



# 幻想水滸伝<sup>TM</sup>

GENSO ❸ SUIKODEN

ソウルイーター〈上〉 堀慎二郎

監修○幻想水滸伝制作チーム(KCE東京)







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# Table Of Contents

1. [Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —](#)
2. [Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —](#)
3. [Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —](#)
4. [Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —](#)
5. [Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —](#)

# Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —

«[-first](#) // [archive](#) // [Ramsus-kun](#) Scanslations

For your reading pleasure and enjoyment, below the cut are the full rough English translations of the first two chapters of the official 1998 Suikoden I *Soul Eater* novel. Individual page translations can be found in the [chapter 0](#) and [chapter 1](#) tags.

## Chapter 0: Revelation of the Stars

The wind swept by under a sky brimming with stars. Amidst the raging winds, the Magician Leknaat stood atop her tall tower, gazing at the stars, both hands extended towards the heavens. Looking up at the night sky filled with countless shining stars, she took a deep breath. She calmed her mind and, listening intently, relinquished her consciousness to the flickering stars. Though an incident in the past had left both her eyes blinded, incapable of sensing light, whenever she faced the night sky she was always able to hear the whispers of the stars.

“O, stars grown so distant! O, shining stars!”

She performed the Star-Seer ritual as she always did. At least it appeared that way. But even while Leknaat spoke the ritual words, she sensed something different in the surrounding atmosphere...

The Magician’s Tower she stood upon was built on a small island at the mouth of the Tolna Canal which ran through a large continent. When she turned to the east, she could hear the swish of the ocean waves. When she turned to the west, she could sense the solemn weight of the Lorimar mountain range beyond Toran Lake. But now the noise of the ocean waves had ceased, silent under the heavy weight of the night. She just barely sensed the presence of the Lorimar mountain range, which seemed as if it was imprisoned behind a wall of deep darkness. At the same time she perceived the light of countless stars pouring down from the night sky above, she also sensed the depth of the night now sweeping the land. In astrology, it’s an ill omen when heaven and earth are clearly separated between light and dark. Exhaling deeply, quelling her feeling of premonition,

Leknaat looked up to the stars once more.

“O, stars, ever harboring the truth of the world! Reveal to me the future of this world—oh?”

Suddenly feeling something was calling to her, Leknaat’s words died on her lips. Heeding the call, she turned her body, which had been facing east, inland towards the west. In the skies above the capital of the Scarlet Moon Empire, Gregminster, situated at the center of the Arlus region on the banks of the Tornal Canal, she sensed the existence of two brightly shining stars. Leknaat sensed a brilliant light emanating from one of the two stars. She perceived that that star shone a brilliant gold. And she sensed the other burned with an intense light. It was red, as red as if it were aflame.

“Is that...?”

She knew the shining golden star represented the emperor’s influence. But the star that shone red hadn’t even existed in the night sky yesterday. It had been concealed by the darkness, until it suddenly shone out. And that meant this star was...

“The Tenkai Star...”

At the very same moment she spoke, the red star let off a single bright flash of light. Immediately after, it began to flicker intermittently. Just as if it was sending a signal to other stars.

“It couldn’t be... it’s—”

Leknaat gasped involuntarily. Stars were appearing one after another in response to the red star. When they flickered into being near the red star, more also quietly appeared above the large forest to the south. From the west came a strong light, breaking the wall of darkness once again. So it was amid the darkness that these stars responded to the red star, shining as if to compete with the brightness of the two stars that had first appeared. These three phenomena could only mean one thing. Leknaat, processing the flickering of the stars with her entire being, murmured to no one in particular:

“I see... so the stars have finally begun to move...”

She looked up at the sky for a little while longer, but soon expressed her thanks

to the stars for their revelations, and the Star-Seer ceremony was over. As if just waiting for the ceremony to end, a voice spoke to Leknaat from beyond the darkness...

“How did it go, Lady Leknaat?”

The voice, while young, also somehow managed to drip with prickly sarcasm. It was the voice of Luc, Leknaat’s apprentice. The heels of his high-laced boots clacking, Luc came climbing up to the top of the tower. Coming to stand next to Leknaat, he continued to speak in a way that held just the barest hint of contempt.

“If you were able to read something in the stars, couldn’t you please hurry and write up a report? The Empire keeps fretting on in the most tiresome way - ‘the Astral Projections STILL aren’t ready?’ That arrogant pride of theirs has gotten so bad recently, I was sorely tempted to fling them to the ends of the ocean with my wind magic.”

“You must control your temper, Luc.”

Leknaat, who had gently admonished him so, faced her apprentice and for a brief moment silence fell. Although she had received the Astral Projections, time was necessary.

“Listen to me, Luc.”

As if she had decided something, Leknaat slowly opened her mouth to speak.

“A great struggle will cover this land. Due to the foolishness of humans, animals and even nature herself will be caught up in this strife.”

“That was what the stars foretold tonight, then?”, Luc asked calmly.

“Yes. A great struggle... a struggle that will swallow all is now brewing...”

After a short pause, Leknaat moved on to the main issue at hand. She took into account Luc’s tendency to avoid bothersome issues.

“By the way, haven’t you yourself changed recently?”

“Now that you mention it, I do feel like my rune is different than usual. How can I describe it... like it’s throbbing, I guess?”

Luc raised his right hand and gazed at the back of it in wonder. There shone the Wind Rune, one of the 27 True Runes that had been scattered across the world.

“That’s because the rune is reacting”, Leknaat said, while sensing the power of the large rune on Luc’s hand.

“Reacting? To what?”

“Reacting to that which is in the process of destroying the original balance that ought to exist, the entire system of True Runes... You, who bears the Wind Rune, as well as myself, who bears the Gate Rune, are in no small way involved in this struggle.”

“Does that mean there’s no avoiding it? I don’t want to get dragged into anything bothersome...”

To Luc’s complaints, Leknaat quietly declared, “it was never avoidable. The runes are a symbol of the larger forces that govern our world. When that power is awoken by war, there are none who can avoid it. And besides, Luc...”

And then Leknaat took Luc’s hand that bore the rune.

“Whatever the form, it is your destiny to participate in this battle. For you bear the Tenkan Star, one of the Stars of Destiny.”

Letting out a sigh, Luc turned to look towards Gregminster with a clack of his boot heels.

“So what do I tell the Empire? ‘A war about runes has broken out, Lord Luc’s reporting to the front for duty’, or what?”

Showing a small smile at Luc’s joke, Leknaat too turned once more to face Gregminster.

“That won’t be necessary. Even those fools who hold the power of the Empire cannot stop this war. To tell them would only invite chaos. We can watch over those caught up in the flow of fate, but only they themselves may choose their own path forward, among all the possible paths. No matter how hard that choice may be.”

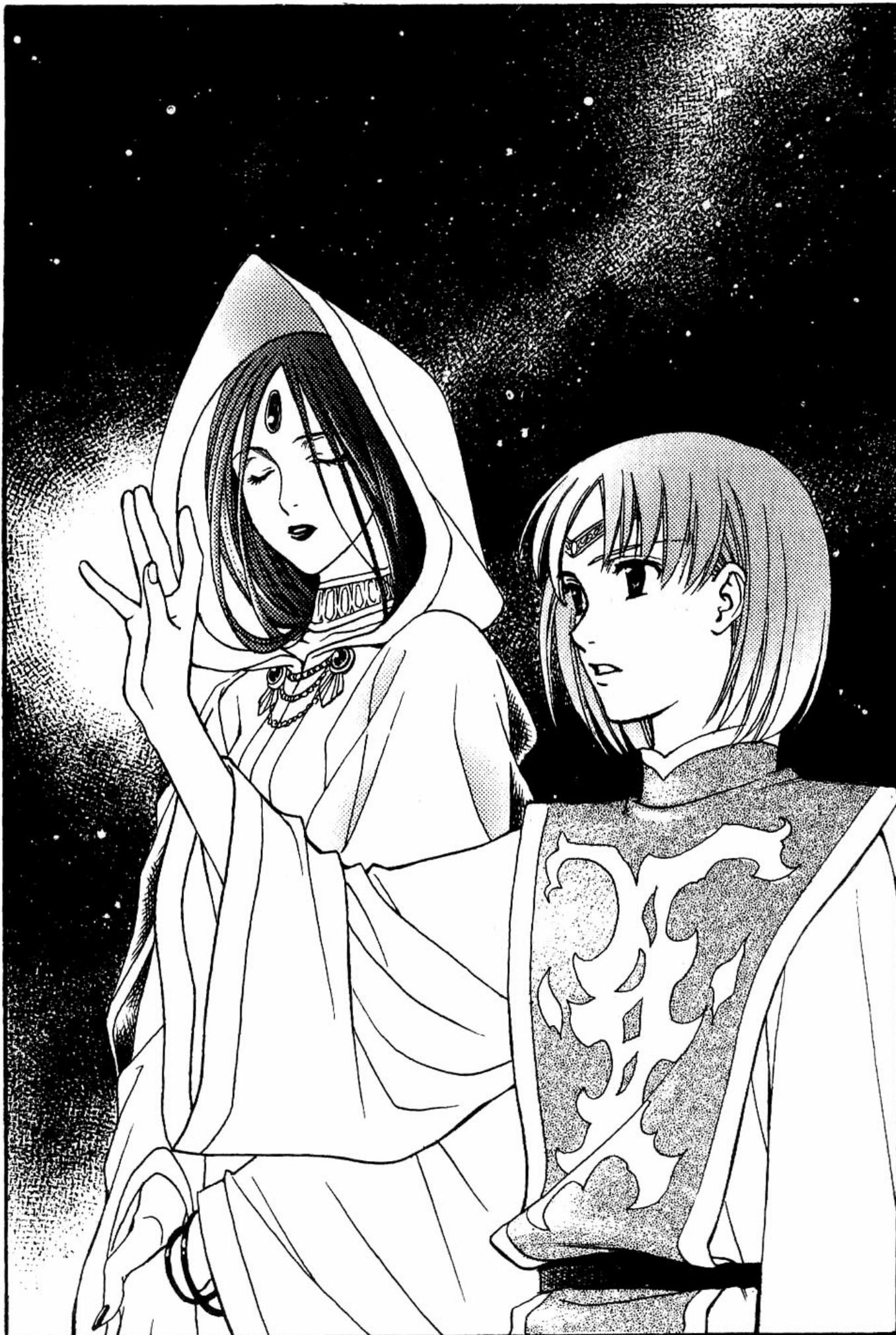
“I understand. I’ll write up and prepare some unalarming report. But allow me

one more question...”

Giving a small sigh, Luc looked up at Leknaat.

“What in the world are runes, anyway? Or Stars of Destiny? If that power is leading us to war, is it the runes who are making or allowing us do so?”

Leknaat was considerably surprised to hear Luc ask these questions. Knowing Luc’s personality, she had fully expected that Luc would continue to look at the world through disillusioned eyes until the bitter end, but his words just now had been filled with a serious tone she had never heard there before.



She didn't know what had caused this change in him, but she wanted to

answer his questions.

“To speak of the will of runes is to speak of the truth of this world... I’m sorry to say that even I don’t fully understand it all.”

“Is that so?”

Leknaat still holding his hand, Luc hung his head.

“But the one thing I can say is... as you well know, there are 27 True Runes in this world. Each rune represents either chaos or order and contributes to the balance of the whole.”

“The original, ideal balance?”

“That’s right. When that balance is upset, the world shifts from ‘peace’ to ‘chaos’. And so, the 108 Stars of Destiny exist to maintain that equilibrium. Look there.”

Leknaat let go of Luc’s hand and pointed at one of the glittering stars—the red star.

“Can you see that red star? It is the fate of all the Stars of Destiny to gather together and fight under that Tenkai Star. To change the world... to change the balance of runes from ‘chaos’ to ‘peace’.”

Luc and Leknaat looked up together at the night sky, at the Tenkai star. It still gave off a strong red light. However, as they watched, the other Stars of Destiny flickered out one by one. As the Star Seer ceremony was over, the stars were returning to their original positions.

“Heheh!”

Luc snickered when the final Star of Destiny winked out.

“Is something the matter?”

“It’s nothing. Just...”

Luc turned his back on Leknaat and began walking towards the stairs.

“I was just thinking how troublesome this all is.”

To Luc, disappearing into the darkness, Leknaat said:

“May you be guided to the correct path...”

Luc’s reply came from within the darkness.

“I’ll be fine. You don’t have to worry about me.”

Luc descended from the tower, leaving those words behind.

Between heaven and earth, now returned to calm serenity, Leknaat looked up to the sky again, once more offering her thanks for the revelations the stars had given her. Finally, she offered her usual wordless prayer to the heavens:

“Please lead everyone along the correct path...”

## **Chapter 01: The Scarlet Moon Empire**

“There they go! You ready, Tir?!”

Tir, sitting on one of the rocks scattered about the meadow, smelling how the wind and the grass mixed together, raised his face towards the voice that leapt out at him from the forest a little ways away.

“You bet I am!”

Tir stood as he answered, retying his green bandana around his head, grasping tight a black staff as tall as himself. Trampling the grass underneath, he stood and readied his breathing.

“Look, look! There they are!”

The voice in the woods grew closer. He tightened his grip on the staff. His heart raced. Thinking to himself, ‘I’ll definitely bring one down, I definitely will...’, Tir faced the dense woods.

“Go!!”

