I'm worried."

"Man... You know the captain's mother hasn't got long to live."

The soldier called Gibun recoiled in shock, his eyes widening. No, apparently, he hadn't known that at all.

"Oh, right. You were dispatched elsewhere for a while, huh?" the other

soldier, Donnay, said, realizing his mistake.

“Yeah. But anyway, is that true?”

“He’s always taken good care of her, which makes it even more painful to see him go through this.”

Gibun’s face twisted with grief. It was Yusen who’d helped him out when he was short on money before he was dispatched elsewhere. He’d happily loaned him three months’ worth of pay without saying another word about it.

“Is there nothing that can be done? Like sending him on leave...”

“This is wartime,” Donnay said, shaking his head.

Gibun sighed. He wanted to do something, but he had no way to. It wasn’t like Yusen hadn’t been searching for some way to see her himself either.

He made up his mind and then went to visit Lieutenant Commander Hadan, who was currently directing the supply unit. Of course, the man’s subordinates blocked the way and wouldn’t let him into the tent. Hadan was in a real sour mood today. When the commander left for the front, he’d assumed he was going to be the one taking over. Instead, some boneheaded lord from the countryside was taking the position. The noise outside his tent only served to agitate Hadan further.

“What’s going on?”

“He keeps insisting on seeing the lieutenant commander...”

“Let him in.”

Hadan had them let the noisy Yusen into the tent with every intention of taking his frustration out on him.

“What is it?”

As soon as he stood before Hadan, Yusen suddenly got down on his knees. Then, pressing his head to the ground, he started to explain his situation.

“Just one day... Give me just one day’s leave. I’ll fight to the death after that!”

He hadn’t forgotten his duty for a moment. He simply wanted to see his mother in her final days.

“Ha ha ha!” Hadan bellowed in laughter when he heard this. Yusen cocked his head to the side, unsure what to make of this reaction.

“You’re not the only soldier who has a personal situation to consider. If you were a grunt, I’d understand, but this is just pathetic coming from a hundredman! Hey! Drag this fool out of here and give him a good lashing!” Hadan shouted raucously, blowing off steam.

Yusen’s face twisted horribly. Not because of the lashes he would receive, but because of the despair he felt as he lost all hope.

When he returned and his men saw the whip marks left on him, their expressions grew uncertain, and they voiced their displeasure.

“This is just horrible.”

“Shh! They’ll hear you,” Yusen shushed his men, holding up his index finger to his lips.

There were more men in Yusen’s hundredman unit who felt indebted to him than he could keep track of, and a lot more outside his unit who respected him for his humanity. Gibun rounded up his fellow soldiers to hold a secret meeting without Yusen.

“I still haven’t paid the captain back,” one man said.

“Me either. He just told me I could pay him back a little at a time. Even though I know he can’t have that much himself.”

The other soldiers nodded and said the same.

“Money’s not the only debt we owe him. The captain’s always looked out for us, first and foremost.”

After more similar sentiments were voiced...

“...”

...a silence fell over the soldiers.

Gibun was the one to break it.

“Anyway... We’ve gotta find a way. Some way we can help the captain...”

“Do you have a plan?” asked Gibun’s friend, Donnay the tenman.

Everyone was paying attention to Gibun. He fell silent for a while, then started scratching his head.

“When we head out to supply, it’s with multiple hundredman units, so he needs to work together with the other hundredmen. There’s no way of tricking people there. Our only chance is now, while we’re still on standby after returning from supplying the troops. You know how we form patrol units while on standby, right?”

Donnay nodded at Gibun’s words, adding, “Yeah. We were just sent out. They just sent another ten hundredman units out with supplies, so it’s our turn to patrol those unit’s posts. It’s true, when you look at it that way, this is our only chance.”

“Definitely!”

“You’re right!”

The other soldiers voiced their agreement.

Once they did, Gibun started to explain his plan.

“We’re going to be put in charge of Sector 12 soon. Our hundredman unit will be handling all the patrols. That’s when we’ll have our chance. We can let him slip away then. And... I have some good news.”

Gibun paused for dramatic effect, frustrating everyone.

“There’s more? What is it? Tell us already!”

Gibun quickly continued at their urging.

“I heard this from a friend who works in Hadan’s tent. Hadan’s been called to a meeting with the advisor tomorrow. He sounded pleased about it, thinking he’ll be given a mission of some sort. Well, Hadan’s one of her people, and he was always hanging around command HQ in the hopes of getting to do something big. Anyway, if Hadan’s away from the unit, then this is the best chance we’re going to get. I doubt we’ll get another opportunity for the captain to sneak away.”

The men all stood up when they heard what Gibun was saying. They felt, just as he did, that this plan was their only option.

Of course, they couldn't have known that Hadan had been called to take part in a conspiracy to ensnare Erhin, and the arrival of the new commander of the supply unit would doom their efforts.

*

The supply base was behind Lynon Castle along a key road to the capital. Materiel arrived from the capital and various domains, and was then stored at the supply base until it was distributed to the battlefields.

They put the supply base at Lynon Castle, where the interim command headquarters is?

If Lynon Castle fell, they'd instantly lose all of their provisions and supply routes, so it obviously should have gone somewhere else.

Royal Runanese Army Supply Unit

Manpower: 10,000

Training: 40

The supply base has ten thousand troops. That's not many.

Five thousand were there to protect the base, while the other half delivered supplies to the battle lines.

So, I effectively only have five thousand.

Their level of training was a disaster. It wasn't just Erhin's forces that had a problem with lack of training, it afflicted the entirety of the Royal Runanese Army. They had essentially no units that were properly trained. Small wonder they lost their country without much of a fight.

This was a shabby supply unit with less than 50 Training, and that wasn't the only terrible thing about them. I was led to the commander's tent as soon as I arrived. I didn't have a problem with that. It was the lieutenant commander who suddenly barged in that I didn't like.

Hadan Gerdick

Age: 40

Martial: 50

Intelligence: 25

Command: 35

Those are some awful stats. He only got to be lieutenant commander because he's a baron.

Of course, it wasn't his abilities I took issue with, but his attitude.

"Congratulations on your appointment. I'm Hadan, your second-in-command."

"Erhin. It's a pleasure."

"Now, with that out of the way. I know this supply unit better than anyone. I hope you'll think of your stay here as a vacation. What I'm trying to say is: please, don't do anything."

As if I wasn't going to get upset, being told that out of nowhere.

"You want to run that by me again?" I said crossly, but Hadan kept going with his nonsense.

"The advisor says you are to leave everything to me."

The way he took an arrogant tone and dropped a mention of the advisor irked me.

Looks like the advisor's taken moves to keep an eye on me. This guy seems to have an awful lot of faith in her too.

"The advisor has summoned me, so I will be heading to Lynon Castle, but please relax and do nothing while I am gone. Have I made myself clear?"

Having dropped that cheeky remark, he turned and left without waiting for me to reply. I let out an exasperated laugh.

What's his problem? Just ignore him. Even if he's acting on the advisor's orders, ignore that too. The game's history tells me that Lynon Castle is about to become a battlefield. The advisor won't have time to worry about me for long.

If I do what the main offender responsible for the destruction of Runan says,

I'll end up dying with her. So, I can ignore her. In fact, if I can get a firm grip on the supply unit by the time it happens, I'll be able to stand on the battlefield.

That's why I decided to completely disregard his warning and called up the hundredmen.

I want to get a look at the personnel for now.

"I've been appointed as your commander from today onward. I am simply informing you of the change in command, and there are no other changes, but carry out your duties faithfully so there are no disruptions to our supply operation!"

Two of them openly smirked when I said that. Probably Hadan's direct subordinates.

The rest had tense looks on their faces. None of them really looked like they were on Hadan's side. He apparently wasn't that popular. That was convenient for me.

Looking around, I found just one person with superior stats.

Yusen

Age: 39

Martial: 82

Intelligence: 60

Command: 90

Hundredman was the highest rank a commoner could aspire to. That meant he'd been in the army for quite some time. If his ability scores were this high, I wanted him as a retainer.

The higher your Command score, the more quickly and efficiently you could raise the Training level of your troops.

He had a whopping 90 Command.

I feel like I just unearthed a pearl from the mud!

There really were excellent personnel on the battlefield! This was the

moment that confirmed that for me.

*

Finding new personnel is great and all, but I can't neglect my duties as commander either.

I dismissed the hundredmen before I went around surveying each of the units.

I mean, even if I do find talented people, I can't just suddenly say, "Hey, join my side," right?

The units were moving according to a planned supply strategy. The supply base was on top of a fortress, but the soldiers lived in tents so that they could pull out at any time. The largest of those tents was the one meant for the commanding officer of the unit—the commander's tent.

I headed to the commander's tent, and read through all the different documents regarding the supply base. You might say I was studying up on it. After spending half a day familiarizing myself with the current state of supplies inside the base, I went to scout out the area.

If there's an enemy raid or the need to withdraw, I need to know the terrain in advance. I'd be a laughingstock of a commander if I panicked because I didn't know the lay of the land around my own base. And just looking at a map won't cut it. I need to see things with my own two eyes.

I chose Yusen as my guide, figuring that I could both do my scouting and get a feel for the man at the same time. Two birds with one stone, right?

"How many roads lead from here to the battlefronts at Bern Castle and Ganen Castle?"

"There are three: one each that goes through and around Lynon Castle, and the one that passes through the mountains you see to the east. However, considering the difficulties involved in bringing soldiers through the mountains, I suspect the only practical roads are the two leading around or through the castle."

There was nothing all that special about the local geography. Nowhere to lay ambushes. It was just an open field—grass as far as the eye could see, and the

base was positioned on top of a hill with a broad view of the area, allowing guards to detect any enemy raids.

"Okay. Guess we'll check out the road that goes around, then."

"Understood. Right this way, Commander!"

I followed Yusen on horseback. Half an hour of riding around and surveying the topography had passed with minimal conversation when we came to a fairly wide river. We'd come out pretty far, and it wasn't good to be away from the unit too long.

I've been able to check out the terrain all the way out here, so mission accomplished.

I turned to head back.

Of course, I had another objective in going scouting, and we need to actually talk if I want to accomplish it.

"You, what's your name?"

"I am Yusen."

"Have you been in the military long?"

"Since I was a child. So over two decades, I guess?" Yusen scratched the back of his head, chuckling as he told me that.

Twenty years is a long time. Sounds like he wasn't drafted but voluntarily chose the path of a career soldier. We're at war now, so a lot of people are being conscripted, but normally people enlist of their own accord.

"Commander, look!" Yusen stopped embarrassedly scratching his head and pointed towards the north. "Enemies on the road that goes around Lynon Castle!"

Enemies? That road around is behind us.

I turned around, surprised, and he was right. A cloud of dust was rising into the air, and I heard hoofbeats as it got closer.

"Those are Naruyan scout uniforms!" Yusen shouted.

I quickly confirmed his report with the system. There were ten men—a scout

unit made up of rank-and-file soldiers, just like Yusen said.

“There’s ten of them...can you handle that, Yusen?”

“Of course!”

Yusen had an impressive Marital score of 82, while the leader of the scouting party’s score was only 30. It wouldn’t be a problem. As proof of that, Yusen ran over and cut down the enemy soldiers with ease.

One enemy soldier fell from his horse.

Then a second. A third. A fourth.

In no time, Yusen had polished off eight foes.

“Take at least one of them alive! We’ll want information.”

Captive soldiers could be a source of intel, but Yusen was going to kill all of them, so I ordered him to take prisoners. The scouting party had charged at us with their horses in a single column with gaps between them. Now, only two of them remained.

“Surrender, and your lives will be spared!” Yusen shouted loud enough for the furthest man to hear. Soldier #9 wasn’t in a listening mood, however, and he rode in, sword raised in one hand, without attempting to slow down at all.

It was the soldier in the rear who reacted. He pulled back on his reins at the order to surrender, but his lack of experience caused his horse to rear back, whinnying, and he fell to the ground.

That was a really nasty fall. He was going to have some broken bones, at the very least.

Clang!

Just as I was distracted by that, it happened!

The ninth soldier and Yusen crossed blades.

Steel collided with steel.

I thought, *Yusen’s gonna win, of course,* but when I looked away for a moment his sword went flying and spun high through the air. The enemy had disarmed Yusen and sent him tumbling to the ground with a single blow.

This was unexpected.

I rushed to Yusen's side, shocked.

Will you use the bonus?

This is impossible. Yusen was unhorsed in a single blow despite his 82 Martial?

It couldn't have been a mere coincidence. The enemy pointed his blade at the fallen Yusen. His life was in desperate peril.

Jint

Age: 21

Martial: 93

Intelligence: 41

Command: 52

When I saw the enemy's stats, I got shocked all over again.

93 Martial! The surprise was dizzying.

That puts him in an entirely different dimension from the rest of the ordinary soldiers in his unit. No, that Martial score was simply unimaginable. He's only 21 too. There's still a ton of room for him to improve at that age. He's got the stats to be one of the Ten Commanders of Naruya, yet he's just an ordinary soldier.

Was he a farmer that they pressed into service as a rank-and-file conscript, maybe? If that's what happened, it's possible that they never noticed his incredible Martial. Only I can see people's ability scores, after all!

The enemy soldier moved to kill the unhorsed Yusen.

Yusen's gonna die if I don't do something. There's only one thing I can *do. At 93 Martial, he's even stronger than I am with the bonus.*

"Stop!" I shouted as I triggered Crush without hesitation.

Daitoren's weapon skill, Crush!

The overwhelming skill that lets me kill or incapacitate anyone with a Martial score up to five points higher than my own.

I couldn't possibly kill such a promising man, so I chose to incapacitate him.

The moment I did, a flash of light ran through Daitoren, and with that flash the blade flew forward, reaching Jint's throat in an instant. He made an attempt to sweep Daitoren aside, but the stats said it was impossible.

The system is absolute. No, it must *be absolute!*

I waited for the result with great conviction. The moment sword met sword, the area was washed in blinding white light.

Once that light faded, what remained was Daitoren, stabbed into the ground, and my formidable foe, fallen from his horse and unconscious. I rushed over to confirm he'd been knocked out.

No problem. He's out cold! The only issue's for how long.

Knocking him out is one of Crush's functions. It'd be pretty pointless if he woke back up right away. If he were to regain consciousness and resume fighting, all I'd have accomplished is to waste a usage of Crush.

Assuming I must have at least *some* time, I rushed over to Yusen, dismounted, and extended my hand to him.

"You okay, Yusen?!"

"Commander... Thank you for saving a useless fool like me!"

I'd rushed to his side to help him to his feet, but Yusen actually knelt before me instead.

"Of course I'd save my subordinate," I told him. "And don't call yourself useless. You're more than strong enough. The problem was who you were up against. That guy was unnaturally strong."

"Humiliating as it is to admit this...he sent me flying with a single blow. Ha ha ha."

Yusen bit his lip with chagrin as he acknowledged his opponent's strength.

"I'm just glad you're not dead. Well, can you walk?"

“Yes. I’ll manage,” Yusen replied as he did just that.

He knows how to fall safely. That 82 Martial isn’t for nothing. He’s on a completely different level from that enemy soldier with a Martial of 30 who started thrashing around in agony after falling from his horse. The guy I used Crush on is just ridiculous.

“Let me see you ride. Riding a horse takes all your muscles, after all. If there’s anything wrong with you, we’ll find out fast.”

Yusen mounted his horse when he heard me say that. Then, he nodded.

“No problem!”

“Glad to hear it. Now, I have a request. I plan to take the man who fell from his horse and the one I just knocked out prisoner. Head back to the unit and fetch some chains and manacles. I’ll want you to bring a cart to carry them in, and some men too.”

“You want me to leave you here, alone, Commander? I can’t do that. Come back with me. I’ll come back with some men to capture them later!”