Just as he shouted, several wild rabbits came leaping out of the thicket, scattering leaves. Tir began to run nimbly, his black hair and red clothes swaying, and as he closed the gap between them, took aim at the closest rabbit. As the wild rabbit drew near, the rustle of its movement in the grass became audible.

“Hah!”

Tir grasped the staff in his left hand and quickly swung it. With a whoosh, a sound so sharp one might think they could hear it cut the very air itself, he sent

the pliant staff flying out in front of him. The shock of impact shot through his arm and a gray mass of rabbit was sent tumbling back into the thicket. He stopped, and in a minute would check the thicket for signs of life. The rabbit wouldn't be able to escape from that thicket.

“All right! We did it!”, Tir yelled loudly, without thinking.

Then he took a deep breath, facing the sky with eyes closed. The rays of the sun basked his face in warmth. Perhaps because he had chased these rabbits with all his might, or perhaps he was simply thinking to himself about what he had accomplished. Tir suddenly turned to look at the imperial capital, Gregminster, which towered beyond the meadow. Doing so brought to mind how the decision to do this hunt today had come about. This was a very special day for Tir. Because once it was evening, he'd be able to accompany his father to have an audience with the Scarlet Moon Empire emperor. Tir knew all about Emperor Barbarossa Rugner - his bravery for the nation, his confidence and skill at politics because his father, Teo McDohl, was the general of the Imperial Forces.

Every time Tir had heard stories about the emperor from his father, he had always thought he'd like to meet the emperor just once. And today that wish would come true! Just thinking about it made his heart race. But not just with happiness... because the original point of today's audience was Teo's official appointment to defend the northern region. His father, the only one he held in higher esteem than the emperor, had only just returned, but tomorrow would once again depart. He had thought about what he wanted to do to congratulate his father. Whereupon his best friend Ted had said, “We're gonna celebrate your first audience with the emperor and pray for Lord Teo's safety, so we're definitely having a feast tonight!”

And so Tir and Ted had come to the forest on the outskirts of Gregminster to hunt for food for the feast. Tir had first met Ted about two years ago. Ted lost his parents seven years ago in the Succession Wars and had wandered from place to place as a war orphan. Teo, who had been departing for the front, had adopted him and brought him back to Gregminster. Ted had refused to live in Teo's mansion, so he was given a small house in the neighborhood, where he began to live. The reason he gave for his refusal was that he had suffered an

injury during the war that left burn scars on his right hand which he didn't want other people to see. Aside from the leather glove he always wore to cover his right hand, Ted was a very ordinary and exceptionally cheerful young lad and so soon became good friends with the brother-less Tir.

Because he had seen so many places and experienced so many things, he had also learned many things. They were both fourteen and before they knew it they found they had become the best of friends. At the rustle of something pushing its way through the grass, Tir returned to his senses. Just as Tir thought he glimpsed a green vest through the foliage, Ted, the owner of the voice that had chased the rabbits through the woods earlier came out of the thicket and towards the meadow.

“Get over here, Ted!”

“Didja do it?”

Ted's light brown eyes lit up at the sound of excitement in Tir's voice and he came running over, leaves still sitting in his chestnut-brown hair. Tir pushed his way through the grass with his staff and showed Ted the rabbit he had just brought down.

“I was right on the mark! Look, there it is!”

“Awesome, it's huge!”

Ted shouted with glee as he lifted the fat, plump body, holding it by the ears.

“Just as you'd expect from the son of the invincible General Teo. You're the best with the staff there is!”

“Oh, knock it off! That's too much. I can't even begin to compare to father.”

It embarrassed him for some reason, so Tir unconsciously avoided comparing himself to his father.

“It's all thanks to you chasing the rabbit to such a good spot. This victory is both of ours!”

“Heheh, that's for sure!”

They exchanged glances.

“We’re dinin’ fine on rabbit stew tonight!”

“Rabbit’s not bad roasted whole, either!

‘Cuz it’s freshly caught, it’s gonna taste great!”

“Man, I can’t wait to eat it!”

Ted made a show of licking his lips, making Tir laugh. His laughter was infectious, and for a little while the meadow echoed with the cheerful sound of their laughter. That was when everything went wrong.

“Huh?”

Tir stared at Ted blankly. The feet of the rabbit hanging in Ted’s grasp twitched. Ted looked at Tir, puzzled.

“Tir, you didn’t—”

Twitch.

“Ahh!!”

The rabbit suddenly began to struggle, kicked Ted in the chest with its hind legs, shook free of his grasp, and took off like a shot towards the forest.\* Ted took the hit from the revived rabbit and was so surprised at the ferocity of the attack that he was sent sprawling on his butt and into the grass.

Dumbfounded, Tir watched the gray furball disappear off into the forest. And so things were completely turned around. Tir sighed and stared at the ground.

“What the hell was that about, Tir?!”

Ted’s voice floated over at the level of Tir’s feet. Tir turned and helped Ted up, scratching his head through his bandana in puzzlement.

“Huh. That’s weird... I aimed for its vitals correctly, so it should have worked...”

Tir had previously taken lessons in bojutsu, the art of the staff, from an elderly man named Kai. As might be expected from General Teo’s son, he picked it up quickly, hungrily learning everything from the basics to the secret techniques.

“You say you hit it in its vitals, but I guess rabbits and humans are totally different, huh? Either way, it’s pointless unless you strike the final blow, right?”

Tir didn't notice until Ted said it. When he confirmed the rabbit was down, he hadn't struck the final blow. No, he hadn't be able to do it. Tir sighed once again.

"Yeah... you really are kind in the strangest ways. Well, there's nothin' wrong with that, but..." Ted looked at the forest.

"Aw, tonight's fine feast... our rabbit stew..."

"Don't blame yourself, Ted. It's all my fault. Yeesh..."

Dejected, Tir didn't say any more.

They'd worked so hard, thinking they could make father and everyone happy, but...

"Well, can't be helped, yeah? We'll just catch ourselves another. But are you doin' okay on time?"

He clapped Tir's shoulder as if to comfort him, and jerked his own chin towards the sky. Tir looked up at the sky and the sun that had risen high into it without his noticing.

"If you don't hurry up and get back, you're gonna be late for your audience with the emperor."

"Woah, you're right! Sorry Ted, I'll head back to the mansion before you!"

"All right. I guess it'd just be payback - an added bonus - for me if you're late, but as a rule, it's a bad idea to keep Lord Teo waiting."

"Now there's a 'bonus' I don't need!", Tir said, grinning.

"What are you gonna do, Ted?"

"I'll take my time heading back. See ya, Tir!"

Ted flashed a smile at Tir.

"Hey, I've never wanted anything more in my whole life. After you get back from the audience, tell me all about it! You'll do it, right?"

"Yeah, I said I would!"

"Just wanted to make sure. I'm looking forward to it, you know!"

The two crossed clenched fists in farewell and Tir raced back to Gregminster.

Tir's chest swelled in anticipation of today's big event - the Emperor awaited him in the castle! Tir ran through the meadow for some time, and finally arrived at the castle walls surrounding the imperial capital, Gregminster. Gregminster was a large town, encompassing both the castle and the castle town. Shops stood along the road that cut through the center of the town and the houses of those who worked in the castle and the town clustered together along the side streets. The main road ran straight through the gardens and over the moat to the towering castle itself. The castle was so large, you could even see it over the city walls from outside of town. Once a month, a huge market was held in the town's central park, and today just happened to be that day. Tir slipped past the city walls and into the street crowded with people, turned at the corner before the park, and dove towards the stone mansion that stood at the side of the castle moat. Next to the the entrance was an elm tree. Tir stood beneath it and looked up at the sky, checking the time. The sun was no longer full in the sky; the shadows of the townspeople and the buildings had begun to grow longer.

"This is bad!"

Slightly flustered, Tir opened the mansion door.

"Ahh! Young Master! Where in the world WHERE you?!"

Gremio greeted Tir with something like a shriek. Three soldiers roomed free-of-charge at Tir's house - that is, at Teo's mansion. Gremio was one of them.

He was a slender, blonde, gentle and sensitive man whose specialty was making stew, but when called to battle, he turned into an axe-wielding warrior. Perhaps his gentle nature came from the fact that it was he who had watched over and cared for Tir when, as a child, he lost his mother to an illness.

"Uh, well, I..." Tir mumbled. It was a secret from everyone that he and Ted had gone hunting together.

"Don't you mumble at me! If you don't hurry, you won't make it in time for your audience! Lord Teo is already ready to go. Hurry up, Young Master! Go on!"

"Okay, okay, I get it, Gremio!"

While speaking, Tir obediently went up to the second floor. Though it made him uneasy that Gremio still treated him like a child, every time he saw the scar

on Gremio's cheek that he'd gotten protecting Tir, he could never find it in his heart to oppose Gremio. Tir ran to the end of the hallway and paused in front of his room. Just as placed his hand on the doorknob, a deep, calm voice rumbled behind him.

"You're back, Tir?"

Tir turned and his field of vision was filled with none other than the master of the house, Teo. The military fame he'd gained in the Succession Wars as a loyal retainer to the emperor had made Teo one of the five Imperial Generals under Emperor Barbarossa. Tir, still young at the time, may not have actually ever seen his father in action, but he still held great pride in his father's accomplishments and necessity to the Empire.

"Sorry, dad, I had to take care of an errand... I'll be ready in a minute so just hold on!"

All of a sudden, Tir remembered Ted's words: 'Lord Teo isn't someone you keep waiting!' and, flustered, turned the doorknob.

"How you are now will have to do. The Emperor may be strict, but there's no need to fear him. He's got more to worry about than the way you're dressed."

Teo didn't usually wear his armor around the house, but today, for the occasion of an audience with an emperor, he was clad in brilliant silver armor. Moving effortlessly in his heavy-looking armor, Teo placed his hand on his bewildered son's head.

"It's fine to let him see you as you always are. Look, just this is preparation enough."

Teo picked off some grass that had been stuck to Tir's bandana and let the wind outside the window at the end of the hallway take it. Looking down at Tir, he grinned.

"Well then, shall we go?"

"Yes, sir!"

Teo descended the staircase, his amber cape billowing. Tir followed after him, his heart leaping so much over his audience at the castle that he had already

forgotten his error during the hunt. Gremio saw them off and Tir and Teo went out into the town together.

The market tents set up in the park and alleyways fluttered in the evening breeze and the fountain in the center of the park sparkled in the sunlight. It certainly was a bustling castle town at the moment, but up until a few years it had been nothing but a pile of ruins thanks to the war. Right now he was going to have an audience with the very emperor that had rebuilt this town so splendidly. Tir's heart wouldn't stop pounding. What if the emperor spoke to him? What would he say in reply? His head was filled with such thoughts.

They crossed the drawbridge stretching over the moat and passed through the meticulously maintained castle gardens. People turned their heads to stare or stole sidelong glances at the famous Teo. They entered the hall on the first floor and a servant wearing gorgeous clothes greeted them.

"Hello, Lord Teo. We've been expecting you. His Majesty is already in the audience chamber. This way, please..."

Climbing the staircase, Tir felt like he was climbing to the heavens. A huge door came into view at the top of the stairs. The door, adorned with extravagant carvings, slowly opened. There he was, at the end of a long red carpet spread across the floor of the hall. The Golden Emperor who founded the Red Moon Empire, Barbarossa Rugner.

"I hope you are in good health, Your Majesty."

Teo, who had entered the room ahead of Tir, kneeled respectfully. Flustered, Tir did the same.

"Good of you to come, Teo. We last met at your departure half a year ago."

Barbarossa's voice echoed through the hall.

Tir was more than a little surprised when he heard his voice. The emperor's voice, even deeper than his father's, calmed Tir. Tir had never heard a voice with such presence before.

His appearance was just as Teo's stories had described and put his voice to shame. His eyes, set in his finely chiseled features, gleamed with a prodigious light and the moustache above his lip and his beard brimmed with majesty. Tir

saw Barbarossa was wearing the gold armor that had earned him the name 'Golden Emperor' and was overwhelmed by the magnificence of his personage.

Tir had advanced towards the throne and knelt with Teo, fidgeting slightly, his body strained to the point of bursting by his nerves. Last night Gremio had told Tir that those who weren't exchanging words with the emperor must remain kneeling, so, still kneeling, Tir lifted his head.

"How are you, Teo? Have things not changed since then?"

"No, sir. We're still the same as when we fought together in the Succession War - neither our swords nor our armies have grown rusty."

"Promising words. Don't you agree, Windy?"

Windy was the name of the Court Magician employed by the Empire. It was rumored that Windy had won Barbarossa's favor due to her resemblance to his late wife, Claudia.

From the left-hand side of the throne, a woman's voice rang out clear as a bell.

"Yes. Words just as one would expect from a great general."

Tir raised his head and stole a glance at the woman named Windy. She was achingly beautiful.

Teo and Barbarossa resumed their conversation.

"Teo, you are aware of the unrest growing in the north."

"We've received information that the Jowston City-States are actively amassing troops. It seems certain they intend to invade our territory."

"Indeed. How about it, Teo? Will you accept your summons to the north? If you go, our enemies will think twice before carelessly attacking us."

"You speak too highly of me... thank you, sir."

"My beloved sword Prakk has protected me with its good fortune on countless occasions. I bequeath it to you. Carry it with you."

"This is too great an honor, sir... I will, without fail, live up to Your Majesty's expectations."