“Nah. We wouldn’t want them waking up and running off in the meantime. It’s better if I stand watch. Now, get going.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right... I’ll hurry as best I can, then!”

With that, he left, and I found myself a place to hide.

If that Jint guy woke up, I’d be in trouble. The bonus was still active, but I’d have to wait another five hours before I could use Crush again.

I checked my level while I was waiting, but it hadn’t changed. I’d expected as much. Just because I fought didn’t mean my level would increase.

The enemy’s death is the deciding factor. I won’t get experience just practicing. Yeah, that makes sense. If I got experience just for knocking out enemies, then I could level up by repeatedly knocking Jint out and waking him up.

There’s no way they’d have made that possible.

*

Night fell—the night when Yusen's subordinates were also hoping to enact their plan.

"Captain!" Gibun called out as he entered the tent.

"What is it?" Yusen replied, looking up at him.

"Could you come with me?"

Gibun looked worried. Yusen hurried to his feet.

"What is it? Another fight? If the lieutenant commander gets wind of it, we'll all be whipped, you know..." Yusen asked, clicking his tongue unhappily.

"Well, something like that. Ha ha!" Gibun answered vaguely, scratching the back of his head, then went outside the tent. Yusen followed him.

"Where're the guys who're fighting? Not out on patrol, right?" Yusen asked with a look of exasperation, but Gibun refused to give him a clear answer as he led the way to Sector 12. That's where Yusen's men were.

The men all gathered around in no time. That's when Gibun made the suggestion to Yusen as representative of the group.

"Captain! Everything's all set up. We'll cover for you for a day or two. Please, go and visit your mother."

There was a noticeable hint of surprise in Yusen's eyes at this unexpected statement from his subordinates.

"Guys... You *do* know that desertion is punishable by summary execution, right?"

"But Captain...! The commander just arrived today, so he probably doesn't know anything... With Hadan away, today's your chance!"

"You're wrong. I was just out scouting with the commander. I can't see us getting anything past him..."

When the hundredmen were dismissed after the assembly, Yusen had been immediately called by the commander while his men were carrying out their duties patrolling Sector 12.

Obviously, it was impossible for a common soldier to keep track of everything

going on inside the unit. There was a lot that they could have learned if they'd tried to, but they made the mistake of moving into action as soon as they'd confirmed that Hadan would be away.

"Well, I doubt he'll be calling on you again so soon," Gibun suggested, but Yusen firmly shook his head.

"If I do it this way, I'll cause trouble for all of you. I can't have that. It'd be far better for me to desert on my own!"

Yusen had considered desertion himself. He just hadn't committed to doing it. So, while he was genuinely happy about his men's suggestion, he knew it wasn't realistic. If he deserted alone, he'd be the only one to die for it, but if he did things their way, they'd all be punished.

"He's right, you know. Desertion is a capital offense," said a sudden voice from behind them.

Everyone turned in shock. Yusen instantly knelt down when he realized who it was, and then the other soldiers did the same.

"C-Commander!"

"Eeek! What's the commander doing here?!"

The soldiers screamed at Erhin's sudden appearance.

Desertion is a capital offense. Those words told them he'd heard everything.

Yusen immediately pressed his forehead to the ground.

"Commander! It's not their fault. I bear all the responsibility."

"No, Commander! The captain didn't know anything. We forced him to do it..."

"Hey, would you shut up?! Don't say anything you shouldn't."

They're both desperate to claim responsibility.

Erhin scratched his cheek with his index finger. This scene told him exactly what kind of person Yusen was. A hundredman unit with bonds this tight would be useful on the battlefield. The supply unit's overall Training was only 40, but taken on their own, Yusen's hundredman unit must have had a fairly high

Training.

Yusen's Command score is 90. That's damn impressive.

Between the captive with the monster-like Martial and Yusen here, Erhin wanted to cry out in delight at the appearance of two such capable people. Of course, they weren't his just yet, but he was still happy to have met two potential recruits.

"So, why exactly *were* you trying to desert?"

"Commander! The captain's mother is..." Gibun started to explain the situation on Yusen's behalf.

Once he'd heard everything, Erhin closed his eyes.

They were trying to sneak him out, then cover it up? Are they ignorant or just stupid? Well, it's heartwarming, I'll give them that.

Having thought all this, Erhin said, "Still, desertion is a serious crime."

Yusen's men hung their heads.

And yet, the next words out of Erhin's mouth blindsided all of them.

"But you know what? I haven't seen anything. It's absurd for a soldier to put his family first after coming to the battlefield, but if she's that important to you, then go! And then pay me back for the life you were about to throw away when you return to the battlefield!"

*

On my second day as commander of the supply unit, I received a report that Jint had woken up. It happened precisely five hours after I knocked him out. That meant Crush had a duration of five hours when I used it to incapacitate someone.

I took a shower and then headed to the prison tent.

Since he was staying put like a good prisoner, he presumably didn't have any skills that would let him sever his chains. Besides, now I could use Crush any time I wanted to. That's why I was able to enter the tent without any fear.

Inside the gloom of the tent, there were two soldiers, both bound with chains.

One was in the back, sleeping. The moment I entered, Jint fixed me with a glare and the stare-down continued for a while.

Is this what they call a psychological battle? Nah, this is pointless.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked, ending the pointless staring contest.

Or so I thought, but Jint just kept on glaring at me without a word in response.

"Looks like you didn't sleep. Now, stop glaring at me like that and let's have a little talk. I rate your martial abilities quite highly."

He stayed completely silent. I tried talking to him repeatedly, but never got a response. As proof of that, Jint's eyes were completely closed now.

In fact, it was the soldier sleeping in the back, awakened by the sound of my voice, who spoke instead.

"That guy's always been silent. I can talk on his behalf, if you want. If you'll promise to release me, that is!"

"Silent, you say?"

"Yeah. He never responded to anyone, even in our unit."

I see. So he's always been like this, huh?

"You'll tell me anything, then?"

"Just spare my life! If you'll let me go, I'll tell you anything!"

Time for a change of objectives, then. From recruitment to interrogation.

"I can spare your life. But I could also kill you here and now."

I drew the sword at my hip and put it to the soldier's throat.

"Eeek! Have mercy. P-Please, spare me!" the soldier cried, trembling.

This is the guy who got scared and tried to run away when he encountered us, only to fall off his horse. He seemed a lot more timid than the other nine. Well, that makes him easy to interrogate, at least.

"Tell me honestly. What were you scouting for? What is your unit preparing to do?"

"Well..."

“Listen, if you try to get clever with me, I’ll kill you instantly.”

I pressed the sword flush against his throat to show I meant business. A thin trickle of blood ran down his neck.

“I’ll talk. Honestly. I don’t know the details, but I think we’re preparing some sort of surprise attack. That’s why we were sent out to scout.”

“A surprise attack? On this supply base?”

“Yeah, that’s right. That’s all I heard. I don’t know the details either. I was just given orders to come scout the place. Honest. P-Put the sword away now, please. Spare me!”

It’d be more suspicious if a common soldier like him knew too much. This could be fake information, or it could be real. Even if he thinks it’s real, he could have been fed false info by his commander in the Naruyan army before being sent out to scout.

Of course, the odds are the surprise attack is real. When I went out scouting yesterday, Yusen showed me how there’s a road that comes here from Ganen Castle without passing through Lynon Castle first. If the Naruyans learned about that road while they’re marching on Ganen Castle, it seems obvious they might want to raid the supply base.

A successful attack here would leave Ganen Castle and Bern Castle with a shortage of food. Even if we set up other supply lines, it would take days, and the defenders might begin to starve in that time. That’d be a major hit to morale.

Also, if they occupy this supply base, that’d make it especially difficult to set up alternate supply lines. The enemy has more than enough to gain from it, so his story isn’t completely unbelievable. Although, the way they sent in a scouting party so blatantly is suspicious in and of itself. It’s almost like they wanted *us to capture them and make them talk.*

Does that mean they’re deliberately informing us about the surprise attack?

“Very well. If what you’ve told me is true, I’ll spare you. But if it’s a lie, you’ll die. Now we get to wait and find out.”

“Eeeeek! I-It’s true. That’s exactly what I heard. I don’t know the rest of the details, but that’s what my commander said!” the enemy soldier cried desperately.

Jint, meanwhile, remained calm and unmoving, eyes closed.

He’s unperturbed even in this situation. That makes me want him even more, but the problem is that it’s impossible to even talk to him. I’ll have to think of something.

I decided to leave Jint as he was for the time being and went outside the prison tent. I had bigger concerns now. On my way to where I was going, I stopped by the tents where Yusen’s hundredman unit were gathered.

“C-Commander!”

When they noticed me, Yusen’s men stood at attention, placing their right hand over the left side of their chests. That was this world’s salute.

“I have something to tell you. I’ll be rounding up the hundredmen after this. There’s something I need to have a meeting with them about.”

“B-But our captain’s currently...” Gibun replied, so startled his voice sounded like a hiccup. His fellow soldiers gathered around, looking hesitant too.

“Don’t you worry. I’ll say Yusen’s away attending to other duties. I just came to tell you in advance so that you’re not surprised. Anyways, you, your name was Gibun, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. I am Gibun!”

“You’re a tenman, yeah?”

“Indeed, I am!”

“They tell me you’re Yusen’s right-hand man.”

“Well... Ha ha ha! Something like that.”

“Then you’ll attend the meeting in his place.”

“A-Are you sure?”

“I have orders for all of the hundredman units, so someone needs to act as a stand-in.”

Once I'd explained the situation to Yusen's hundredman unit, I went to the commander's tent and called for an emergency meeting. Even if the enemy had some other target in mind, as the commander of the supply base, I needed to prepare for a surprise attack.

"As I'm sure you're all aware, we caught some enemy soldiers while out scouting yesterday. Well, one of them spilled his guts. The enemy that occupied Ganen Castle have discovered the road that goes around Lynon Castle and are now planning to raid this supply base."

"Whaaaaaa?!"

"Is that true, Commander?"

"A-A-A raid?!"

The hundredmen gathered in the command tent all started making a fuss. That's how important this information was.

"There's no question that the prisoner told us what he knows. Although, whether the attack is coming or not is less clear," I said with a shrug.

"S-Send a report to Lynon Castle at once!" exclaimed one of Hadan's subordinates. "I can't believe this is happening while the lieutenant commander is away!"

"I'll send a report, yes, but only after considering countermeasures..."

What would having him around even change?

The supply base was situated in a fortress on top of a hill along the road leading to the capital. It was also surrounded by castle walls, even if they weren't very high. The one unique thing about it was that, in order to ease the transport of supplies, each sector had its own doors, so there were a lot more entrances than a castle city with gates in the four cardinal directions.

"We haven't the time! I'll report to him at once!" the hundredman who I'd had my eye on as Hadan's man since yesterday ignored what I was saying and took off running.

Blatantly ignoring his commander? Well, with his superior officer being who he is, I shouldn't have expected any better from him.

“Well... Setting that aside, we need to prepare for ourselves. Whether what our prisoner said about the surprise attack proves to be true or not, we should be more than able to fend them off if we’re ready for it.”

Of course, since we’re inside a fortress, we can hold out against attacks to some degree. But I predict a long, drawn out battle, and we won’t be able to carry out our supply duties while it’s happening. That’d be just what the enemy wants.

On top of that, with our current level of Training and Morale, it’s questionable if we can make it through a long battle. It may look like we should have a terrain advantage here, but we really don’t. What good is a supply unit that ends up isolated?

There was terrain outside the base that would be easier for us to fight on. If there were some way to take advantage of it to rapidly drop the enemy’s morale and drive them off, that would be an effective strategy. It won’t be too late to hole ourselves up in the fortress afterwards if that plan fails.

“I will be giving new orders to each hundredman regarding the countermeasures we’ll be taking. You’re dismissed for now to explain the situation to your men. Be ready to move into action at a moment’s notice!”

Once I’d given those orders and dismissed the meeting, I had Gibun stay behind. I had something to ask him.

“Gibun, you stay.”

Gibun looked around, waiting for the other hundredmen to file out before walking over to me.

“Is this about the captain?”

“No. I’m sure Yusen will be back eventually. That’s not it. I have something else to ask.”

“What is it?”

“Could you tell me which of the hundredmen have an axe to grind with Hadan? The ones who don’t obey him.”

“Who has an axe to grind with Hadan? Well, um, that would be...practically

everyone. Everyone but the hundredman who ran off to report to him, and one other, hate the man's guts."

"Oh. Is that a fact?"

"Yes. The lieutenant commander is...scum—No!"

Disrespecting a member of the nobility was a crime. One usually met with immediate punishment. Gibun hurriedly covered his mouth as he belatedly remembered that I, too, was a member of the nobility.

"You can insult scum like Hadan all you want."

I chose to allow it. If he ever insulted me, I'd punish him. But that detestable prick Hadan? Eh, whatever.

"Y-You mean it?"

"Yeah."

"Th-Then I'll do just that. He's rotten to the core—always looking for the tiniest fault in the hundredmen so he can have them whipped..."

"I see. So, there's a lot of ill-will built up against him?"

"Yes!"

This was good news for me. Now was my chance to eliminate Hadan and seize complete control of the unit!

"Then which hundredmen are close to Yusen and trustworthy? Are there any we could share Yusen's absence with?"

"I'd say pretty much everyone likes the captain, but Hundredman Jido is probably closest to him."

"I see. Okay, I want you to get your hundredman unit ready to deploy immediately. And call Hundredman Jido here for me."

*

"A surprise attack, you say?" Advisor Heina asked, sounding surprised.

"Yes," Hadan answered her. "The new commander says he made a prisoner talk."

“What...?”

Heina was taken aback. Erhin had captured an enemy scout so soon after being appointed and managed to make him talk?

“It *is* true that he captured an enemy soldier. He must have gotten lucky, I’m sure.”

Lucky, huh... Heina scratched her head in confusion. The enemy were already advancing on Ganen Castle. Given the current situation, she couldn’t write off a raid on the supply base as utter nonsense.

Duke Ronan, the commander-in-chief, was currently preparing to lead the sole elite force left in the Runan Kingdom’s military, his own house’s troops, in a decisive battle at Bern Castle. It was the one place he refused to give up.

It would be a massive hit if his supplies were disrupted now.

Heina was a relative of the House of Ronan, but not in the direct line of succession. Because of that, she had sought the position of advisor in order to raise the profile of the House of Berhin, which was often looked down on in the Runan Kingdom’s noble society due to their status as a branch family.

She didn’t want her treatment in noble society to get any worse. That’s why she really couldn’t afford to mess this up. Especially not now, when she’d received the important task of defending Lynon Castle in Duke Ronan’s absence. It was a huge burden resting on Heina’s shoulders.

“For now, have that prisoner brought to me. I’ll interrogate him personally.”

“Understood!”

No sooner had Hadan accepted the order than Heina took it back, saying, “No, wait!”

Heina looked at the map again and began racking her brain. Ganen Castle and Bern Castle weren’t about to fall. She couldn’t see that happening. That meant the supply base was her primary concern.

“I’ll go with you. We’ll take half of the manpower from Lynon Castle with us to the supply base!”

“U-Understood!” Hadan nodded. But, after struggling with the decision a little

longer, Heina changed her mind yet again.

“But, still. If this were a diversion, and they launched a surprise attack on Lynon Castle... No, with Lynon Castle’s manpower and high walls we could still hold out. So the supply base comes first...”

Heina bit her lip as she considered a variety of possibilities.

“Hadan. Head back to the supply base immediately. You aren’t to leave the fortress under any circumstances. Order the commander to do the same. He must meet the enemy attack inside the fortress, no matter what happens!”

“Understood. But, Advisor, I can’t imagine the soldiers in the supply unit will be capable of handling this...”