So saying, Teo rose and went to Barbarossa's side. Suddenly, Tir's heart was

filled with a feeling of hopelessness. Father accepting His Majesty's command meant the audience was drawing to an end. He'd stayed kneeling the whole time, but His Majesty hadn't said a single word to him. But then...

"Teo, who is this?", Barbarossa's voice rumbled.

"This is my son, Tir McDohl. He's still a mischievous kid, but I hope that someday he'll be of use to Your Majesty, so I brought him along."

Teo's words stunned Tir. What was he saying?!

"Well met. Raise your head, Tir."

Following His Majesty's orders, Tir timidly raised his head.

"Hoho! What a fine countenance. I'd expect no less from Teo's son."  
Barbarossa smiled.

"Y-yes, sir, I'm much obliged, sir..."

"What do you say? While Teo's away protecting the northern regions, will you lend me your strength and protect the Empire in your father's stead?"

"O-of course, it would be an honor!"

"Perfect. We're in need of an Imperial Guard. How about starting tomorrow?"

Tir was so happy he could hardly speak. Just the honor of His Majesty speaking to him alone would have made him happy enough - he had never expected to be invited to join the Imperial Guard and become one of the emperor's personal bodyguards!

"What a cute young man. He must be nervous in front of you, Your Majesty."

Windy stepped in and saved Tir, who had been stunned into silence. He had been determined not to be nervous, but for some reason his body had frozen up so he couldn't speak. He knew it was disgraceful, but he had been so caught up thinking about being unable to say anything in reply that no words had come out.

"Tir? How about it?"

When Tir turned and saw his father's smiling face, his nerves finally unwound. Tir straightened his back and, although they were the very same words father

had just uttered, said to the Emperor:

“Y-yes sir! Without fail, I will live up to your Majesty’s expectations!

“I expect just as great achievements from you as your father.”

Teo bowed deeply to Barbarossa, who was smiling in apparent satisfaction.

“Thank you very much, Your Majesty. Now I can head north without worrying.”

“Indeed. Come back safely, Teo!”

With those words, the audience ended.



Tir followed his father out of the audience chamber.

He was so happy he didn't even remember where they walked after that as they returned to the mansion.

"W-welcome back, Young Master!"

Hearing Gremio's worried voice greet them at the entrance, Tir finally returned to his senses.

"H-h-how was it? Did everything go well? You didn't make any mistakes in front of His Majesty, did you? Ohh, I've been so worried!"

Since he was too embarrassed to tell Gremio that he had been stiff from nervousness and wasn't able to utter a word, Tir just vaguely replied, "Well, yeah... it went okay, you know?"

Behind him, Teo grinned happily.

"Sheesh, Gremio, you're obsessed with Tir."

Startled, Gremio turned his head.

"You're here too, Lord Teo?!"

"Yes, I am!" Teo replied, astonished.

"At any rate, I'll be leaving Tir in your care again, Gremio."

"Uh... yes, of course, but why the sudden formality?"

To Gremio, who didn't understand the meaning behind Teo's words, Tir said:

"Listen to this, Gremio! At the audience with the Emperor, I was chosen to be in the Imperial Guard! Isn't that awesome?!"

"What?! Really?! So all our our hard work taking care of you has paid off... Of course, we'll face any trials from here on out together as well. We'll go with you! Won't that be nice?"

"Huh? But, uh..."

"It's fine, Tir", Teo said with a smile and began climbing the stairs.

"You still need their help. We'll just inform your commanding officer that your three servants are also joining the Imperial Guard."

“The Young Master is safe in my hands, Lord Teo! I’ll protect the him with my life!

Gremio saluted Teo’s retreating figure. But Tir pouted.

“Yeesh, Gremio’s such a busybody....”

The truth was, until this moment, Tir had been thinking that doing an amazing job at being an Imperial Guard all by himself would prove to Gremio that he wasn’t a child any more. Tir rolled his eyes as he looked at Gremio. Then he noticed that Gremio was holding a large ladle.

“Gremio!” Tir cried in reflex.

“Y-yes, Young Master?!”

“What’s for dinner tonight?”

“Stew, but wh-... oh my! The stew!”

Gremio dashed to the kitchen as soon as the words were out of his mouth. Standing there talking, he had completely forgotten about the stew.

Thinking Gremio could handle the cooking and that he’d go to his room, Tir placed his hand on the stair banister. As he did so, Gremio’s voice came floating out of the kitchen.

“Oh, that’s right, Young Master - Ted’s here!”

“What?! Why didn’t you tell me sooner?!”

Tir flew up the stairs in a single leap and rushed to his room. The best friend he had parted ways with earlier now sat waiting on his bed with a huge grin on his face.

“Ted! You’re here!”

“Yep! Welcome back, Tir. How’d the audience go?”

“Something amazing happened!”

Tir proudly told Ted how he had been selected to join the Imperial Guard. As he was telling the story, Ted’s eyes slowly grew wider and wider in surprise and joy.

“Cool! That is so cool! This is the birth of Imperial Guard Tir McDohl! Next you gotta aim for squad leader, or even general!”

“Aw, knock it off! You’re getting ahead of yourself. It hasn’t even been decided where I’ll be assigned to yet. Plus...”

“Plus?” Ted peered into Tir’s eyes with evident interest.

“It wasn’t just me who was enlisted. Um...”

“What do you mean?”

“Gremio and the others are enlisting with me!”

“Ah, so that’s it. Hmm...”

Suddenly Ted crossed his arms solemnly and smirked at Tir.

“Hey, Tir, we’re best buddies, yeah?”

“O-of course! But you can’t - ”

Tir knew in a flash what Ted wanted to ask.

“Can’t what? Take me with you too! Come on, I’ve never wanted anything more in my whole life!”

“But...”, Tir stalled for a moment, but Gremio and Cleo were going too, after all. It didn’t matter how many people ended up going.

“All right, Ted. Let’s go together.”

“Woohoo! Now I can finally pay back Lord Teo for taking me in!”

Tir was surprised to hear him say this. Since Ted got carried away easily, Tir hadn’t thought he’d talk about anything but wanting to join the Imperial Guard. Ashamed, he realized he had misread Ted. He would say it once more to Ted. Wholeheartedly, this time.

“Let’s give it our all, Ted.”

“Yeah!”

They looked each other in the eye and bumped their fists together.

Tir’s hands were bare and Ted’s, as always, were gloved.

Then they heard Gremio's voice call down the hallway from the dining room:

"Young Master, Ted, dinner's ready!"

"Okay!"

They looked at each other and smiled one more time, then they dashed out of the bedroom to the dining room.

Teo and the others sat at the long table. Gremio's special stew and freshly baked bread were laid out on top of the pure white tablecloth. Cleo, a female soldier who employed throwing daggers, turned and asked with a kind smile, "How did the audience go, Young Master?"

He had heard that in one battle she had single-handedly disposed of the countless enemy cavalry harassing her allies. But though she was a great warrior, Cleo never wore her weapons in the house, and was just like an older sister to Tir and the other two.

Next to her was the martial artist Pahn who, unable to take his eyes off the stew, exclaimed, "ooh, pulling out all the stops tonight, huh? This is makin' my stomach rumble!" He had been a soldier on the enemy side in the Succession War but, won over by General Teo's charm, he switched sides and has worked for Teo ever since. Though he was a man bursting with courage, he was an unbelievable glutton, and to Tir he was like a bumbling older brother.

Tir and Ted took their seats too and waited for Gremio to finish pouring the wine. At last, Gremio set the wine bottle on the table and he, too, quietly took his seat.

"Well then, Lord Teo..."

At Gremio's words, Teo cleared his throat once and, his mouth set in a serious line, said, "Harumph. Lend me your ears, everyone. Tomorrow morning I must depart for the north. From then on, Tir will be in charge of this household."

Teo suddenly looked at Tir, who was seated across from him. Tir sat up straighter in response. Perhaps reassured, Teo continued speaking, looking around at everyone.

"I hope everyone will work together to lend their strength to Tir. Gremio."

“Yes, sir?”

“You’re the one who has attended to Tir since he was a child. It’s thanks to you Tir has grown so well even without his mother. You have my gratitude!”

“Oh my, that’s... I only did what anyone would do, and being able to assist the Young Master has been a real pleasure for me, so...”

Teo next turned his gaze to the two sitting across from Gremio.

“Cleo, Pahn. My son is still young. Lend him your strength and protect him for me.”

“Just leave it to us, Lord Teo!” said Pahn proudly.



“As long as I’m by his side, I bet the Young Master could even take on the monster of Toran Lake -”

“All right, that’s enough, Pahn”, Cleo butted in.

“You know there’s no such thing, don’t you? Yeesh, you get carried away so easily...”

“Hey, I was just showing Lord Teo how I’m overflowing with fighting spirit!”

“Have you forgotten that Lord Teo always say fighting spirit isn’t the only thing that wins wars?”

Pahn couldn’t argue with that.

Last, Teo turned to Ted, who was chuckling at this exchange.

“Ted, I hope you will always be good friends with Tir.”

Ted, naturally, smiled mischievously.

“Of course. That’s my plan, whether or not Tir likes it!”

Still sitting straight, Tir replied, “Yeah, of course!”

Teo smiled in satisfaction and picked up his glass.

“The food will get cold at this rate. Let’s raise our glasses.”

Seeing that everyone had taken their glass in hand, Teo said in a voice filled with dignity,

“Congratulations to my son and to the Empire!”

“Congratulations!”

Everyone emptied their glasses and an enjoyable dinner began in earnest. Words and jokes spoken between bites flew back and forth across the table. Tir carved into his heart the few words his father spoke and couldn’t help laughing at the jokes Ted and Pahn threw back and forth. Everyone’s hearts were filled with joy and their stomachs with good food. As the night deepened, the dinner came to a close.

Tir got into bed that night feeling happier than he ever had before. He was happy about joining the Imperial Guard, of course, but today he’d been

reminded again just how lucky he was to live surrounded by wonderful people.

Tir slipped into a peaceful sleep holding tight his present happiness and dreaming of his new life that would begin tomorrow.

## **CHAPTER 01 END**

*Check in every Wednesday for weekly updates! Translated by rin-uzuki. Email me at [RinUzuki@gmail.com](mailto:RinUzuki@gmail.com) with any translation suggestions or comments. Thank you!*

# Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —

«[-first](#) // [archive](#) // [Ramsus-kun](#) Scanslations

★ [Chapters 0-1](#) complete translation

For your reading pleasure and enjoyment, below the cut are the full rough English translations of **chapters 2 and 3** of the official 1998 Suikoden I *Soul Eater* novel. Individual page translations can be found in the [chapter 2](#) and [chapter 3](#) tags.

## Chapter 2: The Imperial Guard

Signs of dawn peeked through the windows as Teo prepared his gear for his journey north. Gremio had already carried his baggage outside, so only his sword and armor remained in his room.

The armor gleamed coldly in the bluish purple darkness. Prakk, the sword he'd received from His Majesty yesterday, still lay by the bed as if it might be sleeping.

Teo picked up his armor and quickly put it on. His armor was like a second skin, but it felt heavy that morning for some reason. He well understood the reason why. There was one worry on his mind at this moment when he was leaving the capital. He strapped his sword to his side and, all his preparations complete, sighed despondently.

Gremio's voice came from the hall.

"All your luggage has been loaded onto your horse, Lord Teo. Will that be all?"

"That's all. Thank you, Gremio."

Teo moved slowly out to the hall so his armor wouldn't make a sound and wake the others.

"Please take care, Lord Teo. We'll be there for him."

"Yes, about that..."

Teo spoke to Gremio in hushed tones.

"I believe I spoke of this last night as well, but Kraze is the commanding officer

of the Imperial Guard unit Tir has been assigned to. I can't help but wonder how a coward like Kraze climbed to such an important rank in the government, unless he knew the right people in the right place and pulled strings."

"I share your suspicions, Lord Teo. I've often thought the same of Kraze."

Teo sighed once more at that, then continued down the hall until he stood in front of Tir's room. He opened the door quietly and went in, then turned to Gremio.

"I've said it before, but I entrust you with Tir, Gremio."

"Y-yes sir. No matter what happens, I'll protect the Young Ma-"

Without waiting for Gremio to finish, Teo knelt by the bed and looked at Tir's sleeping profile. Though Tir seemed young to him, looking at the sleeping face of his son who was certainly growing eased Teo's worries somewhat.

"Once again, I'm not going to be able to see your face, Tir. "

"Shall I wake him?", Gremio asked.

"No, it's fine. Let him sleep. This isn't farewell. We'll meet again."

Teo left the room, his cape billowing.

Teo exited the castle walls on horseback, leading the squad who had been waiting for him outside the city. They first took the western route to head to the northern border that spanned Lake Toran. While they passed through the meadows, the sun rose from the mountains in the east. It was quite a magnificent sight, their armor reflecting the sun, banner waving.

When they could see the face of Toran Lake, Teo thought of something, turned to two of his nearby subordinates and asked:

"Alen, Grenceal... do you think the Empire and the Emperor have changed?"

"Well..." began Alen, seemingly unable to gauge the true meaning of the question.

"It's difficult to say. I hadn't returned to the capital in so long, and I didn't meet with the emperor this time around."

"I see. Sorry. It was a foolish question." said Teo, and suddenly looked back at

Gregminster, towering under the morning sun, as if looking for an answer to his question.

Tir was woken up by a cacophony of noise that echoed around the corners of his room. Squinting against the light of the morning sun shining through the window, he turned his head towards the source of the clattering noise and saw the familiar green cloak, the tied-up blonde hair.

Gremio was the one making the noise, beginning the morning cleaning.

“Oh, did I wake you up? Good morning, Young Master.”

“Y-yeah, morning...”

Now awake, Tir rubbed his sleepy eyes, sat up, and looked out the window again, startled. The sun had already risen into the eastern part of the sky and the townspeople were beginning to move about.

Tir leapt out of bed and cried, “what about father, Gremio?!”

“He has already left. You overslept, Young Master...”

“Huh?! Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Lord Teo said to let you sleep. Besides...” Pausing in his cleaning, Gremio turned to look at Tir.

“From today forth, you too must do your best as a member of the Empire.

Hurry and get ready to go to meet with... Lord... Kraze, your commanding officer.”

Gremio’s momentary pause made Tir uneasy, but was so caught up thinking of his father that he soon forgot all about it.

“...Oh, yeah. It’s too bad I couldn’t see father off, but I’ll just have to work my hardest at my Imperial Guard job and make him proud.”

“Yes, that’s the ticket!”

“Yeah! I’ll do my best!”

And whispered in his heart that he wouldn’t lose to his father, Teo the general.

After Gremio went downstairs, Tir quickly finished getting ready and left his

room. He looked down from the second floor stairwell and saw Pahn and Cleo were already waiting at the door on the first floor, all ready to go.

“Morning, Pahn, Cleo!”

“Hoh, finally up! Yer late, Young Master.” Pahn said, dressed in red, his green breastplate glittering.

“Your first day on the job, eh, Young Master? Whether it’s clearing out the rumored bandits of Mt. Seifu or killing the monster of Lake Toran, just leave it to me!”

“Not this again... Jeez, Pahn, can you get any more worked up?” Cleo said, also wearing a green breastplate and carrying several throwing daggers at her side.

Pahn frowned and shrugged.

Then Gremio joined them, shouldering an axe sheathed in leather.

“Now everyone’s all here and ready to go.”

“No, wait!” Tir cried, flustered. “Ted’s not here yet.”

“Ted’s coming too?”

Just when Cleo asked, a voice called from the foyer.

“Heey, wait for me, Tir! You aren’t thinking of leaving me behind, are you? That’s awful...”

They heard light footsteps, the door opened, and there Ted was, bow in hand.

Wanting to tease Ted a bit, Tir flashed an impish smile.

“Oh, were you awake? And here I thought we’d go to all the trouble of letting you sleep peacefully.”

“You jerk! You know you’d be lonely without me. Ain’t that right, Tir?”

After they caught each other’s eye and laughed for some time, Tir turned to the other three. “Okay, let’s go!”

At the signal of Tir’s energetic voice, the party went out into the city of Gregminster and headed to the castle. Tir, accompanied by everyone, exited the hall on the first floor and excitedly led everyone into the Imperial Guard waiting

room. And then...

A haughty voice came wafting out of the room.

“Oh ho. So you’re Teo’s son.”

Surprised, Tir turned towards the source of the voice; a thin-faced man dressed in gaudy purple and pink clothes sitting behind a large desk. Behind Tir, Cleo muttered “Kraze...”

Kraze? This was his commander?

Tir entered the room and took a second look at Kraze, forming the impression he was listless and ignorant. He had expected a commander of the Imperial Guard to be someone with more presence, like his father. But this man called Kraze neither wore armor nor carried a sword. His greasy, slicked back hair gleamed with oil, the thin whiskers drooping over his mouth trembled, he dressed frivolously. Even worse, his voice was painfully high-pitched.

“Name?” Detaching himself from the desk, Kraze approached Tir. “You deaf, brat?”

Though surprised at his arrogant attitude, Tir answered, “Uh, no sir... my name is Tir.”

“Ah, yes, that’s right. Hmph.” said Kraze, stroking his thin whiskers and giving Tir a sidelong glance. “You’ll get no special treatment here, even if you are the son of a general. You’re late, and yet you still play the Young Master card. You should be ashamed.”

“I’m not - ”

He had spoken without thinking, but caught the look Gremio shot him and stopped himself. Seeing this, Kraze gave an ugly laugh.

“Good. I’ll tell you this now, at the start: A superior’s orders are absolute. If I tell you to die, you die! Remember that, for your own sake.

“What?!” Tir and the three waiting behind him were dumbfounded.

Kraze briskly returned to his desk and, while skimming some kind of document, said, “Incidentally, without delay...I’m to grant you one mission. Head northeast from the castle to reach Magician’s Isle, home of the astrologer Lady Leknaat.

You're to go there, obtain and bring back the results of this year's astrological predictions. Got it?"

Casting his eyes downward, Tir answered, "Yes sir, I understand."

"Magician's Isle can't be reached by boat, so instead we've called for a dragon knight from the Dragon Knight's Domain. You will be taken to the island by dragon."

"Woohoo! He said we get to ride a dragon!"

It had been Ted who had whispered to Tir, but Kraze shot Tir such a withering glare that he snapped his mouth shut.

"Well, go! You must keep Lady Leknaat waiting."

"Y-yes sir."

Tir left the room as quickly as he could and exited the castle.

Tir was about to sigh a huge sigh, feeling as if his dreams had been crushed somehow, but then...

"Sigh... just as I thought, he hasn't changed."

Since Gremio had sighed before him, Tir couldn't help turning to him and asking, "You know Commander Kraze?"

"Well, just barely. As he is now, he's completely drunk on his own power. It's embarrassing."

"I don't think we have to worry about him", Tir said, trying to comfort Gremio. "As long as we do what we're told, even he can't get us in trouble."

"Sure, but..."

"He's right, don't worry about Kraze", Cleo chimed in, cheering up Gremio.

"Right now it's our duty to focus on accomplishing the mission the Young Master was given."

"Calling it a 'mission' is a bit much", Pahn said, crestfallen. "We're just messengers, aren't we? We're not a buncha kids! Makes my blood boil."

"Don't say that, Pahn. This work's not as bad as you think it is. The astrological

predictions are indispensable to governing our country.”

“You’re right!” Gremio’s face brightened at Cleo’s words. “With work like this, the Young Master is less likely to face danger!”

“Okay then! Let’s get this job done right away and surprise Commander Kraze... huh?”

Tir had been planning to motivate himself and everyone else with a few words, but, looking around, Ted was nowhere in sight. But he had been with them when they left the castle...

“Heey, Tir!”

Ted’s voice came from a little distance away. Tir turned and there Ted was, standing at the corner of the castle.

Ted beckoned and called, “Hurry up and come over her! The dragon’s here!!”

“The dragon?!”

His earlier unhappiness vanished and, his heart pounding, Tir ran to Ted’s side. At the place where the castle base curved he stopped in shock. There was a dragon next to the stable behind the castle.

Its whole body was covered in black scales that shone under the light of the sun.

“It’s the dragon!”

Given that there was a basket on its back between its wings, there was no doubt it was the dragon from the Dragon Knight’s Domain Kraze had spoken of.

The Dragon Knight’s Domain was located at the base of the Lorimar mountain range to the far west of Gregminster and, a potent military force, had established relations with the Empire. So Tir had, from time to time, turned his eyes to the sky and caught sight of a dragon, but this was still the first time he’d seen one so close up. Black scales covered its body, big as a barn, and white teeth gleamed in its mouth.

With forefeet so large they could easily pick up and crush a grown man and claws like scythes, Tir thought it must be a terrifying sight to see this beast angry, but at the same time he was fascinated by its sheer strength, so far beyond that

of other animals.

“Come on Ted, let’s go!”

“Whoo!”

Watching it all the while, they raced each other to the dragon resting with its wings folded next to the barn. Then a boy stepped out of the shadow of the dragon’s tail. Though he was younger than Tir, there was no doubt he was a Dragon Knight; his torso was covered by a thin breastplate and on his brow was a circlet stylized after the wings of a dragon. Ted was entranced by the dragon, but Tir stopped in front of the boy.

“Are you the Dragon Knight?”

The boy turned towards Tir, his face innocent and his eyes shining.

“Yeah, that’s me. Who’re you?”

“I’m Tir, an imperial guard. I believe Commander Kraze ordered you to, but will you take us to Magician’s Tower?”

Gremio and the others ran over just as Tir finished his sentence. Looking around at all the new faces, the boy said, “Hmm. So you guys are the imperial guard, huh? I’m Futch, an apprentice Dragon Knight, and this is Black, my dragon. Nice to meet’cha. Hey Black, say hello to everybody!”

Black’s eyes widened as soon as Futch gave his order, then he suddenly opened his huge mouth and roared loud enough to reach the heavens. The roar was impressive, just what one would expect from a dragon. Tir, Gremio, and the others jumped and the horses in the barn stamped in surprise. But most surprised of all was Ted, who had been standing right in front of Black and so got a good look down his throat.

“Ghh! Youu...”

Ted had been surprised by the dragon’s huge mouth suddenly opening, and he had been too close to the dragon for its greeting, too loud for human ears, so he stayed huddled over for a little while, covering his ears.

But then he suddenly raised his head and strode over to stand in front of Futch, folding his arms proudly.

“I see. So you’re Futch the Dragon Knight, then?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh. That right?” Tir couldn’t stop Ted before, his voice dripping with contempt, he said,

“I got my hopes up when I heard you were a dragon knight, but you’re just some apprentice kid!”

“What?!” Futch bristled.

“Don’t talk like you’re such hot stuff! You’re just a brat yourself!”



“Don’t lump me in with you! I’ll have you know I’m three hundre–huh?!”

“All right, that’s enough, boys.” Gremio said, appalled, and grabbed Ted’s back.

“Let’s hurry and depart. We may be flying there, but it’s still a long way to Magician’s Tower.”

“Lemme go, Gremio! That jerk called me a brat!!”

Still restrained by Gremio, Ted flailed his arms and legs, but was forced to stop when Pahn elbowed his way through to stand between him and Futch.

“Maybe you’ll feel better if we hurry up and get out of here, Futch”, Pahn said.

“Yeah... all right, quick, climb on Black’s back!”

Glancing at Ted, who was hanging limp in Gremio’s grasp, Futch jumped on Black’s back. After that Tir and the others filed into the cramped little basket on Black’s back.

“Okay, we’re ready, Futch”, Tir said.

“All right, hold on tight and make sure you don’t get thrown out!”, Futch called, lightly patting Black’s neck.

“What?!” Ted cried.

“And we’re off!”

At the same moment Futch shouted, Black flapped his wings with stunning force. Tir reflexively closed his eyes against the increased wind pressure. The basket gave a lurch and then he had the strangest sensation that something was pressing down on his head and his whole body. When the wind lessened somewhat, Tir opened his eyes a crack. Black was already high above the ground, soaring through the sky.

## **CHAPTER 02 END**

### **Chapter 3: The Magician’s Tower**

Tir and the others reached Magician’s Isle on the mouth of Tornal Canal on just as the sun entered the southern sky. After circling above the island several times Black landed in a rocky area a little ways away from the Magician’s Tower, which

stood in the center of the island.

“Hey, we’re here! Hope that wasn’t too fast for ya. You didn’t pass out or anything, did you?” Futch asked, jumping down off Black’s back.

“N-not at... all...”

Despite his claim, Tir still had the strangest sensation his body was floating even though his feet were on solid ground. Because Futch was accustomed to riding dragons, he walked normally over in front of Black as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Black nuzzled up to him and Futch stroked his head while the five passengers staggered down.

“I’ll wait here until your work is done. Be careful out there!”

“Th-thanks. All right, see ya... later...”

To get to the tower, Tir and his party entered the forest on shaky legs, walking like sailors on land.

They moved forward while making sure the tower where Leknaat was said to reside was visible in between the trees. Just about the time Tir stopped feeling like he was floating, there was an opening in the forest and an austere tower that looked like it belonged to an ancient civilization appeared in front of them. The tower was formed by countless megalithic structures. The stones were crumbling in places, weathered by the passage of who knows how many long years. The outer walls were the color of gray ash, but they were splashed with green by the moss and climbing vines growing here and there about the place.

The stones were so tall it seemed a mystery how they had ever been drug up there in the first place. It seemed if you climbed to the top of the tower, you might find yourself above the clouds.

“Well, that was a surprisingly easy mission”, Ted said, perhaps relieved they had found the tower.

Replying to Ted, Tir placed his foot on the stairs leading up to the entrance. “Yeah. Well, let’s go get those astrological predictions, quick.”

A voice suddenly rang out from the dark depths of the entrance.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Imperials.”

Grabbing their weapons, the party of five peered into the entrance.

“Oh my... what in the world are you doing, drawing your weapons?”

A young boy dressed in loose white clothes topped by a green garment appeared in the entrance with a glow of light.

Smirking at the five ready for battle, the boy continued, “you Imperials really are a hopeless lot. Lady Leknaat and I aren’t the only ones who live here, you know.”

“And you are...?”

Charmed somehow by this boy’s eyes, Tir lowered his staff. They resembled Futch’s eyes, but there was something different about them - perhaps the self-confidence lurking there.

“I’m Luc, Lady Leknaat’s number one disciple. You guys are here to take the astral predictions, right?”

“That’s right. Is Lady Leknaat here?”, Tir said, his gaze still fixed on Luc’s eyes.

But Luc didn’t answer Tir’s question. He stared into Tir’s eyes and, smiling, nodded twice, then three times.