“If there really is a raid, I’ll come to reinforce you personally. Just to be safe, I’ll lead half of our manpower from Lynon Castle to a position between the castle and the supply base. You’ll be able to hold out long enough for me to come to your aid, I’m sure. If there’s an enemy raid, you raise a smoke signal!”

Yes. If this was a diversion, and they attacked Lynon Castle, she could return immediately, while if there was a genuine attack on the supply base, she could rush to their aid. It was a flexible plan that worked for either outcome.

Heina, convinced she’d come up with a superior strategy, sounded immensely satisfied with herself as she gave the order.

“And have the captured soldier sent to my camp. I’ll interrogate him myself.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll head back to the supply base!”

*

In order for the enemy to launch an attack on the supply base, they needed to use the road from Ganen Castle that went around Lynon Castle. That was why I sent the hundredman that Gibun told me about, Jido, on a scouting mission.

I ordered him to standby on the side road with two hundred troops, and send a message if there was any movement from the enemy.

Once those two hundred men and the others out on supply missions were excluded from the total, I was left with forty-eight hundred troops.

I excluded all of the hundredmen who were on Hadan's side from the operation to prepare against the attack. Yeah. I gave them separate orders to defend the inside of the fort. Then I advanced to the side road with my forty-eight hundred troops.

Fighting inside the fortress would guarantee our defeat. There was a risk of it falling before reinforcements could arrive from Lynon Castle.

If that's going to happen, we need a plan to catch the enemy by surprise and drive them off all at once!

For that, I had the river that cut through the middle of the side road.

It's knee deep, which isn't really that deep.

If we dammed the river so that it was only ankle deep, and then released the water behind the dam all at once, we could probably wash away hundreds of enemy soldiers.

Against an army of a hundred thousand, or even a million men, this strategy would be completely useless, but there was no way they would mobilize that many men in what was supposed to be a surprise attack. Raids like this lived or died on the speed with which they were executed.

If they do *come with a force of that size, then we need to withdraw to the fortress and hole up there immediately. But our invaders, the Naruyan army, aren't even on that scale to begin with.*

Of course, this water attack can't sweep away enemies spread out over a wide area. The river's not big enough, and it's impossible to hold back that much water anyway. It'd only be doable with sufficient men and time, as well as a river with lots of flow. My aim here is to use the water we hold back to temporarily divide the enemy. Then we attack the ones who've crossed and wipe them out before going after the remainder of their forces.

I hurried our march along until the river was in sight.

The enemy has to come down this road if they're going to attack the supply base, so of course we're going to lay a trap upstream.

"We're going upstream to dam the river. Follow me."

I started by gathering the hundredmen in front of the river and explaining the plan to them. They were all bewildered at first, but must have acknowledged the idea had some chance of success, because they quietly obeyed me as I led them all upstream.

“This looks like a good spot. Block off the water here. Have all your men work in teams to do it. Understood?”

With that order, they began building the dam. Forty-eight hundred men moved into action as one.

Fortunately, no messenger had come yet.

As the work was progressing, a soldier from our forces ran over to me. Well, this particular soldier might as well have been an enemy, so far as I was concerned.

It was none other than Lieutenant Commander Hadan himself.

“Commander! There’s no time for this. I have orders from the advisor. Stand by inside the base and don’t do anything reckless!” he announced the advisor’s commands with smug superiority.

‘Stand by in the base?’ That’s got to be the worst possible idea. It won’t be too late to pull back if we fail here, after all.

But Hadan’s words seemed to give the hundredmen pause. His mention of the advisor only added to that.

“Hey, what are you doing?! Pull back to the base immediately!”

Hadan didn’t even wait for my response before he started barking orders at them. The hundredmen and their soldiers, who had been hard at work, all stopped to watch us.

This guy’s screwed in the head. I should just ignore the advisor. When you consider what’s about to happen to Lynon Castle, the advisor’s just a loser.

Rather than follow her commands and lose with her, I’m better off winning this battle, even if it means countermanding her orders. In fact, winning here would be actively beneficial to me. I brought only the hundredmen who are discontent with Hadan in case something like this happened.

He's only a baron and I'm a count. Besides, even if he brings the advisor into it, I'm the actual commander of this unit, not him. If I go through with this, the advisor'll probably get pissed and call me back to Lynon Castle—the center of the action.

"Ugh, just shut up."

With that decided, it was time to act. Hadan's Martial was only 50. I pointed the back of my hand at his throat and triggered the Attack command. With a 10 point difference in our martial scores, I could knock him out whenever I wanted.

Hadan went down with a groan.

"I'll bear all responsibility for this. Continue with the plan at once!"

"A-Are you sure...?"

"This is the most effective way to defend the supply base. You won't be held responsible, so don't worry about it. I'll take all of the responsibility!

"Understood!"

When I then pointed at Hadan and said, "Gibun, put this guy in a corner somewhere," everyone seemed to cheer up and nodded.

"Right! On it, sir!" Gibun chirped and then dragged Hadan off, chuckling.

The many carts that we had access to because we were a supply unit made this operation possible. But it wasn't just carts; the fortress where the supply base was located hadn't been in use prior to the outbreak of war. Thanks to that, the walls were crumbling in a number of places, and had been hastily repaired with sandbags and rocks—repair supplies I repurposed for dam building.

With thousands of men working on it, we soon had something that held back the water like a real dam.

If we let the water build up behind it a little and then break the dam so it's released all at once, the enemies crossing the river are sure to panic. Especially the cavalry. Their horses'll go wild with the fear of death. Then we take that opportunity for a quick strike. They can't be bringing that large of a force with them for a raid, anyway.

The preparations were done by nightfall.

Still no sign of movement from the enemy. I worried that they would appear before the trap was laid, but they didn't show up even once it had been.

The water behind the dam had now built up to the same height as it and was flowing over the top. There was nothing to be done about that. The enemy just needed to show up before the dam broke.

If the water's up to the height of the dam, that'll be more than enough to throw them into chaos!

Dawn came as we waited for the enemy to appear.

Hadan woke up.

"Urgh... Commander, what is going on here?"

"Shut up."

I knocked him right back out, of course.

It might be weird to bring this up after already using it so much, but the Attack command sure made things easy. It'd be impossible for a normal guy like me to knock out a tough guy like Hadan without the system's support.

Once I had laid Hadan low again, a soldier came running towards me from off in the distance.

There's our long awaited messenger. That means they really did launch a raid. Well, I'm still dubious if it's really coming. What kind of surprise attack announces itself in advance and gives the opponent time to prepare?

Well, I've got some ideas of my own on that. For now, though, winning is the key thing. No matter what the enemy may be thinking, I don't have any intention of losing.

"That's the signal! Everyone, deploy! Gibun, lead Yusen's hundredman unit and follow me. I want all the other units to lie in wait on the field behind the river, just like we planned. You attack once the dam breaks and the water hits the enemy. Got it?"

"Yes, sir, Commander!"

The hundredmen and soldiers who'd been half-asleep on the job jumped up and hurried back to work.

Once I'd urged them into motion, I led Gibun and his hundredman unit north of the river on horseback. When we crossed the river, with its water level greatly diminished, we saw Jido and his two hundred soldiers pulling back.

When he saw me, Jido brought his horse to a stop and shouted, "Commander, it's the enemy's raiding party!" with a look of urgency on his face. "Wh-What do we do? We need to do something, take some countermeasures..."

He was gasping for breath—panicking.

"What's the scale of the enemy force? Give me a detailed report," I asked him calmly.

"Their main force is a cavalry unit. The soldiers I had watching from a higher vantage point reported there's a unit of infantry in the rear too."

"I see."

Cavalry were to be expected in a raid. It sounded like they'd added an infantry component with an eye to taking the fortress too.

"None of the enemy got past you, right? Were you strictly monitoring them?"

"Of course! We expected they might have scouts, so we were meticulously careful, but nothing passed us but wild animals."

If they figured out our plan, it was over. That's why I'd sent out a full two hundred men to watch for them everywhere. Fortunately, it didn't seem like it was going to be a problem.

"Okay. You link up with the forces on the other side of the river and get the full details of the plan from them. I'll move once I have a fuller grasp of the enemy's scale."

"Understood!"

After watching Jido's scouting party go, my unit hid ourselves and waited for the enemy. *I need to check their scale.* Knowing the number of enemies would let me take more certain countermeasures against them.

After some time, I saw the unit of cavalry Jido had told me about kicking up a cloud of dust. I immediately activated the system.

Naruya Kingdom Army: 5,320 men

Training: 80

Morale: 80

I saw a well-trained enemy force—small in scale, but still more than a supply unit with a Training score of 40 could handle.

Still, at this scale, the plan would work on them.

Raiding parties had generally been around this size in the game too. I knew this world well because I'd already experienced it through the game.

I don't really know for sure, but it looks like their troop numbers are the same as in the game.

*

"Everyone, listen up! We're going to cross that river! Our objective is the enemy's supply base!" the enemy commander, Randall's younger brother Hirina, bellowed as he chased after Erhin and his men. He'd expected the raid to be discovered and already included that in his plans.

Now, a river appeared in front of his Hirina's cavalry. It was a broad river, but the water level was rather low. The enemy force, more than fifty-three hundred strong, split into four groups as they began to cross.

As Hirina's lieutenant and his men finished crossing, and the rest of the men moved to follow them—it happened!

Roar!

Suddenly, there was a rumbling noise.

"What's that sound?" Hirina cocked his head to the side and looked in the direction it was coming from.

However, he didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

“Commander?”

The lieutenant was about to remind him that their target was the supply base, and they didn’t need to get distracted by anything else, but then his face twisted with shock. There was a massive surge of water coming at them from upstream.

Around five hundred cavalry had finished crossing, but one thousand were still making their way across, and another roughly four thousand infantry troops behind them hadn’t even begun to cross yet.

Their main force, the cavalry, were swallowed up by the onrushing water. As the height of the river rapidly went from ankle deep to chest high, the force of the water started to sweep away man and horse alike.

Whinny!

The horses’ distressed cries echoed in all directions, joined by the screams of their human riders.

Eeeeek!

“What’s happening?!”

Soldiers abandoned their horses and tried to swim, but the current was too strong for them to resist.

“Wahhhhh!”

This wasn’t the end of their troubles either. Hirina was shocked. Not only were his men caught in the muddy flow of the river, they now had the enemy converging on them from both sides.

“Damn it all!” Hirina cursed, drawing his sword.

So many men and horses, gone in a single water attack. Well, he had more left than he’d lost, but they were in a state of utter disarray, and having suddenly been divided was a big part of that.

“Attack!” Gibun shouted, leading his hundredman unit in a charge. The hundredman unit trained by Yusen, with his long career in the military, was better trained than any of the others, so they had no trouble with the charge attack.

The problem was the other hundredman units. Their men quaked in their boots as they attacked. Even a hundredman like Jido appeared frightened. Only Gibun, his hundred men, and Erhin could fight properly. Even with the enemy in disarray, the soldiers of the supply base were losing to Hirina and the Naruyan cavalry in spirit.

Seeing this, Erhin shook his head in dismay.

This is the sad state of the supply unit. And they thought these guys could've held out at the fortress? Absurd.

The way things were going, he was going to lose even though the plan was a success. Erhin sensed the need to kill the enemy's momentum and raise his own forces' confidence.

There's only one way!

Erhin sent his horse galloping towards Hirina. The man's Martial was 80. That was pretty strong. And yet, when Erhin rushed towards him, bonus equipped...

"Gwagh!"

...he lopped Hirina's head off without giving the man any chance to fight back.

When Daitoren flashed, he shouted out loud!

"Fight without fear! The enemy is confused. Look at their commander's head. These enemies are nothing. Jido, man up, would you?"

"Y-Yes sir, Commander!"

Hoping for an even more dramatic effect, Erhin used a skill, triggering Sweep on the mass of enemies as a show of his own majesty.

Boom!

When he used the skill, all the enemies in range died in a flash of white light. Everyone froze stiff when they witnessed such an intense mana skill.

"M-Mana!"

That included his own forces, who were especially shocked by how off-the-charts Erhin's power was.

"You can use mana, Commander?!"

“That doesn’t matter,” Erhin answered Gibun curtly. “Focus on driving off the enemy!”

Then...

Wooooo!

The soldiers of the supply unit, having regained their vigor after seeing him use the skill, cast their fear aside as they brandished their swords. That went for the hundredmen too.

And so, they completely mopped up the enemies who’d crossed the river. All that left was the remaining forces on the other side!

When Erhin took the lead, the soldiers who were entranced by his use of mana cheered as if they were under the illusion they’d wielded that power themselves. They quickly began crossing the river, now returned to its normal level, after him.

Their morale was on the rise! The enemy had lost their commander, and all that were left now was the infantry in the rear.

This was the first victory for the Runan Kingdom Army.

*

“You’re telling me he *won*...?” Heina murmured, trembling, when she saw the report.

He’d wiped out five thousand enemy soldiers to secure a massive victory. And, on top of that, his own losses were minimal.

“Impossible. That’s just not possible!”

Heina was mad with jealousy.

If the commander-in-chief were to learn of this, my position would be in danger. That was the first thing that occurred to her.

Erhin’s a count. I’m a countess too, but after something like this, it’s entirely possible he could drive me from my position.

If she let herself be driven from power by someone she’d thought of as incompetent as Erhin, the House of Berhin would surely be a laughingstock. She

could never suffer the indignity of it. But more than that, she couldn't stand that Erhin had disobeyed her orders and acted on his own. Heina's eyes were no longer on victory.

Forgetting the risk to the nation, she racked her brains solely for the sake of her own glory. Erhin had ignored the advisor's orders not to leave the supply base. Even if they were equals in terms of nobility, she was still his superior in the army's command structure. That was an indisputable fact.

So, this is insubordination. Blatant insubordination!

Having found the perfect charge, Heina called for some of her soldiers at once.

"Arrest the supply unit's commander for insubordination!"

Chapter 3: The Trump Card of Miracles and Reversals

I won the battle, but could only laugh at the result as I looked around the dank, cave-like dungeon of Lynon Castle. That's where they locked me up.

The charge? Insubordination, of all things!

Obviously, Advisor Heina was responsible for this.

When we won the battle and returned, triumphant, to the supply base, the hundredmen were all beaming.

That didn't last long. Things changed in an instant. Once we reported our victory, soldiers rushed to the base from Lynon Castle.

Advisor Heina's so easy to figure out.

She summoned me to Lynon Castle not because I'd won the battle, but for disobeying her orders. Then she had me jailed.

The hundredmen like Gibun who had my back protested that this was unacceptable, but they got slapped down by Hadan.

So, that's why I was in the dungeon of Lynon Castle.

But the greatest author of my "misfortune" was myself. I had *deliberately* gotten myself arrested.

I had a feeling Heina would treat me this way even if I won the battle—one only reinforced by the way that she looked at me like I was an insect.

Going by the game's history, this is still only the earliest stages. The protagonist goes into action after the Runan Kingdom falls. I only saw the war that ruined the kingdom in the prologue, so I don't know many of the finer details about it.

What I *did* know, however, was important—the most important historical fact of them all.

Ganen Castle should be falling right about now. And just one day after that,

Lynon Castle falls too. That's the history, as I know it. I don't know how it plays out, but it's a fact that they fall. How in the world could they make Lynon Castle fall just one night after taking Ganen Castle?

I couldn't shake the notion that it might have something to do with the raid on the supply unit. They'd moved far too openly. Even though their scouts never returned, they not only didn't call off the surprise attack, they even gave us time to prepare for it. My forces had finished preparing long before the attack began.

If they'd launched the attack the moment we captured their scouts, I doubt I would have been so suspicious. Basically, they knew that we'd caught their scouts, and yet they held off on the raid long enough to give us time. Even though there was the risk of their plan leaking!

That's why I focused my attention on the movements around Lynon Castle at that same time. From what I'd been told, Advisor Heina had left her post after news of the raid came in.