“Huh. I see. I see what she meant now.”

“See what who meant now?”

“Oh, nothing. Okay, I’ll show you the way. Follow me.”

Luc turned on his heel and went into the castle. Feeling strange, Tir followed after.

Luc turned to everyone standing below him on the stone staircase and said, “Lady Leknaat is in the first room at the top of these stairs. Well, I’ll go on ahead then.”

“Huh? Wait!”

No sooner did Tir cry out than Luc was wrapped in a blue light.

Just as flashes of light shot out of Luc’s body, he transformed to a dazzling light.

His eyes automatically shut tight against the light, Tir heard Cleo's voice.  
"What the?!"

The flashing ceased. Tir opened his eyes and Luc was gone.

"That was wind magic, right? Teleportation is really high-level magic!" Cleo said with admiration in her voice.

Gremio nodded too and replied, "Just as I'd expect from a disciple of Lady Leknaat's. I've never seen such magic!"

The five talked excitedly about their first experience seeing high level magic for awhile, but as they began the climb, conversation dried up. Leknaat was at the top of this tall castle. The staircase wound on for so long that even the self-proclaimed inexhaustible Pahn gave up.

"We're still not at the top floor?!"

They climbed and climbed. They knew they had finally arrived at the top floor when they found Luc looking down at them with a cold smile.

"You're late."

Tir raised his head at the sound of Luc's voice. Behind him, the endless stairs that had been in front of them all this way ended in a heavy door.

"I will go ahead and inform Lady Leknaat. When everyone is accounted for, enter the room."

Luc disappeared through the doorway, leaving his words hanging in the air. Everyone sat for a moment on the floor in front of the doors they'd struggled so hard to reach.

"Jeez...", Ted wheezed. "Who said this was an easy mission?!"

"Good heavens, Ted, weren't you the one who said it?" Gremio helped up Ted, who had collapsed face-up on the floor, chest heaving.

"All right, one more push. After this we've just got to get the astral predictions."

"Right, Ted?" Tir said to Ted, who was still breathing heavily.

"Yeah, you're right, one more push... gotta do our best."

Seeing Ted put his hands on his knees and stand up, Tir pushed open the heavy doors. “This is Lady Leknaat’s...” Having entered the room, Tir’s voice trailed off in amazement. Because in complete contrast to the dreary stone staircase they had climbed to get here, this room was filled with countless small crystals. Befitting the room of an astrologer, the crystals embedded in the ceiling and even the walls sparkled beautifully, like the night sky.

“I have been expecting you, messengers of the Empire.”

He sought the source of the quiet voice that carried through the room and found a tall, smiling woman standing by Luc’s side. There was no doubt this beautiful woman, with nearly translucent skin and clad in a white silk robe, was the astrologer Leknaat.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Lady Leknaat.”

Leknaat turned her face towards Tir, the first to enter and greet her, and said, “Oh my, they sent a cute messenger this year.”

“Huh?” Tir’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Oh dear, my apologies. You are a splendid Imperial soldier as well. Please excuse me for calling you cute.”

Leknaat stood in front of the door leading to the next room, the hem of her robes swishing.

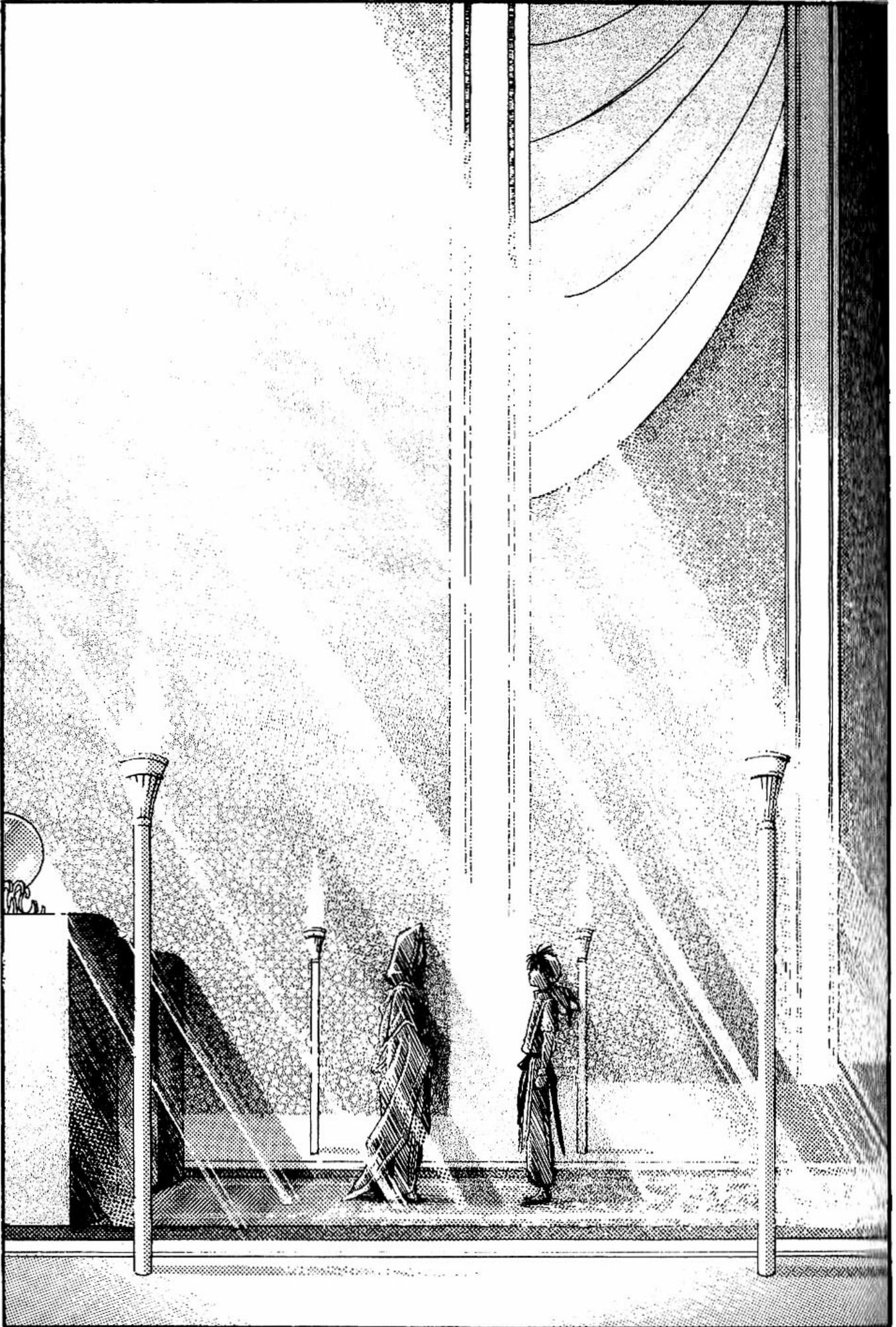
“The Astral Predictions have been prepared. This way, please.”

Gremio, who had entered the room after him, whispered into Tir’s ear, “Young master, we will wait here.”

“Okay.”

Tir handed his staff to Gremio and followed Lady Leknaat into the next room. Blue light streamed into the room through stained glass set in the ceiling and on the walls. As Leknaat moved beneath the rays of light, for an instant her white robes were dyed a brilliant blue. Leknaat handed a single document to Tir, who was gazing in turns in fascination at both the beauty of the stained glass and the changing hues of her robe.

“These are the Astral predictions. Please wait one moment.”



“Thank you very much. Now my mission will be compl-...”

Tir held out his hands but stopped speaking mid-sentence as he felt Leknaat suddenly staring at him intently. Tir raised his head when he accepted the document. For some reason, Leknaat had sunk into silence, still facing him. The gentle smile she had worn until then vanished and she stood before him with a grave expression on her face.

“What is your name?”, asked Leknaat in a solemn voice.

“I am Tir McDohl.”

“Yes, Tir... I see, you’re...”

Whether she knew it or not, Leknaat echoed the words Luc had spoken earlier. Feeling odd once more, Tir had to ask, “Lady Leknaat, have I done something to offend? It’s just that Luc said something similar a while ago...”

“Listen, Tir.” Turning her back on Tir, Leknaat looked up to the tall ceiling. “I am an astrologer. It is my task to watch the flow of the stars and read the future in them. But the future is not predetermined. What I understand is just the general flow of things.”

“Yes ma’am. I know that.”

“This may be difficult for one so young as you, but... Within that vast flow lies a heavy destiny you must carry. You will encounter difficult choices and grief for which there may be no relief.”

“M-me, ma’am?” Tir couldn’t hide his surprise.

Leknaat turned to him. “But please remember this one thing. You hold your future in your own hands. No matter what happens, choose the road you believe is right. And believe in your own choices. Do you understand?”

Unable to hide his confusion, Tir said, “Lady Leknaat... I am grateful for these valuable words you’ve shared, but they were so unexpected, I’m not sure what to make of them...”

“Yes, I see. Forgive me.” The smile returned to Leknaat’s face.

“However, whenever hardship befalls you, please remember my words.”

“Yes ma’am...”

Tir came out of the stained glass room following behind Leknaat and looking bewildered. Gremio’s voice called, “How did it go, young master? Young master?” and Tir finally returned to his senses.

“F-fine. I got the astral predictions. See, right here.”

Everyone broke into grins once they saw the document Tir held out.

Leknaat said to the five of them, “Thank you for all your hard work. Please wait just one moment and Luc will escort you out. Luc!”

The dazzling light they had last seen at the bottom of the stairs appeared beside Leknaat. The light was so bright, Tir shut his eyes. He opened them to find Luc standing there.

“Take them back to the rocky area, Luc.”

Luc smiled insincerely and took one step forward.

“Okay everyone, please close your eyes.”

Tir and the rest timidly shut their eyes and were enveloped in a bright flash. The light faded faster than he had thought it would and the smell of saltwater tickled Tir’s nose.

“Woah!”

Tir opened his eyes at the familiar voice. Futch was staring at them, dumbfounded. The five of them had been transported in an instant by Luc’s wind magic to the rocky area where Futch waited.

After making sure everyone had made it to the rocky area, Cleo looked up at the sky. “The sun’s already setting.”

“If we’re going to leave tonight, let’s get back to Gregminster before the sun sets.”

“Yeah, let’s get outta here, young master” Pahn said, rubbing his stomach. “I’m already so hungry I could die!”

Taking their words in, Tir turned to Futch. “Sorry, Futch, but we’ll have to ask you for one more ride.”

“Whew, we can finally go home!” Perhaps tired of waiting, Futch leapt back on Black. “Hurry up and climb on, don’t just stand there staring or I’ll leave you behind!”

The five climbed into the basket. Black carried everyone into the wind with a powerful flap of his wings. The basket was as cramped as ever, but this time everyone was filled with relief at having accomplished the mission and there were smiles all around. Tir, however, silently gazed out beyond the clouds just beginning to be dyed in orange hues.

He couldn’t get Leknaat’s words out of his head.

“Within that vast flow lies a heavy destiny...”

By the time Black swooped down into Gregminster and Tir and the others staggered off on their inevitably wobbly legs beside the barn near the castle, the sun had just sunk behind the Lorimar mountain range.

“What the heck, it took us longer to get back than it did to get there! You slackin’, kid?!”

“Fat lot I could do about how strong the headwind is, jerk! Shoulda shook you off on the way here while I had the chance!”

Listening to Ted and Futch bicker had brought a smile back to Tir’s face, but now a new fear gripped its icy hand around his heart. He had better get this document to Kraze as soon as possible. Tir stepped in, interrupting Ted, and turned to Futch.

“Thanks, Futch. A lot happened, but we’re in your debt. You have my gratitude.”

“Aw, shucks. Just doin’ my job. Even if this was an apprentice gig, I’m just happy nothing went wrong” said Futch, his smile coming back and his eyes sparkling like when they first met.

Suddenly sad to part from Futch when he was like this, Tir forgot all about Kraze and the rest and asked, “Heading back already?”

“Yeah. If I had time I wanted to take a look ‘round the castle, but I’m late as it is. I’ll have to do it next time!”

“Don’t hesitate to call on me if anything happens, since I live here and all.”

Futch returned Tir’s handshake.

“Thanks. I’ll look forward to it. See ya!”

Futch leapt onto Black’s back and they took off into the sky in a flash. Ted made a face.

Tir waved farewell to Futch for a little while longer, but then said to everyone in a cheerful voice: “Okay, we’re nearly done! Let’s go see Commander Kraze!”

Following his orders, everyone left the barn and entered the castle. There were still retainers standing and moving about the castle interior, but the candles flickering here and there gave the place quite a lonely air that only made Tir feel even more uneasy.

“We’re really late... are we gonna be okay?”, Tir muttered as they entered the waiting room. Right on cue, Kraze’s reedy voice came floating out of his office.

“You’re late, brat! Were you planning to keep me waiting ‘til I mummified?”

“N-no sir. My deepest apologies.”

Tir bowed deeply, but Kraze, on the other side of the desk with his feet up, wasn’t appeased.

“The Imperial Guard does not accept apologies! I hope you actually got the astral predictions? Hmm?”

“Yes, sir, here they are.”

Tir timidly stepped forward and handed over the document he had received from Leknaat.

Kraze broke the seal carelessly and quickly skimmed the document.

“Hm... hmph. These are certainly Lady Leknaat’s astral predictions. Seems you’re not completely useless after all.”

Tir let loose a sigh without realizing it. It was a sigh of relief. Today was finally over...

“However.”

“Yes...?” Tir looked up in confusion.

“There’s still a mountain of work left to do. The Imperial Guard never sleeps. Let’s see, next is...”

“H-Hold on just a minute, please”, Gremio cut in, unable to stand it any longer. “We’ve only just returned from the Magician’s Tower. It isn’t reasonable to give us our next task so soon; we are still tired from our most recent flight.”

“Yeah! Jeez...” Pahn and Ted muttered under their breath.

Gremio went on insisting to Kraze: “We must review and confirm the results of today’s mission. Only after presenting our findings to the emperor may we then accept our next mission.”

Kraze harrumphed, looking worried. It seemed like Gremio, knowing just how cowardly Kraze was, had pushed him exactly where he wanted him.

They waited in silence for Kraze’s next words.

And, sure enough, he spoke.

“Be that as it may, this is a matter of utmost urgency. I don’t mean you must go right now, but it is the Empire’s wish that you set out in haste.”

Gremio, of course, couldn’t say anything to that.

Tir answered instead. “I understand, sir. What is our next mission?”

Kraze’s expression changed as soon as he heard those words. His trademark disgusting smile crept back onto his face. Kraze had won out over Gremio after all, it seemed.

“Hmph. I’ll only say it once, so listen well, brat. To the east of the capital, there’s a little village called Rockland.”

Gremio groaned. “Rockland?!”

Rockland was the nearest town to Gregminster, but it still took three days to get to even by horse. They all felt exhausted just thinking about the journey.

“What’s the matter? You’re working for the Empire now, boys. How about we see some smiles, huh?” He looked around at everyone’s faces, then cheerfully continued.

“For some reason, Rockland hasn’t sent their tax payment this year. Kanaan, my aide, has already gone to investigate, but we have not been able to contact him. You lot and Kanaan are to meet with the governor and discover why the taxes haven’t been paid. Got it?”

“Yes, sir...”

“The governor’s name is Grady. Don’t forget it. My aide is Kanaan. He is your superior officer, so obey his orders without question.”

“Yes, sir...”

Tir left as soon as possible. Once they were outside the castle, he wanted to sigh again... but Gremio, of course, beat him to it.

Gremio slumped and sighed in defeat.

“Forgive me, young master, I wasn’t able to help at all...”

Tir patted his shoulder in consolation.

“It’s okay, Gremio. Don’t worry about it.”

Behind Tir, Cleo added, “you did the best you could”.

“Leaving that aside, we have to get ready to go to Rockland. There’s so much to do - prepare the food, repair the weapons... we don’t have time to be miserable!

“Whatta pain in the ass...”

The five friends returned to the mansion under a sky already brimming with stars. Their tired bodies weighed down even more by the task ahead of them.

Leknaat, standing in the star room, greeted Luc as he came into the room carrying a silver tray.

“You did well today, Luc.”

“Oh, I didn’t do anything much.”

Luc crossed the room, placed the tea set on the tray on the table by the window.

While preparing the tea, he said, “However, that boy, Tir. He’s...”

Leknaat murmured, “so you noticed, too. Yes, Tir McDohl...”

She walked to the window and pushed open the shutters separating the room from the outside world. Outside the window, the stars glittered in the broad expanse of the sky just as they had the night before. A sigh escaped her lips as she basked in the gentle glow of the stars.

“For a boy so young to have to shoulder such a destiny... even the stars can be cruel.”

While pouring the tea, Luc asked, “What will he do next? The stars have already begun to move, haven’t they?”

“This involves you, too, Luc”, Leknaat replied, the night wind blowing through her hair.

“Yes, I do believe it appears you will meet again. Lend Tir your strength when you can.”

“Hmm...”

Done pouring the tea, Luc turned and looked at Leknaat curiously.

“But why? He’s just a boy who’s not even protected by a rune, isn’t he?”

“That, even I don’t know. I read his future through astrology and felt I wanted to watch over and protect that future, but perhaps...”

“Perhaps what?”

“It may be that the Gate Rune dwelling in my body is making me feel this way.”

“Your Rune, huh?”

Luc sighed at the unclear conversation and prompted, “your tea is ready”.

Leknaat turned to Luc with a small smile, then turned her face towards the red star shining in the western sky and murmured, “Tir McDohl, you who carry the Stars of Destiny... may you be guided down the right path...”

### **CHAPTER 03 END**

*Check in every Wednesday for weekly updates. Translated by rin-uzuki [ RinUzuki@gmail.com ]. Thanks for reading!*

# Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —

«-[first](#) // [archive](#) // [Ramsus-kun](#) Scanslations

★ [Chapters 0-1](#) complete translation

★ [Chapters 2-3](#) complete translation

For your reading pleasure and enjoyment, below the cut are the full rough English translations of **chapters 4 and 5 of the official 1998 Suikoden I Soul Eater novel**. Individual page translations can be found in the chapter [4](#) and chapter [5](#) tags.

## Chapter 04: Rockland

The next day, Tir and the others worked quickly and by evening had prepared for their journey to Rockland. Kraze begrudgingly lent them five horses and they left Gregminster behind to fulfill their mission. Because they were blessed with clear weather and made good progress on the road, on the evening of the second day after leaving the capital they were able to see Rockland on the distant horizon. But they were growing very tired since they were constantly on horseback, the only exception being when they camped.

Riding his horse at the head of the party, Pahn stretched and turned back to Tir.

“Hoo, Rockland’s finally in sight, young master. My ass already hurts like hell... when we get there I just wanna crash at an inn for a change.”

Cleo walked a horse beside Pahn. Her exhaustion showing, she muttered, “amen to that. Forcing us on this mission where we can’t even take a proper shower... Kraze certainly doesn’t know how to treat a lady.”

“Not to burst your bubble, but...” Gremio pushed his horse forward and rode alongside Pahn and Cleo. “We’re paying our own way from here on out. The funds we received barely covered preparations for the journey.”

“What?!” Pahn’s eyes bulged in outrage. “What a bastard! Kraze sends the young master all the way out on this long-ass journey and all he can spare is chump change?!”

“The government’s not doing well financially, as I understand it. I’ve heard that Rockland isn’t the only town to not pay its taxes.”

Looking puzzled, Tir muttered, “I wonder why... I haven’t heard of any big disasters or droughts this year... but there must be some reason they’re not paying, right?”

“Yeah, no kidding. Thanks to that, now we’re mixed up in this mess, too.”

Ted glanced towards Rockland.

“What the?!”

The other four all heard the shock in Ted’s voice and turned to look at the distant town. Slightly higher on up, a thin black column of smoke rose from the streets of Rockland.

Tir shouted, “A fire? Let’s check it out!” excitedly as he whipped his horse and galloped off. The others followed after.

After they sprinted for a short while, they looked again to the city and could see with painful clarity the flames wavering between buildings and the smoke growing thicker. When they drew close enough to hear the braying of horses and the screams it was already too late.

“Argh, there’s nothing we can do!”

“Let’s hurry anyway, young master.”

Tir whipped his horse again in response to Cleo’s words. Narrowing their eyes against the dust cloud swirling in the raging wind, they continued to race and finally arrived in Rockland.

Rockland was a desolate and poor town. The rows of houses were built from stone. Sand piled up here and there all over the town and as many rocks as anyone could ever want littered the place. There was barely a blade of grass or vegetation in the whole town. Rockland truly was a town of rock.

Tir entered the town at a lively pace, but reined in his horse as he was greeted by a strange sight.

Though smoke continued to rise from the center of the town, strong men and young boys gathered in the lanes with no apparent intention to douse the blaze.

As if that weren't enough, some were even pointing to the growing flames and laughing. Men roared as if they were holding some kind of festival.

Uncomprehending, Tir turned questioningly to the four behind him. "What the heck's going on?"

Digging around in the leather bags stored at his horse's side, Pahn said, "Dunno about the people on the streets, but..."

Pahn pulled something out of the bags, holding it tightly in his hands. What dim light there was glinted dully off the claws that he favored as a pro martial artist.

"You know Mt. Seifu lies to the east of this town, right?"

"So you're saying those shouts we've been hearing are..."

"The bandits of Mt. Seifu. I saw them running around torching the place."

"It's a distinct possibility", Cleo said, and drew the daggers at her waist.

"According to rumor, the bandits see the Empire as an enemy."

Gremio, looking worried, drew closer on his horse. "Young master..."

The other three waited for Tir to speak, too. While they looked at him, Tir quietly closed his eyes to think. He had swung his staff at human opponents countless times during practice. However, this would be his first time using his staff in combat. He had confidence in his skills such as they were, but he couldn't help feeling afraid. Uneasy as well as worried for everyone else. But he was a member of the imperial guard, so - just like his father - it was his duty to protect the empire. He gripped his staff tightly and raised his head.

"We have to do something, right?"

"That's right, young master. Let's teach 'em what it means to be an imperial guard!" Pahn replied, his eyes glinting.

Gremio eventually caught up with them and it turned into a free-for-all fight with the bandits.

"Ugh, this bites!", Pahn griped and jumped from his horse and began stabbing and kicking the bandits. Pahn was far stronger on foot than on horseback.

"Go with the young master, Gremio!"

"I will!"

Gremio, carrying his axe, and Tir slipped away from the free-for-all and rode their horses towards the men who looked like the leaders. Tir raised his voice over the resounding noise of the horse's hooves.

“Wait! Are you the bandits of Mt. Seifu?!”

The two bandits turned to stare in surprise at Tir. One had a squarish face, a burly beard and moustache and, unlike the other bandits, wore a green bandanna. His large frame, wrapped in a pelt, and the huge axe he carried at his back lent him the air of a mountain giant. The other one was slender, had long hair and was dressed like one of those ninjas he'd read about before. He wasn't holding a weapon but could have been carrying one.

First the giant turned around his horse and stared straight at Tir. Then, as if he had thought of something, he turned and whispered to the slender man. They exchanged looks and grinned widely. Tir was certain they saw him as a child. He wouldn't let this chance pass. He dug his heels into the horse's sides and flew towards them.

WHAM!

Tir brought his staff crashing down smack in the middle of the big man's forehead. He slipped by as the giant fell from his horse without having enough time to even draw his axe.

“Argh! Y-you bastard!”

Even though the giant managed to stand, he was shaky and unsteady on his feet. His unsteadiness was, of course, due to the fact Tir had hit him where it counted. Gremio kept the thin one engaged, not giving him any time to draw his weapon.

Tir turned his horse, and just as he was about to attack again, someone called out, “Young master!” and “Tir! You okay?!”

Holding her daggers between her fingers, Cleo appeared around the corner of the mansion. Behind her came Ted with arrow nocked and a little later Pahn, his breastplate splattered with blood.

“Tsk! reinforcements?!” Holding his forehead, the giant looked up at Tir.

The bandit who called himself Varkas spat over his shoulder, “Don’t think this is the last you’ve seen of Varkas of the Whirlwind Axe, brat! You better be ready the next time we meet!” as he jumped on his horse and galloped away east with the thin one in a cloud of dust.

“Are you all right?”

Tir jumped down from his horse and untied the rope binding the two captured men. One was a thin man wearing a gaudy velvet jacket. The other was a round-faced man with a small moustache, his plump body garbed in red.

The men rubbed the marks left by the ropes on their arms for some time, but eventually, perhaps when the feeling of being freed settled in, they let out enormous sighs. It was only then that Tir began to feel that the battle was over. The wind was still whipping the mansion fire into an intense blaze, but the bandits had completely vanished from the town, and the wounded soldiers were receiving medical aid. With a sigh, Jacket said, “I thought I was going to die...”

Moustache was still trembling, but eventually calmed down and addressed Tir in an odd voice. “Hmph, you possess some skill. What are you lot?”

“Huh?” Tir couldn’t comprehend the man’s question.

“Do you belong to the Imperial Army? Or are you just passing travelers?”

“We are members of the Imperial Army, yes...” answered Gremio, climbing down from his horse.

For some reason, a sly grin spread across Moustache’s face. “Well then, what’s your unit?”

“We belong to the imperial guard. Lord Kraze ordered us to come here to...”

Moustache’s round face was suddenly flooded with rage. “Where the devil have you scumbags been lollygagging?! When you’re told to hurry, you hurry! Any longer and we’d have been tortured to death by those repulsive bandits!”

Tir and the rest were at a loss for words. To be called ‘scumbags’ and scolded by some stranger they’d just risked life and limb fighting off bandits to free was ridiculous.

Speaking for everyone, Gremio said, “Say what you will, but we don’t even know who you are...”

“Shut up! Be quiet! Do not talk back to me!”

After his hysteric ranting drowned out Gremio’s words, Moustache grinned nefariously and said to Jacket,

“See, Grady? It was the troops I called in that fought off the bandits. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes, yes, I am filled with awe at your foresight, Lord Kanaan. You have my endless gratitude.”

And with that, everything finally clicked into place.

The two men who the bandits had almost run off with were the governor Grady and the aide Kanaan that Kraze had told them of. But something still wasn’t right. This must be Kanaan. He had been incommunicado and would now throw his weight around to claim credit for driving away the bandits.

Then Kanaan declared to the astonished group of five, “Well, I suppose you scum did do good work for me, so I guess I’ll forgive you for being late. Be grateful.”

“Gh...” Pahn gritted his teeth behind Tir.