What if that's just what the enemy was aiming for? What if their true aim wasn't the supply base, but to draw Heina away from Lynon Castle? If that's what it was, they succeeded. I still don't know what they were planning to accomplish by luring Heina away from the castle. The enemy didn't attack Lynon Castle in her absence. They were attacking Ganen Castle at that time.

The answer's here at Lynon Castle. If I'm here, I'll be able to find out, and once I do it's time to go on the counterattack. If I can just defend Lynon Castle, it'll change history completely. My goal is to retake the castle!

That's why I had come along quietly.

This world is like a game, but it's real. The idea of taking control of it really excites me. Nothing could make a game-lover like me happier. I swear this world will be mine!

I had another reason for letting them arrest me too: Hadan took the prisoners to Heina's place. That meant Jint was here too. If I could just persuade him, somehow, that would massively boost the odds of my current plan succeeding.

Anyway, that's how I ended up in solitary confinement.

They didn’t put nobles in the same jail as commoners. I was being treated to the luxury of my own private cell because of my nobility. Jint was towards the front of the prison. I’d checked that in advance.

But there’s something I need to do before I go to him. It’s time to level up.

I’d won a victory preventing the enemy raid, so I had experience.

Experience List

B-class Strategy x2

Victory against B-class as D-class x3

That enemy commander, Hirina or whatever his name was, had a Martial of 80, so the experience I got was tripled as a result.

My strategy using the river was B-class. Thanks to that, I rose to level 11.

You received level up points.

Points in reserve: 550

I got 500 points this time. I was level 8, so I received 100 points for reaching level 9. Then, starting at level 10, I received 200 points per level, which brings it to 500 in total. The remaining 50, I already had.

Will you enhance your Martial? It will cost 300 points.

I started by raising my Martial by 1.

My current Martial’s 61. That’s such a small change it may not seem significant, but if I keep on raising it, I’ll be strong someday.

I left myself a reserve of 250 points. Considering the point cost for using my skills, it was probably best if I paid attention and used them as the situation demanded.

*

“Hey, jailer!”

Now I was leveled up and ready to meet Jint, but nothing was going to happen if I just stayed quiet. Since we were fellow prisoners, I decided I’d win him over by figuring out his needs and weaknesses.

He’ll definitely be an important element when it comes to my goal of retaking Lynon Castle once it falls. Of course, I’m still going ahead with the plan even if I’m unable to get him on my side. And if the plan fails, then I bail.

I had a number of plans, and my best one was to persuade Jint.

“Jailer!” I shouted again since he didn’t come the first time. Finally, a soldier appeared looking annoyed at me.

The jailer sighed heavily. “What is it?”

“I have something for you to tell the advisor. Come in here.”

“I won’t be doing that.”

“What? I don’t plan on staying in this cell for the rest of my life. What do you take me for? I’m a high noble. A count. If you could convince the advisor to free me, I’d reward you generously... I’ll give more money than you’ll ever be able to use.”

I tried enticing the jailer with money.

“Do you mean that?!”

I’m a count. They’d have trouble executing me for anything less than treason. Nobles don’t get more than a slap on the wrist for insubordination. At worst, I’ll be stripped of my current position in the military and sent back to my domain. That kind of thing happens all the time in the Runan Kingdom. That’s the class system for you. The jailer should know that too.

“Of course I do. But this is important information we can’t afford leaking. Come inside the cell. Don’t worry. I’m not going to try to escape. Why would I go to the trouble when I’ll soon be free anyway?”

“Y-You do have a point there.”

Having made up his mind, the jailer, led astray by my promises, fell over

himself in his rush to open the door and get inside the cell.

“So, what do you have to say...?”

As if I’d have anything to say.

I immediately triggered the Attack command and pummeled the soldier with my fists.

The guy had a Martial of 25. Knocking him out was child’s play.

Plucking the key ring from the fallen soldier’s hip, I proceeded to the jail cell where Jint was being held.

Thock!

Biff! Bap!

I could hear them beating someone inside.

“Talk already! How long’re you gonna keep quiet, huh?!”

Jint’s interrogation was over, but they kept on abusing him under the pretense of extracting information.

What, are they just blowing off steam?

One of the other soldiers beating Jint said, “Hey, look at this. He’s got a ring hangin’ ’round his neck. Looks like a pricey one too.”

“Oh, yeah? A ring, huh?”

Jint couldn’t resist, bound hand and foot as he was. Even with his high Martial score, he couldn’t use his power in that state.

But surprisingly, when they took his ring, he spoke out loud despite never speaking a word before then.

“N-Not that!”

It must be important to him. He wouldn’t break his complete silence otherwise!

“I’ll talk. I’ll tell you everything. Just, please, give it back!”

“You idiot. It’s too late for that. Besides, we don’t need information anymore. You’re gonna be our punching bag until you die. Oh, yeah, come to think of it?

You know your loose-lipped buddy? That guy's already dead. Managed to piss off the advisor. Heh. Just kept begging for his life without telling her anything. Now it's gonna be curtains for you too! Ha ha ha!"

From that point on, all I heard was the sound of blows.

Eventually, the soldiers came out. When they did, I headed back to my own cell temporarily. Once I was sure they were gone, I moved through the silent halls of the prison and entered the cell where they were holding Jint.

The man showed emotion. That's important. This is a big step forward, assuming I can talk to him.

Jint was trembling. No matter how he pulled at the chains binding him to the wall with his bloody arms, he couldn't get himself free.

"Is the ring that precious to you? Breaking your silence over it."

"..."

Jint raised his head when I suddenly entered and started talking.

He seemed a bit surprised when he saw me.

"W-Was this your doing?!"

Looks like he's remembered me. He's come to a horrible misunderstanding, though.

"You misunderstand. While it's natural to fight an enemy you meet on the battlefield, and I did win our fight there, I don't recall beating or torturing you once you were my prisoner. Your problem is with my superiors who took you away. Those same superiors who then locked me up here for insubordination."

I sat down beside Jint and continued talking.

"What I'm trying to say is we're fellow prisoners now."

I'd approached him hoping we could have a conversation, but Jint bit his lip and turned his head away.

Is he going to refuse to talk to me again?

"I could retrieve that precious ring of yours."

The ring seemed like it was key, so I at least tried making the offer.

“You’re a prisoner too, aren’t you? How would you get it back?”

“I don’t plan to stay in here forever. As a noble, they’d never dare bind my hands. That’s how I was able to beat up my jailer and come this far. It wouldn’t be all that difficult for me to knock out those soldiers who were in here earlier and get your ring back. I’m not tied up, after all.”

I noticed that Jint’s eyes wavered slightly at my suggestion.

Looks like he really cares about that ring.

I’d found a hint in the most unexpected place.

If there’s something about it that sways his emotions, then that’s where to start persuading him!

“What do you want? I have nothing to offer you,” Jint said.

“Oh, nothing much,” I replied. “Why not join me, since you’re going to die here otherwise? I’ll save your life, and get back what they took from you!”

“Now you’re mocking me... I can’t do that!” Jint shook his head in a firm rejection.

“And why not? If you’re so attached to that ring, then that means you still want to live, right? If you have something to live for, then you ought to be willing to tell me what I want to hear, even if you’re just lying, in order to get out of here and win back your freedom... Why aren’t you trying to save yourself?”

Yeah, I didn’t understand that. With all his strength, he might have had a chance to escape. Like while they were transporting him from the supply base to the dungeons of Lynon Castle, for instance. Yet here he was, quietly imprisoned in Lynon Castle.

That went for our conversation just now too. The way he talked, it was like he had no desire to live.

“If you have something so important to you, then why aren’t you trying to live for it?!”

He gave no answer. But the way he acted was clearly different from at the supply base. So, I pressed on with another question.

“Does that ring have something to do with someone important?”

Jint reacted to the mention of someone important.

I knew it. The ring’s a symbol of love.

It was clear to me that the ring was also the one and only key that could move this stoic man.

“Okay, look. I’m gonna get your ring back. Let’s loosen up the conditions a little. I want you to tell me about the ring. You don’t have to become my ally. If you’ll just tell me about the ring, I’ll get it back for you. Then you can at least die with it in your possession. That’s what you want, right?”

“As if I could trust you.”

“Why would I lie? What do I have to gain from hearing your story?”

“...”

Jint looked at me closely. There was indecision in his eyes. So, I waited. Our psychological staredown battle lasted for several minutes. Jint was the first to talk.

“Will you really let me die with the ring?”

“If you tell me your story, I’ll get it back for you. I’ll keep that promise no matter what.”

“Why are you so eager to hear about it?”

“Simple curiosity. But the important thing for you should be getting back what you lost. If you really do want it back, then you just have to listen to me. That’s all there is to it.”

*

Jint made his living picking pockets in a Naruyan city. It was the only way an orphan like him, discarded by the roadside, could survive there.

Jint showed a gift for fighting from a young age, and easily seized control of a band of fingersmiths and cutpurses. Even so, they were just a tiny group that

had to pay dues to a larger organization of ruffians in the city.

It wasn't much of a life, but Jint wasn't alone. There was a girl, Mirinae, who had been with him since he was young. He could be happy so long as she was around. He lived for her smile, after all.

"Welcome home, Jint."

Yeah.

"I know you have to pick pockets, but pick your targets, okay?"

This sort of ordinary day-to-day existence.

"Oh, my. You've got a grain of rice stuck on your face."

It was what gave Jint the will to live. Mirinae felt the same way, of course. She wanted to go on living with Jint, each of them supporting the other. But their peaceful lives couldn't last forever. Not when Mirinae was so attractive.

One day, when the two of them were fifteen, tragedy struck.

"Jint! This is bad! They've taken Mirinae!"

Jint had just come back to the hideout after a day's work when his fellow thieves gathered around him, making a fuss. Mirinae had been dragged off. By the ruffians they paid tribute to. At that moment, Jint lost all sense. He grabbed a weapon and headed straight for the place where he knew they hung out.

"Mirinae! Mirinaeee!"

When Jint kicked in the door and barged inside, the goons mocked him with raucous laughter.

"Mirinae? Heh heh. We gang-raped her, man. She was a good woman, you know? Virgin too. But, hey, the organization needs money, so we sold her to the slavers. They'll pay good money for a woman like that. It'd be a waste to just sell her off, though, right? So we all had a taste of her for ourselves first. Sorry, man. Guess we should've let you have a go at her too, huh? Bwa ha ha ha!"

There was no way Jint could stay sane after hearing that. He drew his knife. Tears streamed from his eyes. Blood flowed as he bit his lip. He didn't even want to imagine Miriane's shame. Her smile. Her kind heart. How could they do

that to such a gentle woman?

“You little shit. Put that thing away. You’re getting ahead of yourself.”

Ten men kicked aside their chairs as they got to their feet, but Jint’s knife slashed through the throat of the nearest one.

Jint was born with a gift for mana. Even though all he’d ever engaged in was some street fights, his abilities had still developed to an abnormal degree. He was young—only fifteen years old—but he was already far too powerful for a bunch of local thugs to handle.

Not that he realized that himself.

“Kill him!”

The surprised ruffians all rushed Jint. But Jint was many times faster than them. His knifework was frighteningly fast. And his power was unbelievable.

“S-Stay back...!”

After watching the horrible deaths of nine of his buddies, the last thug knelt down in utter terror. Jint charged in and continued to mercilessly pummel the man’s face.

“Where is she?! Where did you take Mirinae?!”

“S-Spare me...!”

“Talk, damn you!”

“The Hiruone Trade Group... We sold her to—”

Slice!

Jint clenched his fist as he watched the man’s severed head sail through the air. His hand was trembling. This was the first time he’d killed, but he felt nothing.

His only thought was taking Mirinae back. The girl was everything to him. Let her be safe. Let her still be alive. If she’d smile for him just one more time, he didn’t give a damn what else happened.

From that day on, Jint began wandering in search of the slave traders. Finally, after three years, he finally tracked them down. It took a level of tenacity no

ordinary person could imagine. Once he managed to sniff out the slavers, he brutally murdered every last one of them on the spot.

Having fought a number of real battles over the past three years, Jint threw himself into the fight with no regard for his own life. He'd do anything for information. Work for dark organizations. Carry out bloody assassinations in conflict zones. He lived like a war fiend. Perhaps thanks to that lifestyle, Jint's Martial was already above B-class by this point.

But he couldn't find Mirinae.

The slavers had already sold her to a baron in the provinces. Jint rushed to that city. He didn't even think twice before assaulting the manor of the baron that the slavers had told him about. Many soldiers stood in his way.

"Who're you?!"

Jint let his knife do the talking. The manor had thirty guards.

"Call for backup immediately!"

It would take time for the domain's army to arrive. Jint lacked the ability to calculate exactly how long, but he was confident his speed was a match for anyone's. He smashed and smashed.

Once he broke into the manor house, Jint finally found Mirinae.

Even after three long years, he knew her at a glance. The moment he found her, a single tear rolled down his face. He didn't care what happened to him.

But when he saw her in this weakened state and imagined the hellish days she must have been through, he couldn't take it.

"Jint? Is that you, Jint?"

The tears overflowed from Mirinae's eyes as she was reunited with Jint, just like she'd dreamed she would be.

The only reason she'd made it through the three years that made her yearn for death was because she had something she needed to tell him. Even though she felt she no longer had the right to.

Three simple words.

That was all they were, but she'd never been able to say them.

I love you...

She wanted to make sure Jint knew it. If she couldn't tell him this, then she'd never be able to rest in peace, not even in death.

This pair of parentless waifs with nothing in all the world but each other had faced a depressing trial.

Jint held Mirinae's hand tight.

"Let's run away, Mirinae!"

And so, they slipped out of the city together.

The domain's forces belatedly moved into action, but Jint helped Mirinae onto the back of a stolen horse and they raced off without looking back.

Shaking off their pursuers several times, they escaped to a border town that was as far from that city as possible. They'd heard rumors that there were towns near the border where those who'd lost their livelihoods to war gathered.

Mirinae tried to take her own life several times on the journey there. She would thrash about in her sleep, groaning at night. But Jint was always by her side, trying to persuade her that the two of them should live on, together.

"I can't live without you."

That was what finally convinced Mirinae to stop trying to throw her life away.

They settled in the border town where those who'd lost everything went, and there, Jint lived the quiet life of a farmer with Mirinae.

They could only afford one meal per day, but they were happy. So happy that, at some point, Mirinae started to smile like she used to.

But another trial awaited them.

A new king took the throne. The old sovereign who'd maintained a policy of peace died, and a young, ambitious new monarch took to the throne.

And so, the order for general mobilization was issued, and they began mercilessly conscripting people from all regions of the country. Of course, the

powerless people who lived in poverty in the border town were not going to be spared from the draft.

“Take care, Jint. I’ll wait for you here. I’ll be waiting no matter what. I know you’ll never die in the war. I believe that wholeheartedly. Because you’re strong. So don’t run away anymore, okay?”



After hearing those words, Jint became a soldier in the Naruyan army. And he was soon made a disposable pawn in a scouting party. Mirinae gave Jint the ring as proof of her love. That made it the second most important thing in the world to him.

*

"And that's my story... That ring means more to me than my life. Can you really get it back?"

Jint looked up at me as he finished talking.

"I'm sure a lot of guys have a story like yours, but not many of them stood by the women they loved to the end. No, I doubt any did... They'd have to be off in the head. I'm impressed, I've gotta admit."

He's crazy.

That was my honest impression. I didn't mean it in a bad way. The man was insanely driven. Like they say, love is blind. Now I wanted Jint on my side even more.

I'm not going to come across many personnel of his caliber. 21 years old with a Martial of 93. There's endless room for growth there. And he's earnest, to boot.

Unlike Randall, who was too conceited to be worth employing despite his skills, the more I learned about Jint, the more I liked him.