Cleo warned him in a whisper, “Stop, Pahn. He can brag all he wants. It doesn’t mean anything. So just let it go.”

“Yeah... ugh.” Pahn kept quite with an effort.

Tir also quelled his frustration by repeating Cleo’s words over and over again in his head.

“My, just as I would expect from Kanaan’s subordinates. I’m stunned, I’ve never seen such a brilliant battle!” Grady stepped forward without warning and turned his flattery towards Tir.

“We were just doing our duty as imperial guards, sir.”

Tir smiled a little as he said this, but his smile vanished when Kanaan cut in from the sidelines.

“What’s that? No, no, I think you mean, ‘I was just following Lord Kanaan’s orders’.”



“Yes, sir. We were just following...Lord... Kanaan’s orders.”

Grady turned to Kanaan. It’s understandable that Grady, just an appointed overseer as governor, would act subservient to someone as close to the central Imperial administration as the Imperial Guard. But the amount that Grady sucked up to Kanaan was still exceptional. Rubbing his hands together as was his wont, he said, “The military prowess of your unit must be well known throughout the Empire, my Lord. As such, I wonder if I could beg one kindness from you, Lord Kanaan...”

The man who had been trembling in terror not long ago vanished, and with a sneer he might have learned from Kraze, he said, “What? Now that my unit has arrived, I’m unstoppable. Ask away!”

“But this is no place to discuss such matters. As the mansion unfortunately caught fire, let us retire to the dining room at the inn.”

Pulling their horses, Tir and the others followed Grady and Kanaan into the smoke-filled town. After a short while, they finally ran into the soldiers who had regained control of the town.

Gesturing to the remains of the mansion with a jerk of his chin, Grady said, “After you’ve put out that blaze, begin repairs tomorrow. Work the townspeople as hard as need be. Just make sure they don’t go near the storehouse. That’s where I’m keeping all the taxes we need to pay the Empire.”

“Yessir!” The soldiers immediately dispersed and sounds of grief spread across the town. The voices of men resisting, the shouts of women and the cries of children. Brandishing their swords, the soldiers began to forcibly herd together the townspeople who were at hand.

Tir couldn’t take any more.

“Lord Grady... Rockland appears to have soldiers at its disposal, so why use regular townspeople?”

It was Kanaan who answered. “Hmph, a stupid question. If you make the soldiers work, it wastes supplies and empties bellies. Which means it costs money. Working the townspeople hard, however, is fun and doesn’t cost a thing.”

“Hahaha! You’ve really hit the nail on the head. Well, here we are at Rockland’s one little inn.” Grady stopped in front of one house a little larger than the others that had an inn sign hanging out front and, without even announcing himself to the owner first, barged right in.

They entered the little dining room where there were only six simple tables lined up. Grady sat in a chair that had lost its varnish long ago. Kanaan sat across from Grady in a chair that didn’t look like it could hold his weight. Its protesting squeaks echoed painfully in the otherwise empty dining room. Tir and the others stood behind them as Kanan’s subordinates and bodyguards.

Peering around at everyone’s faces, Grady began speaking. “Well, it seems everyone is already aware of this, but the bandits who have made Mt. Seifu their stronghold often attack Rockland.”

“Thanks to them, the citizens can’t sleep at night and the soldiers are exhausted too.”

“That is a problem”, Gremio agreed. “by the way, we are actually here on the orders of Lord Kraze, commander of the imperial guard, to find out why Rockland hasn’t paid its taxes this year.”

“Yes, about that...” Grady began, his face troubled. “We haven’t been able to pay taxes this year because the bandits up and stole them as soon as we collected them.”

“But you just said you were keeping the taxes in the storehouse”, said Ted, puzzled, and Cleo continued. “Is that where the bandits got the goods and money they were carrying?”

Grady grew flustered for some reason. “W-well, um... There is money stored there, it’s just not enough! As much as I beg, there’s no more. I just want those bandits wiped out. Then I could pay the taxes right away.”

“Hmph. Wipe out the bandits, huh?” Kanaan muttered, his expression sour. He couldn’t reply to that straightaway, being the man who’d trembled in fear when captured by the bandits.

“Please, Lord Kanaan...” Grady beckoned Kanaan, smiling for some reason. He whispered something into his ear and Kanaan’s face brightened instantly.

“Consider it done, Grady!” He thumped his own chest as if he’d offered to do

the deed himself. "Since my unit is here, they'd love to catch the bandits. They'll dash out tomorrow and grab them for us. Right, scum?" Kanaan turned to look at Tir and the others waiting behind him.

Tir was forced to answer. "Yes, sir..."

"Now the bandits are wounded, so they shouldn't even be able to move", Grady said in satisfaction. "Please head straight to Mt. Seifu tomorrow morning after you get a guide."

"Yes, sir..."

Tir and the rest left the dining hall with heavy hearts and decided to sort out lodging before discussing matters. Gremio at least tried negotiating with Kanaan, but as his only reply upon returning was a snort, it looked like they'd be paying their own lodging fees. They were so weary, they ought to take any form of rest they could get.

The night was growing late and even through eating the famous Rockland 'button soup' on the table and drinking their tea, the five retired to their rooms in silence. As the night grew later so did the feeling that, though there were things they wanted to say, they couldn't say them now.

Tir had climbed into bed, but he couldn't get the events of the day out of his head and he finally called to Ted, who was under the covers in the bed next to his.

"Hey, Ted..."

"What's up?" Seemed like Ted couldn't sleep, either.

"What do you think of this town? I don't want to believe what we've seen here, but..."

"Yeah, I feel the same way. That guy Grady is really suspicious. Kanaan, too." Ted sat up, pushing the blanket aside. "But I've got something I want to tell you before it's too late, Tir..."

Tir couldn't help sitting up too, in response to Ted's sudden formality. "Ted?"

"Yeah... the truth is..." Ted didn't seem to know where to start.

Tir felt like Ted was hesitating over trying to tell him something important.

"You can tell me anything. We're best friends, aren't we?"

“Yeah, of course, it’s just...” Ted stalled, looking around as if making sure that the other three were asleep.

But Cleo’s voice came out of the darkness.

“Young master, Ted, we’ve got an early start tomorrow, so get some sleep.”

“But Cleo...”

“I know. I think this town’s strange, too. Grady and Kanaan are definitely up to something. But we don’t have any solid proof of what just yet, so... Don’t you worry either, Ted.”

“Okay, Cleo.” Ted gave a sigh and dove under the covers. “We can talk any time, Tir. See ya tomorrow. ”

“All right...”

Unable to shake off his blue mood, Tir pulled the blankets over his head, too, and tried to sleep. But of course he couldn’t fall asleep. Whatever Ted wanted to tell him was on his mind, but even more than that, his mind was filled with memories of the people scornfully laughing and pointing at the fire and the cries of the townspeople being hunted by the soldiers.

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## **Chapter 05: The Robin Hood of Mt. Seifu**

“Hey! How long are you gonna sleep?! It’s outrageous that I, your superior officer, am already awake, and yet you scumbags keep on snoozing away!” Kanaan’s jeers pulled Tir and the others from sleep back to reality. Rousing his still-exhausted body, Tir managed to climb out of bed. “Ah... yes, sir.”

“You’ve got five minutes to get ready. Don’t keep me waiting.”

“Sorry, sir, we’ll be right there.”

Tir and the others hurriedly collected their belongings and, with no time to wash their faces, went downstairs. The five of them, still half-asleep, met Grady in the dining room downstairs.

“Good morning, everyone.”

Tir managed a modicum of soldierliness. “Preparations are complete. We can depart anytime.”

Grady rose from his chair and led them outside the inn. “Preparations here are

complete as well. The guide best suited for our purposes is a child who often climbs Mt. Seifu with her family to pick wild plants. It seems she also happened to accidentally discover their hideout.”

Exiting the inn’s foyer at Grady’s heels, Tir was surprised to see their guide standing there under the eaves. She was a little girl of seven or eight.

“What’s your name?” asked Tir, but the girl’s mouth stayed tightly shut. Tir looked into her eyes and saw an angry or maybe resentful light shining there. He kneeled in front of her and smiled as best he could. “Now what did you say your name was?”

She looked away angrily.

Grady chimed in, seeming rather worried. “Her name’s Haruna. Treat her well.”

In the meantime, Gremio went to the stable and came out leading the horses.

“All right, let’s head out!” Kanaan barked while straddling his horse. Tir was forced to stand as well and mount his own horse. Haruna rode in front of him.

They left town trailing after Kanaan and galloped towards Mt. Seifu looming in the east. Kanaan led. Next came Tir and Haruna. Gremio and Ted’s horses were side by side and Cleo and Pahn guarded the rear.

They finally reached the foot of the mountain after about galloping for half a day. The mountain had been named for the cold wind that whistles down from its peaks, but in this season it was actually relatively warm. However, the warm weather had also caused the plants to grow and block the road. They tied the horses to trees at the foot of the mountain, since they couldn’t possibly fit through the path, and prepared to climb the mountain on foot.

“All right, lass, lead us to the bandit’s hideout.” said Kanaan, while forcing his own luggage onto Pahn. Pahn gritted his teeth again but managed to stay silent.

“Okay then, shall we go?” asked Gremio, leading the way. While Haruna, closely followed by Tir, pointed out the way they should go, sometimes turning around to make sure, Gremio cleared a path through the branches with his axe.

“Are we there yet, lass?” asked Kanaan after they had walked for some time.

But Haruna shook her head.

“Not yet, lass?” Kanaan asked again after they had walked some more. This went on for some time. Then Haruna spoke for the first time. “We’re almost there.”

“O-okay. Hurry it up, scumbags.”

Kanaan hurried Gremio and he cleared the path quicker. When Gremio gathered and cleared who knows how many large branches...

“What’s that?!”

Everyone responded to the surprise in Gremio’s voice and instinctively looked ahead. The forest thinned out past the cleared away branches. In the middle of the forest meadow beyond, they could see the wooden hideout.

The fence around the perimeter was as high as two adults. From the state of the wood, the fortress looked like it had been constructed two or three years prior. The fence effectively blocked their view into the hideout, but from the little exterior of the building and the thatched straw roof they could see, it looked like it had two stories and was about the size of an inn. It could probably easily house forty to fifty bandits.

As the towering front gate was tightly shut as well, it seemed they would have to think of some other means of launching their assault. But, before they knew what hit them, Kanaan suddenly drew his sword and roared in a rousing voice, “All right! Charge, scum! Follow me!”

With a speed that surprised Tir, Kanaan dashed into the field and towards the face of the hideout. Tir and the others had no choice but to run after him.

“Woah!” Suddenly, Kanaan was sucked into the earth and in the same instant a huge hole opened up in the ground under the rest of their feet. The five were helplessly swallowed into the hole along with the earth and sand.

“Ugh... everybody okay?” Tir surveyed their surroundings in the dim light, wiping the mud from his body.

“Wh-what the heck was that?” Ted grunted, his voice strained from pain.

Always worried about Tir, Gremio asked, “You’re not hurt, are you, young

master?”

“Oh, great...” Pahn groaned, embarrassed at being caught in this trap.

Cleo calmly analyzed the situation. “A pitfall, huh... is this the bandits’ handiwork?”

After a minute, Kanaan groaned, “Ow, ow, ow. Damn! Hurry and get us out of here!”

At that, they all looked upwards. The hole was fairly deep and there didn’t seem to be anything at all they could use to climb out.

When everyone sighed deeply, Tir cried out in surprise, “Haruna! What about Haruna?!”

“Young master, wait just a moment.” Gremio said while rummaging through his bag. He seemed to pull something out. Fireworks sparked once or twice, then Gremio created an impromptu torch by lighting a piece of wood on fire.

Tir looked around at the hole they’d fallen into in the flickering light cast by the flame. The bottom of the hole was about the size of a small yard. He could see the six of them, smeared with mud, and the twigs that had tumbled down with them. But...

Gremio held up the torch and looked around and said, “It’s no use, Haruna’s not here...”, appearing worried.

“Maybe she didn’t fall in,” Ted suggested.

“In that case, the solution is simple. We can just make the lass bring us a grass or vine rope. Oh, I’m such a genius!” Kanaan leered disagreeably in the light of the torch. “Hello, lass?!”

But there was no answer.

“Perhaps she got scared and ran away when we fell into the hole. The bandit’s hideout was right there in front of us, after all.” Pahn’s words reminded Tir of something. Tir had been ordered to follow Kanaan, but that didn’t mean Haruna did too. Tir gave a small sigh of relief, but Kanaan’s expression was sour.

“Hmph. Drat. Just when the treasure’s finally right in front of us...” Kanaan clapped his hand over his mouth in alarm. “Ahem! Er, never mind that. You scum

figure out how to get us out of here!”

“Well, if we can’t go up, it seems we can go forward. Look!”

Gremio held the torch high, illuminating a cave in the wall behind Kanaan that was about as tall as Gremio and as wide as Kanaan’s considerable girth.

“O-oh, I see... I mean, I totally knew that was there! Wahaha!”

With no other option, Tir and the rest stepped into the cave, Kanaan’s convulsive laughter still echoing off its walls. Gremio went first, holding the torch. Next came little Tir and Ted. After that came Cleo and Kanaan and Pahn brought up the rear because his large frame would block the light.

The tunnel was filled with the smell of wet earth. They had walked through it for some time when Gremio stopped suddenly. “The tunnel branches off. What should we do?” Gremio pressed up against the wall of the cave to show the others the fork in the tunnel.