"But with all you've told me... I'd expect you to be more eager to live. I think you should have faked a surrender, then fled back to your girlfriend or found some other way to survive. I don't understand why you're acting like this."

Yeah. If he had someone so precious to him, it only stood to reason that he'd struggle to survive, and yet that wasn't his reaction.

"The new King of Naruya declared that we were to kill as many enemies as we could and die rather than be captured. If we come back home after shamefully becoming prisoners, then our families' lives are forfeit."

There was always a risk of prisoners leaking information. Although, their king sounded like the kind of guy who'd give that sort of order regardless. He was

ambitious and managed his country with a strong centralization of power. He'd never tolerate his soldiers becoming prisoners.

He hated the idea of losing the war so badly that he was willing to reward the families of those who died gloriously in battle with riches, and slay the families of those who died pathetically.

Of course, some soldiers put their own lives above those of their families. One of the men I captured was like that. His desire to survive was perfectly natural.

But Jint's the total opposite.

"I was confident in myself, of course. I didn't think I'd lose to anyone. I believed I'd fight with my head held high and come back victorious. But then you captured me. That's why I can't go back. I have no choice but to die. If I don't, Mirinae will be held responsible. Even if I could flee with her, we'd be fugitives for the rest of our lives. I don't want her to have to live in fear anymore."

The King of Naruya was manipulating the public to make them distrust one another. He instituted a policy of providing monetary rewards to those who turned in anyone who acted against his policies.

Basically, the king's making his people monitor one another. If Jint goes back home without an official discharge, the two of them will have to go on the run again. Someone would definitely report them. They'd never know peace.

Jint seemed incredibly averse to the idea of making his woman a fugitive once more, even if that meant dying instead. He was committed to making it so that the woman, Mirinae, could keep living in the town she was in.

"And that's why you're going to die here?"

"That's right. I'll die for Mirinae's freedom."

"So you're going to die holding a grudge against me?"

"I was confident in myself, but I still lost. It's my own arrogance that beat me. I'm not going to resent you for that."

Jint was firm. His will was unbreakable. But I still didn't understand it.

"You've gotta be kidding me," I said, venting my feelings. Jint looked at me

quizzically.

“You think I’m kidding?”

“You can just live somewhere else. If you never go back to Naruya, they’ll assume you died in battle. I think that living with your love for each other, even if you can’t meet, is a better fate than death, don’t you?”

“We have nowhere to go. And no, if I can’t be with her, I’d rather die!”

Jint shook his head firmly.

He’s so determined. He’s only willing to live for her sake. So, if I’m going to gain him as a retainer, then I’ll need to get my hands on the woman too.

“What do you mean you have nowhere to go? I’m the Lord of Eintorian. If you come to Eintorian, Naruya will never notice. They’ll assume you died in battle.”

“You think I could do something so shameful?!”

“Just hear me out until I’ve finished. My domain in Eintorian isn’t far from the west border where you lived. You’ll change uniforms and become one of my retainers. It’s not like I’m asking you to join the Royal Runanese Army. If you join me, then I’ll do whatever it takes to bring Mirinae to Eintorian so she can live with you. Happily, with no one to hold the two of you back.”

“What’d you just say...?”

“Do you think anything is going to change if a tyrant like your current king unites the land? Besides, what has the Kingdom of Naruya ever given the two of you? Nothing but suffering, right?”

Jint didn’t respond, but he didn’t deny it either. In fact, I could see in his eyes that he was wavering.

“I’m going to build up the Eintorian Domain, but not into a land where everyone can live easily. That kind of country where everyone’s happy is just a dream. No, at the very least, I intend to make it the best country possible for those who are willing to obey me. So, follow me. I’ll make it so you two can live happily!”

“You’re just trying to trick me with pretty words too, aren’t you? I’ve had plenty of guys try to sway me, but they all had ulterior motives,” Jint shouted,

his tone indignant.

You're right.

He was right, but there was more to it than that. Even though I'd decided to treat this world as a game, I had no intention of going back on my word.

"My dream is to conquer the world. And once I do, I plan to make everyone who's helped me happy. Well, it's fine. You don't have to obey me yet. The day I end this war and return to Eintorian, I'm going to help you save the woman you love so you two can be happy again. I won't force you to join me until then. Just stay with me and watch. See if I'm a man who keeps his word. If you decide that I'm not, then you can do as you please. Die if you want to. With that precious ring of yours clutched to your breast."

Yeah. That's my entire pitch.

"Think it over. I'll be getting you your ring back, as promised, of course."

With the conversation finished for the moment, I left the cell.

I'll save that Mirinae of his. It's the only way to get Jint! But first, I need to get his ring.

I headed upstairs to retrieve the ring. The dungeon was in the basement, and the jailers were always standing by on the first floor—usually gambling or asleep on the job, but what can you expect, really?

"By the way, what happened to the guy who went to see the nobleman?"

"Who knows? Went out, I guess. Maybe he got paid to do something?"

"That's a noble for you. I should've gone myself. That prisoner only had this crummy ring on him."

There're two soldiers. Fortunately, it looks like they've still got the ring. Should be a while still before they change shifts.

"You two. Can I have a moment?"

"Hey, you're...!"

"H-H-How'd you get out?!"

I approached the two guards and triggered the Attack command as they rose

in alarm.

Thud!

Bam!

I beat the two soldiers unconscious, took the ring, and headed out. I didn't have much time, after all. Jint was important and all, but so was history, and it was time for a historical event to take place. Assuming that history as I knew it hadn't changed, that is!

Bwoooon!

That was the moment when a trumpet sounded.

That's the signal that enemies have been sighted.

I hurriedly slipped out of the prison and went outside. The soldiers were panicking over the sudden crisis.

There're no commoners in Lynon Castle. They've all been evacuated.

No one was going to stop me while I wore the uniform of an officer in the Royal Runanese Army. I was able to move about relatively freely, so I went up on top of the castle gate and checked the scale of the enemy force.

Royal Naruyan Army: 10,213 men

Lynon Castle Garrison: 23,410 men

We have an overwhelming manpower advantage. No, more importantly, the Naruyan army's way too small. I can't see them taking Lynon Castle in a day with that. Sure, they have a Training score of 80, and the castle garrison only has a score of 40. But the defenders hold an absolute advantage in a siege battle. Everyone knows that.

Even with our low Training score, the numbers say Heina should be able to hold out for at least a week as long as she doesn't open the gates and surrender.

"Hey! What's going on here?"

Because I was wearing an officer's uniform, a soldier stopped and saluted me before immediately answering my question.

“We don’t know. We’ve been ordered to increase our alertness because Ganen Castle fell, but I don’t know any of the details... The advisor’s gathering everyone, so head over there!”

Just how are the Naruyans going to narrow the manpower gap and take Lynon Castle?

“It’s an attack! An enemy attack!”

The Naruyan army was already attacking the gates. Not the southern gates, where I was standing, but the northern ones.

Crash!

That was the sound of a battering ram violently striking the gates.

The defenders have the advantage!

Just like I’d predicted, the battle was starting in a way that gave the Lynon Castle garrison the advantage.

I can’t see Lynon Castle falling quickly like this.

But the instant I thought that, the situation rapidly changed. There was a war cry from the western gates.

Yeahhhhhh!

Then, suddenly, fighting started inside the gates.

Because the enemy focused their attack on the northern gates, Heina placed scouts and then focused her forces on the northern gates too. Because of that, there was a rather small number of soldiers at the western gates.

Now, suddenly, the enemy were inside the castle! The western gatehouse was taken in no time, and they opened the gates. The heaviest fighting was in the north, but now there was a breach from a direction they hadn’t been expecting.

The enemy came from inside the castle!

To be precise, they were coming out of the underground waterway beneath Lynon Castle.

They used the underground waterway? That’s impossible!

There was an iron grate blocking the intake that let water flow into the castle. People couldn't get in through there, only water and maybe fish.

If they tried to remove the grate, their efforts obviously wouldn't go unnoticed.

How in the world did this happen? No, don't tell me...

I get it. When Heina was away from the castle! What if they did the work while she was away? The raid on the supply base that I always thought was fishy—it was a diversion! The scouts they blatantly sent along the road around the castle—they were a diversion too.

The scouting party and the raid itself were both diversions.

They were all sacrificial pawns.

Their real goal had been to get Advisor Heina to panic over the raid and leave Lynon Castle.

Did they create a route to infiltrate the castle while the advisor was away, then? The Royal Army's got 40 Training and 30 Morale. Their force at Lynon Castle is just awful. What would happen if Heina led a large number of troops away from the castle in a situation like that?

They'd slack off, of course.

What if the enemy used some kind of trick or plan to bust through the grate on the aqueduct during that time? There're all sorts of ways they could have done it.

Heina leaving the castle was what sealed her defeat. Even with the gates shut tight, the enemy were able to infiltrate the castle the moment the advisor took all the officers away from it.

Come to think of it, the diversionary operations really started in Eintorian.

The plan to attack Eintorian to draw the Royal Runanese Army's attention while the main force attacked from the north—that was the same kind of strategy!

Everything's going according to a script authored by the Royal Naruyan Army strategist. Whoever that is, they've got our Advisor Heina dancing in the palm of

their hand.

It looked like Naruya had quite a capable strategist—one capable of outwitting Heina!

Yeah, well, whatever. This is all within the bounds of my expectations. I can change how history develops from here. The castle's going to fall like it did in history anyways.

I hadn't known how the castle was going to fall before now, but I was already formulating a plan for how to take it back.

Something like the Trojan horse from the Greek myth.

With my resolve set in stone, I returned to the dungeon.

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“Take this gold nugget. This war broke out unexpectedly, and you haven’t been able to see your mother since hearing about her health troubles, so you don’t know all the details, right? There can’t have been anyone to buy her medicine while the war is going on. If you’re going to go so far as desertion, then do the best you can for her before you come back.”

Yusen looked down at the gold nugget Erhin had given him. It was to pay for his mother’s medicine—medicine that had become all the harder to get hold of because of the war.

In fact, Yusen’s mother was on death’s door because she *hadn’t* been able to get the medicine she needed. Erhin also gave Yusen a badge that would prove he was a retainer of the House of Eintorian. The idea was he’d use it in the capital to secure the medicine. A noble’s name would grant him access to medicines that the common folk didn’t have access to.

Yusen couldn’t reject the kind offer. The life of the woman who had raised him all on her own was on the line here.

And so, as a result, his mother was saved, all thanks to Erhin lending him the gold nugget and his name. That meant Erhin had not only saved Yusen’s life in battle, he’d saved his mother’s life too.

It was only natural he should be prepared to give his life to help someone who’d done so much for him.

That was why, after Erhin was taken away to Lynon Castle, he ran off from his unit as soon as he heard the castle was under attack.

There was someone following Yusen too. It was Gibun.

“Captain...! Wait for me! You can’t go alone!”

“Gibun? Why did you leave the unit?!”

“Someone needs to go with you, even if it’s just me! Don’t worry. I’ve told the others to stay with the unit. Those were the commander’s orders, after all,” Gibun said with a voice hoarse from all the shouting he’d had to do to finally get Yusen to stop.

“The commander’s orders?” Yusen asked, head tilted quizzically.

“Heh heh. I have orders to pass to you too, Captain. Here.” Gibun smirked as he produced a letter from his pocket. “It’s a letter for you from the commander. I came after you so I could deliver it.”

“A letter for me...?”

Surprised, Yusen began reading the letter.

Its contents hit him with a shock like a hammer to the head.

*

It was dark now in Lynon Castle, and fortunately there wasn’t a cloud in the sky.

Jint and I slipped out of the dungeon in the chaos, and hid ourselves in a secret space under a small temple in the city. I’d gone around asking the soldiers from Lynon Castle about potential places to hide before going there. There was no way the Royal Naruyan Army were going to know the area better than the locals when they’d only just occupied it.

Incredibly, the soldiers told me that this temple was built millennia ago.

I’d planned out every aspect of my strategy meticulously planned out in advance. We laid in wait beneath the temple until late at night before heading out to the street. Then I watched the sky while avoiding patrols.

It was the night after they took Lynon Castle, around the time when the enemy soldiers were getting their rest. The moon shone peacefully in the cloudless sky. Gibun had taught me a system for telling the time based on the position of the moon, which told me that it was now three o’clock in the morning.

It wasn’t as accurate as a clock, of course, but Gibun would be using the same method to figure out the time, so we’d have roughly the same sense of what time it was.

I’d left Yusen and Gibun orders to start their mission at around one o’clock. That was two hours ago now. If they did as they’d promised, I wouldn’t have much time to relax.

I raced out of the waterway and used the system to check the north gate. It was defended by thirty-four soldiers—thirty on top of the walls and four in front of the gates.

“Jint.”

Jint was as impassive as ever. He just followed behind me. Maybe he’d accepted the idea of staying by my side and watching to see if I was a man of my word, because he didn’t say another word about dying after that. Although, he still clutched the ring to his chest, as if to say he was prepared to die anytime.

“You’re not curious what I’m trying to do?”

“You’re trying to run away, right?”

Well, yes, there’s that too. I’m keeping the option open as a last resort. I can’t throw my life away, after all.

“Not quite. Even if I ultimately run away, I plan to take the castle back first.”

“Are you crazy...? How’re you gonna take a castle by yourself?”

“With a miracle?” I offered with a shrug. Jint looked at me strangely.

“What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“To tell you the truth, the movements of your scouting party allowed me to infer a number of things. They stood out as especially suspicious.”

“What?”

“Your people already knew the terrain and the location of the supply base, so why do you think they still sent your party so close to the supply unit?”

“How should I know? We were just following orders.”

“And that’s why you got taken out. The Naruyans planned to throw your unit away from the get-go. Just to give us information. Well, they probably had multiple ways of going about it. I don’t really know. The point is, the Naruyan military brass used you guys as sacrificial pawns. That includes wasting a talented man like you. Yeesh, I don’t even know where to start with how bad that is.”

“It’s not like that country ever did anything for me... I can’t say I’m shocked at this point,” Jint responded without any particular surprise.

“Yeah, I suppose not. Anyway, I found it suspicious. Something about it wasn’t sitting right with me, even after I’d stopped the surprise attack on the supply base. But now that I’ve seen the operation that took this castle, I can confidently tell what the enemy strategist was thinking. Now I’m going to wreck their plans. That’ll be proof of my strength.”

“What?”

“Also, once I’ve proven myself by accomplishing what you see as impossible, I’m hoping you’ll see that it’s also true that I plan to save you and your woman so that you can live happily ever after, and that it’s entirely within my power to do it.”

“...”

He says he’s ready to die to protect her, but it’s only human to want to live by her side in happiness instead.

“So, what do you plan to do?” Jint asked.

“It’s simple, really. Just charge the north gates, then open them. Running away’s not going to be my first objective, at least!”

“There must be at least ten thousand Naruyan soldiers inside the castle. What kind of miracle are you trying to pull off?!”

I took off towards the north gates without answering him. *I’ll let my actions speak for themselves.*

“Who goes there?! Identify yourself!”

The soldiers called out to me from up on top of the walls, but I ignored them and kept charging the gates.

“Mirinae tells me I’m an idiot,” said Jin, who’d followed after me. “That’s why she told me I shouldn’t try to act on my own. I don’t know if helping you is the right move. Is it really going to bring us happiness?”

“It will. If you follow me, you can say good-bye to living on the bottom. Making you happy will be child’s play next to the miracle I’m about to pull off.

And not just you, her too. Trust me. And trust in the miracle!”

Bwooon!

The soldiers who’d detected my surprise attack blew a trumpet from the watchtower. Enemies would soon close in on us from all sides.

I used my skill Sweep to take out all four of the guards at once, clearing the way for Jint and I to reach the gates. Wasting no time, I made short work of removing the long bar that held them shut and throwing it aside.

“It’s the enemy!”

The thirty men up in the watchtower came down one after another.

“Jint! Will you lend me your strength until I clear the gates?”

“...”

He gave no response one way or the other.

Well, whatever, I formulated this plan under the assumption that I wasn’t going to have Jint. I’ll just have to do it alone!

I turned to face the soldiers who’d come down from the watchtower. If I left my back open as I threw wide the gates, that’d be like asking them to kill me, after all.

“It’s the enemy! They’re trying to open the gates! Kill them immediately!”

Once I’d cut down thirty men and could get back to the gates, more reinforcements started coming down from the watchtower on the opposite side. When I decided to face them, the unit of infantry that had been sleeping nearest to the gates started to swarm around me.

There were easily over a hundred soldiers. I was taking care of it all, so Jint did nothing.

I don’t know what he was so worried about, but his eyes just kept darting about in confusion. As if something were distracting him.

I’ve got points left.

So, I activated the Sweep skill on the oncoming soldiers. It was pretty effective against enemies who grouped together in big clumps like they were. The

drawback was that it lacked the power to punch through the gates, but that was all you could expect from a basic skill.

Ka-boom!

It was still lethal. The big explosion blew away all the soldiers in range.

The problem's that more keep coming.

I'd bought myself some time, though, so I turned and began opening the gates.

Creeeak!

It wasn't that hard to push the gates open with the gate bar removed, but it was normally a task for two soldiers. That made it that much more difficult for me.

Ultimately, I got the gates open. As I did, the enemy closed in again.

Attack command.

Attack command.

I started relying on the system to cut my enemies down. I met the enemy at the open gates. The gap between them was narrow, which prevented them from surrounding me, but things were still gradually getting out of hand.

An enemy avoided the Attack command and managed to graze my arm with their sword, sending a gush of blood flying.

"Urgh..."

I glanced at Jint, but he'd gone outside the gates completely and was watching from a position of safety. Once I saw they'd shed my blood, I accepted I was going to have no choice but to activate the bonus. The soldiers in front of me all had low Martial scores, but it wasn't looking like I could hold out against their sheer numbers.

One commander with a Martial of 61 can't possibly hold out against hundreds of men. But with a Martial of 91? That's another story!

As I repeatedly used the Attack command, Daitoren cut down enemies faster than the eye could see.

The problem's that the number of enemies keeps on growing as time goes by. But I'm almost there. If Yusen and Gibun keep to the plan, then I just need to hold out a little while longer!

And so I kept swinging Daitoren and holding out in the bloody battle that unfolded in front of the gates.

"Can you really make a miracle happen?" Jint asked from behind me in the middle of combat. "I've fought like you did before, back when I was trying to get Mirinae back, and I was miraculously able to save her. Watching you reminded me of that, and now that I see it my body's telling me I've got to help you out. It says, 'If he's willing to put his life on the line like this for a miracle, then try putting your faith in him!' Are you really going to keep your promise and make me and Mirinae happy, just like you got my ring back?"

"Leave it to me. I'll make that miracle happen here. For your and Mirinae's sake too. That's what I promised you!"

Once I shouted that, Jint leapt out in front of me.

Thanks to the mountain of bodies and the narrow gate slowing the enemy, he was able to find an opening to pick up a fallen enemy's sword and join the fray.

"I'll do whatever you ask if you keep your word. I'd give everything for a happy life with Mirinae. So, just this once, I'm going to believe in you. Now, let's see just how you're going to pull off a miracle here!"

Gwahhhhhh!

Jint swung his sword around, cutting down enemies one after another.

He's got a Martial of 93, an ability score that puts him near the very top in this world!

"So, to make Mirinae happy...all of you guys have to die!"

At that moment, the war fiend went wild. Jint faced a hundred soldiers with ease! Fountains of blood gushed forth—carnage under the moonlight. Enemy heads fell one after the other, too numerous to count. Once he drew his sword, he had the power to tear through anything in a single blow. His speed was on a whole other level too.

He's truly worth a hundred men!

I felt a laugh coming on.

Yeah, that's right. This is what outstanding talent looks like. This is the kind of superior personnel that I'll need if I'm going to unify the land.

I felt my chest heating up with excitement. Jint wasn't even using skills. In this world, having a Martial score of 93 meant that he had just that much mana built up inside him.

Does he not know how to use it?

His speed and power showed the mana accumulated in him, of course, but he didn't use skills to unleash it through his weapon.

Well, I can ask him later.

Jint spun around doing nothing but normal attacks as he lopped off enemy heads one after another. He massacred them like a manifestation of the grim reaper himself. Even if he took some minor cuts himself, his defense was ironclad, never allowing any strike to hit his vital points.

Thanks to his efforts, the volume of enemies reaching me dwindled. It gave me the leeway to defend the gates. He was fighting alone, but his Martial of 93 made all the difference. No soldier here had the power to oppose him.

There was a mysterious smoke, like some sort of heat haze, rising from his sword.

That's mana!

A loud trumpet sounded from inside Lynon Castle, and more soldiers began swarming us by the minute. Now it went far beyond the hundreds who had been closest to us at the beginning, and they were coming at us by the thousands.

"We'll fight together, Jint!"

"Together?"

I left the gates and ran to Jint's side.

I'm done buying time. If the miracle doesn't happen, then it means

something's gone wrong with the seeds I sowed with Yusen. And if so, the plan has failed.

If the miracle was going to happen, now was the time for it.

"What's wrong? Never had anyone who'd fight back-to-back with you before? Don't you think it'd be fun, facing down death together? I think it'll be a blast! Gah ha ha ha ha ha!"

I laughed like a madman as I matched my movements to Jint's. Our massacre quickly painted the ground before the gates crimson. I stood on ground Jint had already soaked with rivers of blood, taking advantage of the bonus to cut down enemies.

Around the time I slew my five hundredth soldier, I started hearing loud hoofbeats from outside the gate. I turned to find a unit of cavalry wearing blue uniforms—the Runan Kingdom's colors!

Yes. Thankfully, the miracle *had* happened. Yusen had followed the plan!

The man who led the cavalry's charge through the gates swung his spear at the enemy soldiers. Light rushed forth from the weapon—right onto the heads of the onrushing enemies! Hundreds of heads flew into the air, the light having swept them away like the grim reaper's scythe, every body spurting a fountain of blood.

"You're Count Erhin?"

What an incredible mana skill. I'd had no doubt that, if all went according to plan, and I held the gate open, our troops would come through it.

But this man's appearance caught me somewhat off guard.

Erheet Demacine

Age: 42

Martial: 96

Intelligence: 70

Command: 92

The Runan Kingdom's number one commander, Erheet the Demonspear!

Much like Naruya had the Ten Commanders, Erheet was the most famous man in the cesspool of corruption that was Runan. He was Duke Ronan's right hand man, and in the game's history, he'd followed his orders to defend the palace, fighting there alone until he died still standing on his feet.

"You have my respect for the fight you've put up. Now I, Erheet, will help you from here onwards!"

With that booming declaration, Erheet charged the enemy.

Guhhhh!

His spear slew many soldiers with each swing. That's just how amazing a Martial score of 96 was. Also, the cavalry unit following him had Training and Morale scores that put the rest of the Royal Runanese Army to shame.

"This is what you call a miracle...?" Jint asked, his back still pressed to mine.

"Well, miracles come in many forms," I replied with a shrug and a smirk.

*

After the fall of Lynon Castle, while Erhin was still biding his time in the dungeon, Jend, Lord of Bern, rushed into Bern Castle's meeting room with a sense of urgency.

"Commander! Commander!" he cried. He must have run some distance, because he was out of breath.

"This is terrible!" he cried. "L-Lynon Castle has fallen!"

Hearing this death sentence from the castellan, Commander-in-Chief Ronan had to grip the table to support himself from the onslaught of a sudden dizzying headache.

"Commander!"

"Where's Heina...?! What's she been doing when she was supposed to be defending the castle?!"

"We've received word by carrier pigeon that the advisor is currently withdrawing to the rear with her troops!"

“She’s retreating after failing to defend Lynon Castle?!” Ronan roared, slamming both his palms down on the table.

This wasn’t just an issue for Bern Castle anymore. If Ganen and Lynon had both fallen, Bern would be isolated. Without Lynon Castle behind them, they wouldn’t be free to bring in supplies anymore.

“How can we fall to the enemy like this?! What about the future of the Runan Kingdom?!”

One of Ronan’s aides, who had been listening to him vent as he was faced with the worst possible situation, cautiously suggested their own withdrawal.

“For now, I suspect we should pull back from Bern Castle... As things stand, we’ll be isolated here, and if that were to happen the country would truly be finished. Shouldn’t we pull back to the strategic pass leading into the capital and reorganize before the enemy prepare themselves?!”

“Is that the only way...?” Ronan said, shaking his head. It was true, though, that any delay now would complicate the withdrawal. In fact, if the enemy isolated Bern Castle and then advanced on the capital, they really might lose everything.

After a long pause, Ronan finally said, “Prepare to withdraw.”

It was the only choice he could make.

Ronan was leading his own personal troops, the elite soldiers of the Ducal House of Ronan, one of the major noble families. They were one of the few elite units in the Kingdom of Runan. Obviously, he hadn’t trained these men for war, but to maintain his own political power. Had he been thinking about war, he’d have put together a large scale military force instead of a small, elite unit.

Regardless, Duke Ronan had been prepared to fight to the death defending the homeland with his men, but the enemy had seen that and chose to bypass Bern Castle to take Ganen and Lynon instead.

Lynon Castle was right next to Bern Castle.

Because of that, the slightest delay would leave them stranded in the palm of the enemy’s hand.

Ronan put together a plan to abandon Bern Castle and pass Lynon Castle as they withdrew to the capital. Anyway, because they were so well trained, they were able to rapidly begin pulling out. Then, as they were passing Lynon Castle, someone appeared, standing in their way.

It was Yusen.

“Who are you?!”

Despite wearing the same uniform, Yusen was immediately seized for suspicious behavior. Yusen identified himself and requested a meeting with Ronan saying he had something important to discuss.

Obviously, the idea of them letting a mere hundredman meet the commander-in-chief was laughable.

“Is that you, Yusen?”

Fortunately for Yusen, one of the commanding officers recognized him. It was a spot of luck made possible by his two decades of military service.

“Commander!”

“What are you doing here?”

“I have something important to discuss. It involves the retaking of Lynon Castle. Time is of the essence, so could I ask you to arrange a meeting with the commander-in-chief and explain it to him personally?!”

“Retaking Lynon Castle? What in the world...?”

The commanding officer was noncommittal, but Yusen still clung to the man for help.

“I absolutely need to run this by him. If he’s unable to meet me, I’ll give up. So, please, pass him a message, at least!”

“Hmm... If it has to do with retaking Lynon Castle, we can’t ignore it. Wait a moment.”

The commanding officer who had recognized Yusen nodded, then reported what had happened to the commander-in-chief.

“Commander! One of our hundredmen has something urgent to tell you

about Lynon Castle. I can vouch for his identity. It seemed important, and he's requesting to speak to you personally, sir. He's one of my former subordinates, and not one to tell tall tales. He says it involves retaking Lynon Castle. Will hear him out?"

"Retaking Lynon Castle? Has Heina come up with a plan, then?"

"He says every moment counts, so he wants to tell you himself."

"Bring him at once!"

This would have been unthinkable in peacetime, but the current situation changed everything. If a commoner in the capital had blocked his path saying they needed to talk to him, Ronan would have knocked their head off, but things were different now. He summoned Yusen immediately.

As soon as he was before the commander-in-chief, Yusen got down on his knees, pressed his forehead to the ground, and started shouting.

"Commander! I'm sorry to barge in, but I bring urgent news!"

"What is it? Talk."

With Ronan's permission, Yusen explained.

"The commander of the supply unit, Count Eintorian, is currently engaged in hostilities at Lynon Castle. He ordered me to meet you here as you passed Lynon Castle and deliver the message personally."

"What? Count Eintorian?"

Not Heina, but Erhin? That wasn't a name he'd expected to hear. Having given Heina the order to dispose of the man due to his reputation for incompetence, Ronan cocked his head to the side at this.

"You're saying that man predicted I would be passing through here at this very moment?"

"Precisely, sir!"

His prediction was that, once word of Ganen Castle and Lynon Castle reached them, the defenders of Bern Castle would move to the strategic pass leading to the capital to avoid isolation.

It was something Erhin could see coming because he knew from history that Lynon Castle would fall.

And his prediction came true.

“When you say that he’s engaged in hostilities, what do you mean exactly?”

“Well... Count Eintorian infiltrated Lynon Castle alone. He’s going to open the north gate at night, when most of the enemy are drunk after their victory!”

“You fool! What is this nonsense you’re talking?!” Ronan shouted at the absurdity of it.

Even late at night, there would be sentries. They’d quickly rouse the others and defend the castle. That much was obvious. That would mean opening the gates while facing thousands of enemies. The story was totally unbelievable, of course.

“You’re not an enemy agent, trying to lure my forces into Lynon Castle, are you?” Ronan’s tone turned harsh, full of suspicion towards Yusen.

“Perish the thought, sir. I’ve served the Runan Kingdom all my life. I don’t care if I die due to your suspicion of me. But I want you to send soldiers to the open gates so that the risk Count Eintorian is taking isn’t in vain. This is all part of his plan. I have a letter for you here. Please, if nothing else, could you at least confirm for yourself that the gates have been opened?!” Yusen shouted desperately as he thrust the letter towards Ronan. He’d struck his head on the ground so hard that blood was running down his forehead.

Ronan read the letter first. It spelled out the details of the plan, but he still couldn’t believe it.



It would be completely impossible to open the gates and then hold out there alone.

“Count Eintorian wields mana. If he can get the gate open, he can hold it for some time,” Yusen opined, thinking back to the displays of martial prowess he’d seen from Erhin.

Even if it cost him his life, even if he had to end his own life right here, he meant to get Erhin’s message across. It was the least he could do to repay him.

“The Count of Eintorian, a mana-wielder? Absurd...!” Ronan was saying with obvious exasperation when Erheet, who had been watching in silence all this time, spoke up.

“But Commander, if the gates truly do open... We can’t afford to miss this opportunity. Or to waste the loyalty of the man who fought to the death to open them!”

“Could it be... Were the rumors around Erhin mistaken?”

As Ronan cocked his head to the side thoughtfully, Yusen realized it was time to push the issue.

“Please, just see for yourself! If he can manage to open the gates, it should be more than possible to retake Lynon Castle like he describes in the letter!”

“Well, yes, that is true...” Ronan said, stroking his chin.

He worried about the possibility of the enemy opening the gates themselves to lay a trap—in short, the possibility Yusen was an agent of their adversaries—but it seemed unlikely. The enemy had already taken Lynon Castle. Would they really give up the inbuilt advantages of a siege battle to lure in Runan’s elite troops? No matter how many enemy soldiers inside the castle were armed with bows, his forces still vastly outnumbered them. They’d be in danger the moment the gates opened. Assuming the enemy were to employ such a reckless strategy, they’d be giving him a chance to retake the castle instead.

“I’ll check the gates. Could I ask you to prepare a hundred men for me? If the gates are open, I’ll send up a smoke signal to inform you,” Erheet, who had been earnestly listening to Yusen, proposed.

He felt that, if Erhin really was putting his life on the line, then he ought to rescue his comrade as a fellow Runanese commander. He also thought that any man whose subordinate would risk their life pleading for him like this deserved to be trusted.

“Besides, if he truly can use mana at will, then we’ll need him in this war.”

Ronan thought about the proposal a moment before nodding. He felt it was worth trying, at least. If the gates were closed, then all they had to do was continue their march to the capital as originally planned.

“Fine. Go check it out at once!”

“Understood!”

After seeing Erheet off, Ronan gave the order to all his troops.

“We advance on Lynon Castle!”

*

Duke Ronan would retreat from Bern Castle in shame, and his forces would pass by the enemy-occupied Lynon Castle but be too intent on their flight to do anything about. That was history as the game told it. His forces were the numbers that I desperately needed for the retaking of Lynon Castle.

That’s why I bet everything on Yusen.

Of course, the best outcome would have been if Duke Ronan attacked Lynon Castle on his own and I happened to be there to appear and open the gate for him. That would’ve freed me from the need to fight to keep the gates open until my allies arrived.

But alas, I wasn’t so well trusted that he was going to attack Lynon Castle on my word alone. That necessitated opening the gate first and having the duke see for himself that I had. That was the core of this operation!

“We keep fighting for now. Lynon Castle’s not back in our hands just yet!” I said to Jint, never letting up on the Attack command.

Jint, Erheet, and me.

Now that three A-class characters, each with a Martial score over 90, had

taken control of the battlefield, the enemy lost a lot of their momentum.

“Who are you people?! How can you do this with so few men?! Kill them and close the damn gates! Hurry!” the enemy officer roared.

His stats weren’t all that impressive. He didn’t have Erheet or Jint’s martial prowess. Still, it remained a fact that the enemy had more troops.

“Everyone, gather at the gates! Can I ask you to come too, lieutenant general?”

I was planning to join up with Erheet’s forces and hold off the enemy’s attack at the gates. His arrival meant that it was just a matter of time now.

“Let’s do it!” Erheet nodded as he took an enemy’s head, joining me to gather our forces at the gates. The enemy were quick to surround us. It looked like the entire enemy force, numbering over ten thousand men, were all awake now. Jint and Erheet were massacring enemies in front of the gate, but the area was already awash in enemies.

“Do you have a plan, perhaps?” Erheet asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “If my man Yusen has properly conveyed the plan, then the enemy gathering here is actually favorable for us. They’ll make for easier targets.”

“I see how it is,” Erheet responded, intrigued.

“I’ll kill them all and surpass the commander-in-chief’s accomplishments! Gah ha ha ha ha!” the enemy officer shouted, roaring with raucous laughter.

“Don’t be silly. Try looking up!”

The moment I said that, it got bright on top of the walls. Our forces had lit torches. This had been my last instruction to Yusen. A rain of arrows immediately fell towards the enemy. Terrible screams echoed through the castle. There was nothing they could do but fall prey to the arrows.

“Begin the attack!”

Not long after, a unit of cavalry charged through the gates.

The one who’d given the order to attack was none other than Duke Ronan,

commander-in-chief of the Runan Kingdom, himself.

Exterminating the enemy was now in sight!

When dawn came to Lynon Castle, it was in Runanese hands once more.

*

Back in the capital, the king was raging.

“Those damned imbeciles. If they were going to lose like this, maybe we should have just surrendered from the beginning?”

He had been shouting all night since word came that Lynon Castle had fallen.

“This won’t do. It’s too dangerous here. I’ll abandon the capital and go to the south.”

Count Bordey opposed this idea.

“Sire, the capital is the safest place in the kingdom. Evacuating elsewhere will not help... Besides, in addition to the forces down south that haven’t joined up with us yet, we’ve also sent a request to our allies for support, so it would be better to remain here in capital...”

“Would you shut up?! The state only survives if I survive!”

Sadly, the king was only thinking of his own life. Even if they seized his territory, he didn’t care so long as he made it out all right.

“Curse that Ronan. He said he could defend me. And some ‘Demonspear’ Erheet is. How pathetic. Prepare to retreat at once. Hurry!”

The king got off his throne with a sense of nervous alacrity and began jumping around. In the midst of this, the Captain of the Royal Guard rushed into the room.

“Y-Your Majesty!”

“What is it now? No... Don’t tell me the capital itself is already threatened!”

If the Captain of the Royal Guard was rushing into the room, that meant he had something to report. The king blanched.

“Good news, sire! We’ve just received word that Lynon Castle has been

retaken!”

“What?”

The king’s tremulous expression changed. The other nobles gathered in the audience chamber reacted in much the same way.

“So soon after it fell? Was the report of its fall in error?” Count Bordey asked as the king kept blinking, completely at a loss for words.

“That’s not it. The reports say that after the castle fell it was retaken due to the efforts of Count Eintorian!”

The Captain of the Royal Guard handed the king the report which he began reading. Soon, the king smiled and erupted into boisterous laughter.

“Pfft ha ha ha ha! Pfft ha ha ha! Look at this! Look at it!” the king shouted at his nobles, laughing. “What do you say to that? The report says Count Eintorian, who *I* summoned, retook Lynon Castle! What do you fools who opposed me on it due to his reputation have to say to that?! Can you still oppose my decision now?! Pfft ha ha ha! I was right!”

It was true the king had decided to summon Erhin on his own.

The king had been ready to desert the capital at any moment, but now he ran around the room with excitement.

“There’s no time to waste. Order them to make Count Eintorian an advisor in the Royal Army at once! Hurry!”

It was unquestionably the king himself who had put the kingdom in this position in the first place, but he gave orders as though this victory was somehow his own accomplishment.

*

The third highest rank in the Royal Runanese Army: advisor! That's the rank they appointed me to for retaking Lynon Castle.

Heina was dismissed. She had pleaded to the end that I should be punished for insubordination, but it did her no good. When I knelt down and acknowledged I had gone against her orders, Ronan decided to treat it as if I were acting under the king's command and not charge me with a crime.

At long last, I was finally able to control the entire military and fight the Royal Naruyan Army without anyone getting in my way!

Obviously, the first order of business was to drive the Naruyans off as soon as possible.

That will buy me some time. No matter the country, it always takes a while after one war ends before they're ready to start another because of the supply issue and the need to replenish and train their manpower. In the game's original timeline, it was a year after the Royal Naruyan Army subjugated the Runan Kingdom before their king started the Grand Subjugation.

In the game, one year after the fall of the Runan Kingdom, Naruya launched what was called the Grand Subjugation, a campaign to unify the land using the vast numbers of troops that Naruya had cultivated.

The Naruyan king's only just taken the throne. It'll obviously take time for him to raise an army of tens of thousands. So I'll have time to build up Eintorian's power once this war ends.

From what I had been able to find out after retaking Lynon Castle, none of the Ten Commanders had been involved in the battle. For some reason, the enemy hadn't seen fit to send them along on the invasion from the north.

"The King of Naruya is likely testing himself. Still, as embarrassing as it was to lose to an experimental invasion like that, His Majesty should be thinking about preparing for war now. Our allies will have noticed Naruya's ambitions too, so they'll be easy to persuade. So, we just have to overcome the current crisis!"

That was the reasoning Ronan gave me when I asked him why. It had been

less than a year since the new king took the throne, but word of his ambition had already spread across the continent. Ronan's view was that he sent in the army he had developed over the last year without the Ten Commanders to see how they'd do.

Of course, he didn't seem to have any intelligence to back that theory up.

If the Runan Kingdom had that kind of espionage ability, they wouldn't have lost without being able to put up a fight. Anyways, the key thing here is that the Ten Commanders aren't in this war. They didn't participate in the war in the game either. There's no way to know the exact details of why not at the moment. But the reason doesn't matter. All that matters is defeating the invaders. If the Ten Commanders aren't around, then the only one we need to watch out for is the enemy strategist!

*

Experience List

B-class Strategy x2

I got a B for strategy.

The plan had a high degree of risk, since if Duke Ronan didn't send troops, we couldn't have taken back the castle. If I'd retaken Lynon Castle without relying on the duke for backup, maybe I'd have gotten a higher grade, but there's no point speculating about that. It was impossible to do it without joining up with the Royal Army.

You are now Lv. 13.

Regardless, I still went up two levels. Level-ups are calculated off a base experience value, and then modifiers are applied. The base value is simply how many enemies you kill. If one of those enemies has a higher Martial than you, that adds a multiplier in this system.

This time, I killed a lot of enemies because I fought by myself for an extended period instead of leading troops.

You received level up points.

Points in reserve: 500

I gained 400 points. I spent some of my reserve points to use skills, so those 400 were added to a remaining pool of 100. Since I've got more points now, I'll immediately put some into enhancing my Martial.

Will you enhance your Martial? It will cost 300 points.

Your Martial is now 62.

It's only a small increase, but it's important to build it up one step at a time. Soon enough, I'll have a score of 70. That leaves me with 200 points. I plan to hold them in reserve for now.

*

Valdesca Frann slammed his head down on the desk. Then he picked his head up once again, a dazed look on his face. His forehead was turning red. Even in spite of this, he smacked the desk with it again, and it got even redder. Mert jumped a little every time as he watched on.

Valdesca's always like this, thought Mert. *He engages in self-harm when something's bothering him.*

That's why he couldn't stop the duke. He could only watch.

Slam!

Frann smacked his head against the desk once more before shaking off the pain. This was all because the enemy took back Lynon Castle.

His plan had been perfect, but some incomprehensible actions on the enemy's part allowed them to retake the castle. The enemy acted almost as if they *knew* Lynon Castle was going to fall in one night.

Their victory hadn't been mere happenstance. Acting in a manner that suggested they knew the Naruyans' plan, the Runanese had used Ronan's

forces which were retreating from Bern Castle to take back Lynon Castle.

“By the way, I believe I asked you for intelligence on Runan’s new advisor.”

“About that. We gathered information, and everything was as expected.”

“The lord of Eintorian, the commander of the supply unit, and the person who retook Lynon Castle. It was all him?”

“Indeed, it was!”

The diversionary attack on Eintorian, the surprise attack on the supply unit, the seizure of Lynon Castle—this man was present for all three of these failures. He’d swept the legs out from under them. It was thanks to him that the enemy had concentrated their manpower up in the north too, instead of dispersing their forces in response to the advance party’s attack on Eintorian as originally planned.

“Commander... What do we do now that they’ve retaken Lynon Castle...?”

If things had gone accordingly, they should have been in the Runanese capital by now. Valdesca clenched his fist as he came to one, firm resolution.

“Have no fear. I never thought we’d need to use the House of Frann’s power against the Runan Kingdom, but this time we’re going to win!”

*

Having taken Castle Bern without bloodshed, the Royal Naruyan Army advanced on Lynon Castle.

Royal Naruyan Army

Manpower: 48,720 men

Training: 80

Morale: 60

The Royal Naruyan Army invaded with seventy thousand troops, but they’d lost over twenty thousand in the raid on the supply unit and the battle at Lynon Castle. Their initial Morale of 80 had plummeted by 20 points too.

The Naruyan troops encamped outside Lynon Castle immediately launched a

total offensive.

They need to take Lynon Castle to take the capital because if they ignore the castle, it'll cause problems for their supply lines later. That would leave them isolated between Lynon Castle and the capital. You can't fight a war on an empty stomach, so if they can't take Lynon Castle and secure their supply lines, there's not even any point in advancing on the capital.

Considering that, I could understand the total offensive. I still had my questions about the way they were doing it, though.

"Their attacks are too simple. And it's suspicious how they've concentrated the attack on the north gates too... This could be a diversion."

"A diversion, you say?"

"It's possible. Let's divide our forces. Concentrating ourselves in the north to answer their focused attack isn't our best move. We should have men at every gate. Also, though we've blocked it off, we can't overlook the underground waterway either. We need to continue searching all of Lynon Castle."

That was my proposal at the commanders' meeting. Ronan adopted my idea, and left me in charge of the north gate. With the meeting finished, I returned to the intensely contested north gates.

The enemy's continuing their simplistic attack. It's a little too...orthodox, you might say. Pound on the gates with siege weapons, and use ladders to climb over the walls.

Their tactics were all too common. The attack was still focused on the north gates and the area around them. Honestly, we didn't have the spare manpower to split up. If we ran short of men, they'd smash through the north gates. Still, the enemy strategist would think of that too, so it was essential that we keep investigating all of Lynon Castle.

Which is why I'll have to make up for our manpower shortage in other ways.

"We'll destroy the enemy battering rams. Pour the molten iron!"

"Yes, sir, Advisor!"

After making the proposal to Ronan, I had the weapons of our fallen enemies

melted down and turned to molten iron. We had former blacksmiths among the soldiers at Lynon Castle, and a lot of smithies for them to work in, so there was no problem getting it done.

The rams burst into flames as soon as the molten metal touched them!

The plan takes advantage of the way molten iron can burn up wood in an instant. It's way faster than setting them alight with flaming arrows.

"We'll burn the ladders with liquid metal! The longer this drags on, the worse our position will be!"

Burning their rams and ladders would inevitably sap the enemy's enthusiasm. If we could manage to do that, then it would be our turn to go on the offensive.

Yeahhhhhh!

With the siege weapons destroyed, our side's morale rose. The focused attack on the north gates bogged down, and the enemy were forced to withdraw.

"Don't let your guards down! It's not over yet!" I shouted to my men, watching the enemy's movements.

Eventually, the retreating soldiers came to a stop.

They're out of bow range.

"Huh?"

That's when twenty men carrying big shields advanced on the gates. They were all protecting a single man. This move was incomprehensible to me.

Once the man reached the castle gates, he looked up from the center of the group and shouted, "Are you Erhin Eintorian?"

He was looking straight at me.

The enemy already knew my face.

Well, there were plenty of survivors of the Naruyan attack on the supply unit, so nothing to be surprised about there. I just want to know what this situation is.

"Yes, and?"

I could say one thing for sure: I now knew who the strategist tormenting Runan was.

“I’m terribly sorry, but you’ll have to die!”

As he shouted that, a massive mana circle appeared before him—a powerful one, radiating golden light.

*

Valdesca Frann

Age: 28

Martial: 90

Intelligence: 96

Command: 90

His abilities are straight-As! How is he so unparalleled?! And just look at that magic circle!

There were two ways of manifesting mana, and this was the other. It involved complicated formulas in the creation of a mana circle, and while it was normal for mana circles to be far more powerful than weapon-based mana skills, they needed to be created in advance to be activated. That meant they had the drawback of requiring preparation, but we’d been fighting at the north gates a long time. He must’ve finished the mana circle while we were.

Which meant this battle at the north gates was, in fact, a distraction, but that was entirely within the realm of expectation. It was the entire reason why I’d reduced our manpower here and had our men patrolling the entirety of Lynon Castle to prevent whatever the enemy strategist was planning.

“In the end, victory will be Naruya’s!” he declared, full of confidence.

Well, he was right to be confident.

He’s delayed our forces at the north gate!

Even with some of our forces sent elsewhere, the largest group was still here at the north gates. I couldn’t see Ronan being able to defend Lynon Castle alone after repeatedly losing to this guy. As he raised his hand, the entire enemy force

behind him split into two.

They'll be heading for the east and west gates.

It looked like the only way to stop him now was to destroy the mana circle. The problem was that the moment he used it, his Martial score rose from 90 to 99. Once it triggered, it went back to 90.

That means his Martial score is 99 with the mana circle, and 90 without it. It's the same logic as how I have a Martial of 92 with the bonus, but an effective Martial of 97 when I use Crush.

That meant the barrier I was seeing in front of me had a Martial of 99, and my Martial 97 Crush couldn't break it.

"Gibun, you calm the men! Have it done by the time I get back!"

I'd deployed Yusen and Jint on other missions, so I gave Gibun his orders and then raced down to the gates.

Valdesca Frann's magic circle, huh?

I felt like I was finally starting to get a grasp of what it was.

It's because the game actually starts on the day of Naruya's Grand Subjugation, one year from now.

This was all stuff from before the game started. It was explained in the game, but for whatever reason, Valdesca's name never came up there. This was the true identity of the character who was only identified as the Royal Naruyan Army's strategist. The great nation that once held dominion over the continent, the Ancient Eintorian Kingdom, was ruled by the Twelve Continental Families and the Royal House of Eintorian.

Nothing is forever, of course. As the kingdom waned, it splintered, and each of the Twelve Continental Families created a country of their own. Naruya, Runan, Matein, and the others had originated with the Twelve Families. The House of Frann were also one of the Twelve Families and, together with Naruya, had built the Naruya Kingdom. The king of Naruya with his S-class mana, the Ten Commanders of Naruya with A-class stats, and then Valdesca Frann—these people were the reason why, even in the game, the Naruya

Kingdom was the strongest force on the continent, and served as a sort of final boss.

Still, while I knew who Valdesca was, I'd never predicted that *he* was the enemy strategist because he only really became a significant presence in the game's history in the second half. I only remembered him because I knew the second half of the scenario, but I'd had no idea he was present from so early on.

Well, forget all that for now!

"Stop! Valdesca Frann!"

When I went down to the gates and shouted his name, Valdesca approached me with a dubious look.

"How do you know my name? It hasn't been made public yet, even in Naruya."

"Well, it wouldn't be fair if you knew me but I didn't know you, now, would it? I'd rather you not underestimate me."

"I don't know what sort of intelligence gathering capabilities you possess, but you're finished now. To the best of my knowledge, no one could destroy this mana circle but His Majesty himself!"

I shook my head at this confident declaration.

"Valdesca Frann! You're so full of yourself! This isn't over yet!"

The mana circle had a Martial value of 99. There was no way to destroy it, not immediately. But I had the system on my side.

His Martial score is extremely high. That means that, yes, there is a way! A system I can use on high-Martial commanders!

So, facing him with total confidence, I shouted, "One-on-one!"

Will you challenge your opponent to a one-on-one battle?

I activated the system's One-on-One command! Such was the system I had access to—the commands I'd used in the game worked in this world too. The dueling mechanic was an element that was present in the game I'd been

playing, and in others like it. There were lots of similar one-on-one duels in the Sengoku Period too.

This world's no different from the Sengoku Period. Lots of countries have fractured apart and are battling in order to form one country. That's why there need to be one-on-one fights.

Still, there were lots of situations in the game where it wouldn't allow you to use One-on-One. That's because, normally, you'd want to challenge commanders who were weaker than yours to single combat. In cases like that, the game prohibited One-on-One activation, with a few exceptions in special circumstances where it did allow it.

For that reason, it was a useless command in a lot of ways. Seriously, who would challenge a commander who was stronger than them to single combat? But when a weaker commander used One-on-One against a stronger one, it always activated. Yes, one hundred percent of the time!

That was my current plan.

My Martial's 62. Valdesca's is 90. And the system only applies to me.

I figured that meant so long as a weaker person challenged a stronger one, I would meet the conditions to activate it! Additionally, One-on-One created a space in the game where only the two characters existed—a One-on-One arena!

Once that zone manifests, it should let me out of his seal!

Things went as expected. As soon as I activated One-on-One, the area around us went dark. In that instant, the golden light of the barrier shattered, and blue walls formed around me and Valdesca. The arena for our exclusive battle had formed!

"Wh-What?"

Valdesca's face twisted in shock as he looked around the space, despite showing no change before this.

"H-How...?!"

At last, his gaze fell on me, shaken. He seemed pretty confused by what was

going on.

“You destroyed my circle...? What in the world...?”

The system’s powers just look like mana to the people of this world. That means, to him, I apparently just used more powerful mana than he has!

I approached Valdesca who had a grim look on his face.

“The King of Naruya is the King of Destruction. He is a being that brings calamity to this world. Do you accept that path?”

“It is the duty of House Frann!” Valdesca shouted before adding, “But what is this...?!”

Will you use the bonus?

Now I just have to take him on. There’s no way I’m gonna be recruiting him given the House of Frann’s deep ties to Naruya!

That being the case, the sooner it was done the better.

Never give a mana circle user time in a fight. It’ll be a pain if he manages to make one. Now’s my chance, while he’s still confused.

I gripped Daitoren and charged Valdesca.

Without the mana circle, his Martial’s 90.



Only a bit higher than mine with the bonus!

On top of that, as he was now, Valdesca was too unnerved to respond to my attacks. He hadn't yet recovered from the shock of his magic circle being broken.

I'm going to finish off the man who accounts for a good third of the Naruya Kingdom's combat potential here and now!

My sword was drawing closer to him—but that's exactly when it happened!

"Your Highness!"

Suddenly, three men appeared in front of him.

Here, in the One-on-One space?!

"Defend His Highness!" one of the men shouted, and the other two sprang towards me.

They appeared to be retainers of the House of Frann.

In that case, I'll use Crush!

I took aim at Valdesca. Daitoren flew straight towards him with a beam of white light. His two subordinates who'd moved between us fell, but not before Valdesca and the man beside him disappeared with a red magic circle!

They'd disappeared just as suddenly as they'd appeared.

Shit! I wanted to finish off him no matter what. But how was I supposed to stop him teleporting like that?

It was the same type of magic as the magic circle used to store the gold beneath Eintorian Castle.

I think he'd used an item similar to the pendant that I used to get inside the vault, but the House of Frann were students of mana. They'd spent over a thousand years researching it. I couldn't really complain that I'd had no countermeasures.

I'll just have to get stronger. That's all.

The mana circle he'd used had a Martial value of 99, while Crush only let me

handle Martial scores of up to 97.

Once I raise my Martial another two points, I won't have anything to be afraid of!

The one other saving grace was that Crush's knock-out effect lasted for five hours. That was more than enough time to drive off the rest of the enemies without Valdesca around.

*

Valdesca awoke from his wanderings in the abyss. He had a splitting headache.

"Ungh...!"

The retainer who'd saved him knelt before him.

"Your Excellency!"

"Mert...?"

The moment he saw his retainer Mert, he knew why he'd awakened here.

"Did you use the Frann family treasure?"

"It was the only way to save you, sir. I will accept any punishment!"

The ancient treasure contained a mana circle that the House of Frann had created over the course of a millennium. Because of their powerful mana, such treasures each had their own unique characteristics.

"Then...the treasure was destroyed, I suppose."

"Yes... I'm terribly sorry!"

"Well, it's no matter. You've done nothing wrong. It's my own fault for not knowing my opponent... More importantly, our forces!"

"Again, I'm terribly sorry, but without knowing when you might awaken, I couldn't have them remain on the field... This is Loen, along the Naruyan border."

Loen. That was the first domain they had stationed their troops in for this invasion. They had started from there and taken the northern domains of the

Runan Kingdom one by one.

"..."

Valdesca ground his teeth.

He even got me. There's no way our forces could hold out against such a man without their commander-in-chief.

"Order all our forces to retreat! We should withdraw at once. Send the messengers out immediately. We must save every soldier we can..."

"Understood, sir!"

It was a total defeat. He'd lost in every way. Valdesca quivered.

Erhin Eintorian. To think there was such a man in the Runan Kingdom. One who could not only defeat me, but destroy my magic circle as well!

"Next time, if there is a next time... I swear..."

Slam!

Valdesca slammed his head against the wall as he muttered.

*

Their commander-in-chief, Valdesca Frann, had vanished. That alone sent the Royal Naruyan Army into a state of panic. There were a number of officers who served under Valdesca, but none were as capable as he was. By the time they learned the strategist had fled in defeat, they had already lost much of their manpower.

"Retreat! Pull back!"

By the time the commanders ordered their troops to retreat, their manpower had been reduced to eighteen thousand men. The Royal Naruyan Army abandoned not just Bern Castle and Ganen Castle, but all of the occupied territories and began to withdraw.

Yusen and Gibun laid in ambush along their retreat. That cost them further manpower losses, and when they finally managed to escape, they headed for Ruon Castle, to the relative safety of the supply base there.

"Open the gates!"

When they arrived at Ruon Castle and saw the royal flag of Naruya and the ducal flag of House Frann flapping in the wind, the Royal Naruyan Army breathed a sigh of relief as they entered the castle. Setting down their weapons, they began relaxing here and there. Their flight had been just that desperate. And as soon as they'd let their guard down, a thousand soldiers wearing the Naruyan military uniform assaulted them.

"Kill them all!"

Fully exhausted and without a strategist like Valdesca, the Royal Naruyan Army were mercilessly slaughtered.

Furthermore, at the head of that unit of one thousand troops, wearing the garb of a common Naruyan soldier, was the head of House Demacine of the Runan Kingdom, Erheet Demacine.

When the mightiest warrior in Runan swung his spear, the troops who had already been thoroughly exhausted when they entered the castle fell before him, unable to fight properly. Those who'd remained outside were so astounded that they gave up on the supplies there and fled.

Without the crafty tactician Valdesca, the Royal Naruyan Army received a one-sided beatdown.

Erheet, who had led this surprise attack, let the enemy flee and closed the gates.

"We aren't going to pursue them, lieutenant commander?"

"That won't be necessary. Everything's gone as the advisor said. As such, I should continue following the plan he laid out. We'll seize the enemy supplies. They're already in the palm of the advisor's hand. There's nothing to worry about."

When he first told me to lie in wait here, not join in the battle at Lynon Castle, even though the castle must be in danger, I thought it was an absurd idea. But ultimately, everything went just as planned.

"I'll have to share a drink with him once the enemy are eliminated. Yes, we'll drink all night long!"

Erheet was sincerely pleased to see a man of such unusual talents had appeared beneath Runanese skies.

Final Chapter: War Without End

The enemy were wiped out. We were greeted with applause on our return to the capital. My only remaining task was an audience with the king. I couldn't declare myself independent yet, so there was no way out of it.

A gaudy throne of gleaming gold.

Unlike the declining Runan Kingdom, the throne still sparkled.

It feels almost paradoxical.

I bowed before the king as I took in this sight.

"So you're Count Eintorian, are you? I was right about you. I knew you would protect the country! Ha ha ha!

The greasy king showered me with words of praise. It was almost like he wanted to say *he* was the one who'd won this war.

"I certainly defeated our enemies, but I couldn't possibly say I defended the country. The soldiers were able to fight their hardest because you were here, Your Majesty. This was all thanks to your power!"

Obviously, there was no need to rub him the wrong way right now, so I gave the king the response he wanted to hear. He let out a big laugh, pleased with my response.

"Ha ha ha! I like you. Oh, I really do. If you continue to save my country, I wouldn't even mind giving you the title of duke. I expect great things from you!"

Duke. That's one of the highest ranks in the nobility. Basically, the king's trying to ingratiate me to him. But what I want is to be king myself.

I had an opportunity to take over this world, and the system was letting me make it a reality. The system had sent me to this world to "go for glory." That likely meant something along the lines of, "we're giving you this system to work with, so go conquer the world."

If I chose not to strive for glory, whatever that meant, I had no guarantee that

my current lifestyle would continue indefinitely. The system might disappear, I might go back to my ordinary life...or I might even die.

That'd be the worst.

I wasn't about to miss such an exciting opportunity.

Even if there's no telling when I might die on the battlefield, this is still way better than the monotony of the real world!

I would conquer the world for my own ideals. Even if I failed and died, that was still millions of times better than living an uneventful life.

So, a ducal title in Runan means nothing to me.

"Thank you, sire. If you call for me, I will come to your side at once."

Obviously, I still needed to stay in the king's good graces for now, so I knelt down and gave him that response. Ronan, among many of the other nobles present, were visibly displeased with what the king had just said to me.

That probably means they're not going to let their own power be eroded. The only simpleton here's the king.

"Do you really mean to return? Why not leave your lands to your retainers and stay here in the center of the nation?"

After the audience ended, Ronan began subtly probing me with questions.

He can't possibly want me staying here to amass power.

"No, I'd still like to see to my domain," I responded.

"I see. I won't stop you, in that case. Come to me if you change your mind," Ronan said blithely with a nod of his head.

But I had no interest in the power struggles of the capital. I needed to develop my own nation.

There're the countries of the south, and Naruya in the north—powerful enemies abound. I plan to have Runan keep shielding me until Eintorian's able to build up enough power. If Runan is destroyed in Naruya's Grand Subjugation, Eintorian will appear on the world stage during the resulting chaos. I just have

to bide my time and wait until then.

Of course, when that time came, I would be the lord who started from Eintorian, one small city among many, and went on to unite the entire continent. There were many cities represented by circles and squares on the game's map, and I was going to start with just one of them.

There's too much I need to do. I've got a year from when I return to Eintorian.

This coming year felt like it was going to be the most important. Everything would start from here. Fortunately, I gained a lot from participating in this war. First of all, Yusen and Gibun. They came of their own volition and knelt before me.

"Will you accept us as your subordinates?"

"What're you talking about? You already are."

"I heard you would be leaving the Royal Army. But how am I to serve at your side if you do that? If you'll take me as your retainer, I'll give my life for you!"

"As will I!"

The two of them spoke as one. And they were telling me just what I wanted to hear, of course.

"Are you both serious?"

"Of course!"

"Even if the result is betraying Runan?"

That was the most important bit. When I made that nebulous statement, they both exchanged glances. Then, they answered in unison.

"A retainer of a noble house follows their lord's commands!"

And so, Yusen and Gibun became my retainers. That was three recruits, including Jint. It wasn't just new personnel I gained, but also time and fame. That meant I was right to join in the war.

And with those results, I returned home to Eintorian.

*

Some time earlier, Euracia was watching the war, just like she had been asked to. It was currently dawn on a day in the middle of the battle for Lynon Castle. She'd appeared before Yusen as he ran north to meet Ronan.

That's because Yusen had run into one of the units of the Royal Naruyan Army scattered around the northern regions. She'd been cutting down Naruyan soldiers one after another.

Runan's an ally of Rozern, after all. It's not wrong of me to join the battle.

"Thank you! You really saved me! But who are you?" Yusen asked but she shook her head.

"I was just asked to do this by the Lord of Eintorian. Don't mind me. Carry on and do as you must."

Euracia spoke impassively as she faced the onrushing soldiers. Yusen hesitated a moment, looking at her, but then hurried on to meet with Ronan. Euracia watched him go before keeping the enemy busy for a little while and then retreating. She found a high hill nearby which she could use to watch the battle at Lynon Castle from a distance. She wasn't sure why, but watching Erhin fight when he was surrounded by the enemy made her blood boil.

If there had been a man of his will and mental fortitude in Rozern, her father, the king, wouldn't have died so pitifully. It made her want to test her own strength even more. She wanted to rush to Lynon Castle right away. But by the time she made up her mind, Ronan's troops were already pushing through the open gates, and Lynon Castle was retaken in no time.

Euracia bit her lip as a cheer went up, celebrating an outcome to the battle that went beyond anything she could have imagined. Because it was proof that what he had said might be true.

The crisis bearing down on Rozern...

As she thought of her young brother, the king, Euracia raced off towards her homeland. That was to be the spark for another conflict. The one in which, in the game's history, she was to meet her end.

Afterword

I am Waruiotoko. This is now my second series published by Famitsu Bunko.

Like my other series, this one is also based on a game world.

My previous work, *My Life's a Romance Game? Or So I Thought, but it Turns Out it Was a Death Game*, was inspired by romance games, but this time it's a strategy simulation game.

The kind of game where you unify the country was a major influence on me back when I was in middle and high school, and I enjoyed such games greatly, so this is what I wrote when I wanted to make my own world based on that.

In this first volume, the main character is still fighting for the country he's attached to, but in future volumes, he'll gradually begin fighting for his own country. Euracia, who appeared in the early part of this volume, will become an important character next time, so I hope you will look forward to that and see what happens.

Also, this series has a manga adaptation planned in Square Enix's Gangan Joker, so please check that out too.

Finally, I would like to thank the Famitsu Bunko editing department and Ryoko Watanabe who assisted in bringing this novel to publication.

Also, I would like to thank Raken, who drew the illustrations. I feel the beautiful art helps the protagonist and other characters shine that much more.

But more than anything, this book was able to be published because of you, the readers, who've supported me.

I hope to keep working hard and write more entertaining works.

Waruiotoko