“Go right, go right! No question about it!” Kanaan shrieked.

Ted put in his own two cents; “how about we leave some kind of mark here and then check out one of the branches?”

Glancing at the two of them, Cleo moved to stand next to Gremio. She peered into each tunnel in turn. In times like these, they relied on Cleo’s powers of calm judgement and insight.

“Hmrgh...” grunted Cleo, but then grimaced and said no more.

“What is it, Cleo?”

“I noticed this awhile ago, but... we’re in trouble, young master.”

“T-trouble? How so?” asked Kanaan in a trembling voice.

“This smell is getting stronger. It seems like something lives in this cave we fell into.”

“What?!”

The second Tir shouted, Cleo held her finger to her lips for silence. Everyone listened carefully at the mouth of the tunnels. It was faint, but they could hear what sounded like something rustling around in either the left or the right tunnel.

“Wh-what is it - ahh!” Gremio shouted and held the torch high. In that little

circle of light, Tir saw into the two tunnels.

Two antenna wiggled eerily, questing, at the end of a black, shining body. A huge swarm of ants as big as dogs advanced towards them.

“What, now we gotta deal with this?” Tir grumbled, gripping his staff.

The other four prepared their respective weapons. Kanaan alone turned tail and, forcing his body through the little gap between Pahn and the dirt wall, fled back along the path they had come down.

“Tsk! Commanding officer, my ass!” Ted spat.

Pahn gripped his claws tightly and didn't look back at Kanaan. “What do we do now?”

“There's tons of 'em. We can't take 'em down one by one if they're endless...”

“Don't have much of a choice, do we? The only thing behind us is a dead end, after all.” Cleo also held her daggers tightly.

“Here they come! Take this, young master.” Gremio handed Tir the torch and took up his axe.

“They won't be able to all attack at once, either, since this tunnel is so narrow. Cleo and I will go first, then switch out when we get tired-?!” Gremio suddenly cut off mid-sentence. One ant at the front leapt out and tackled him from behind.

“Idiot! Watch out!” Cleo knocked down the ant clinging to Gremio, sliding her knife into its segmented body and separating the head from the torso. Blood spewed out of the cut and splattered Cleo's breastplate.

A disgusting smell like rotten sap immediately filled the tunnel. The ants' bodies began to change color right before their eyes. Their black bodies became tinged with red and their eyes shined red, too. The cave was filled with a noise like something hard grinding together. The ants were probably making the noise to intimidate them.

“Ya mean the smell of the blood of their ally we killed sends 'em into battle mode?!” Pahn shouted in disbelief. “Woah!”

Another ant leapt at Gremio. Much faster than before, it grabbed Gremio with its appendages and sunk its huge mandibles into his leg.

“You bastard!” Tir used his staff to send the attacking ant flying back. Blood ran out of Gremio’s leg where the ant had bitten him.

“Fall back, Gremio!” Pahn pulled Gremio back behind him by the cape and charged out, yelling. “Raaah!”

“Take that!” Cleo and Pahn took turns fighting off the attacking ants in front, but the ants, gushing out one after another, forced Tir and company back step by step.

“This is bad, Tir! They’re gonna get us at this rate!” Ted shouted, propping up Gremio.

Tir looked over his shoulder and could see the faint light of the sun coming in through the mouth of the tunnel. They had been pushed back to where they first fell in.

A dead end, of course.

“I know, I know, but...?!”

To Tir’s left, a section of the dirt wall at about the height of his chest suddenly crumbled and gave way. He didn’t even have time to shift his grip on his staff as an ant’s mandibles burst from the hole, grinding away.

“Woah!”

The ant was even wider around than the tunnel itself. The noise they had heard was the sound of it destroying the cave walls as it advanced towards them.

Looking up at the giant ant towering over them, Cleo said, “Those wings on her back mean that she’s the queen ant. If we can bring her down, the other ants may lose control and scatter into disarray.”

“So yer sayin’ that ants and bandits have something in common, eh? Heheh. Sounds good to me!” Pahn’s claws gleamed.

“B-but h-how do w-we even bring h-her down?” Kanaan asked, voice quavering.

“Maybe she’s here to escort us to the ant’s food locker”, Ted butted in.

“Nooo! You guys are here to protect me, aren’t you?! Do something!” Kanaan clung to the cave wall, on the verge of tears. But Tir couldn’t be bothered to

tease him, under the circumstances.

“What’s the best way to do this, Cleo?”

“The structure of her body doesn’t seem to be so different from the soldier ants’... So I guess we should aim at where her body is segmented!”

In that instant, they heard the sound of wind rushing by, and the queen ant stomped on Tir.

“Woah!”

Tir immediately raised his staff but it didn’t hold and was sent flying. The force flung his body back against the cave wall.

“Y-young master! How dare you attack him?!”

Despite dragging his injured foot, Gremio’s swung his axe, his whole body flooded with rage. But, though naturally nimble, Gremio was no match for this foe in his injured state.

“Gah!”

The ant’s retaliating attack struck his flank and injured leg and Gremio blacked out.

“Gremio!” Ted rushed to his side.

Cleo and Pahn immediately initiated an attack to draw away the queen ant’s attention. But they couldn’t even dent her hard carapace. They didn’t have any chance to aim at the joint of her swiftly swinging leg, either.

“Gah!” With a heavy thud, her leg made contact with Pahn and he clung to the cave wall. “Shit!”

Tir stood up to challenge her, too, but the best he could do was to ward off her attacks. Ted provided backup with his bow, but his arrows didn’t even scratch the queen ant. Cleo was finally struck down with a grunt.

Tir attacked her forefeet once again, and was sent tumbling. The Queen reared up. She chirped in victory, surveying the six of them grovelling on their hands and knees.

“Damn... isn’t there something we can do?!” Tir cried, standing and looking up at the Queen despite his injuries.

Something fell beside Tir with a dry, dusty sound.

Tir propped himself up and peered at the ground, where he saw Ted's leather gloves. The gloves that Ted had never once taken off in front of Tir before, the ones that hid his burns.

"Ted?"

Ted was standing right next to him. He faced the queen ant with a look in his eyes like he had come to a decision.

"Tir... everybody... step back. I have an idea."

"What are you going to do?!"

"You'll see! Just hurry!" said Ted and held up his right hand, closing his eyes.

Tir snuck a look at Ted's hand, even while thinking he shouldn't.

There were no burn scars.

A strange design was carved into the back of Ted's hand. He didn't know why, but the design, a flickering shadow wielding a huge sickle, filled Tir with fear. The carving seemed to suck Tir in as he stared at it, and he felt as though that huge scythe would steal away all that he held dear.

Covering Tir and pushing him close to the wall, Cleo murmured, "A rune?!"

Runes were stored in the body and allowed people to use magic. That was all Tir knew about them. But he was completely baffled to find Ted had a rune on his right hand. Though shocked, he was worried about Ted, too. Because, though the frightening outward appearance of Ted's rune suggested it might hold great power, it would take more than some half-baked magic to bring down the queen ant.

"No, Ted! It's too dangerous!"

"Heheh, thanks for worrying about me!" Tir quipped, grinning, and turned to face the queen ant once more.

Ted and the queen ant glared at each other for a minute. Soon the queen shook her head and began chirping threateningly but Ted, still holding his hand aloft, was not shaken. While everyone watched with baited breath, the queen finally took a step towards Ted. Right in front of them, the queen took aim at Ted

and lifted her foot.

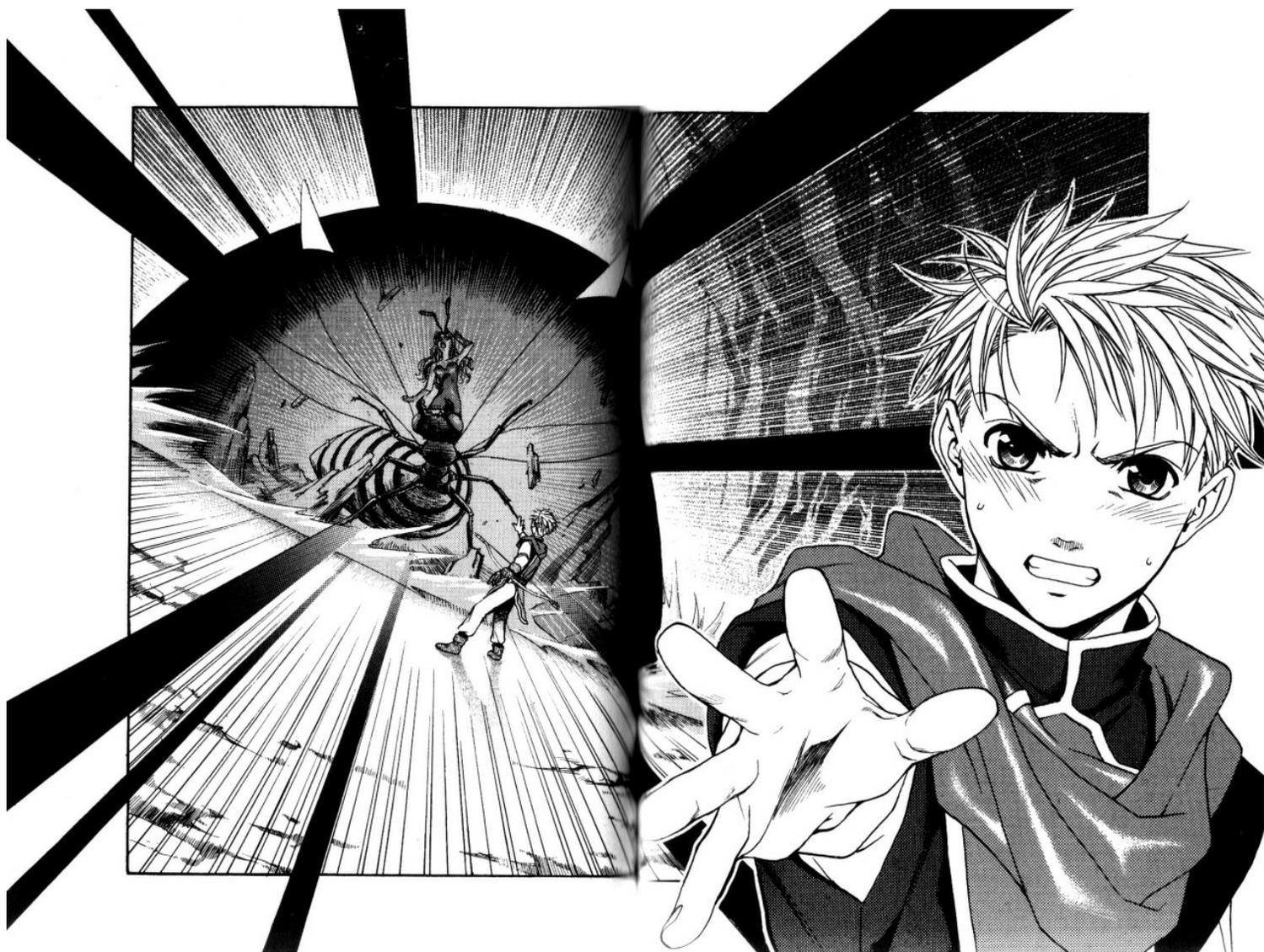
In that moment...

“Oh, rune embedded in my body! Show your power!” Ted’s shout echoed in the cave.

With a sound that rended the very air, the queen swung her leg at Ted with tremendous speed.

“TED!”

The instant Tir shouted, a pitch black thing nothing like darkness gushed out of Ted’s right hand.



The darkness drew close to Ted and just when it seemed it might swallow him, it suddenly coiled about the queen ant. It wrapped around her giant body and, gathering speed, was sucked down into the earth. The queen ant and the darkness both vanished.

“Whew...” Ted’s sigh echoed through the chamber that had fallen silent as the

grave. He lowered his left hand and hung his head as if exhausted. Putting on his gloves, he whispered, “Sorry, that must’ve startled ya, Tir...”

Tir had to ask, having just seen something he couldn’t understand. “Ted... what in the world was that?”

But Ted looked at his best friend with kind eyes and gently said, “Sorry, Tir, but I can’t explain right now. I’ll tell you all about it when we’ve gotten home safe and sound... so do me a favor and don’t ask about it now, eh?”

Tir gave a small nod, “Okay, that makes sense...”, and Ted went back to being his usual self.

“All right! Let’s hurry up and beat those bandits and go home to Gregminster!”  
“Yeah!”

After they treated Gremio’s injuries, they lit the torch and once again headed into the tunnel. They travelled along the tunnel that had grown considerably wider thanks to the queen ant’s passage and when they finally reached the fork in the road from before, Cleo compared the tunnels by eyeballing and sniffing them, then nodded.

“This is where the queen ant’s nest is. That is, the wider one on the right leads down and the left leads above ground.”

They advanced in the direction opposite from Kanaan’s earlier suggestion.

Tir took a look at Kanaan occasionally, but all his pompous authority from before they set out had completely disappeared and he had become totally docile.

“Hm?”

As the tunnel began to slope upward, Tir noticed a strange change in Kanaan. Though he continued trudging along in silence, he shot a glance in Ted’s direction every so often. He must have been thinking about the magic Ted had used earlier.

“I see it, young master! That’s definitely the exit!”

Tir lifted his head as Cleo’s voice came from further on ahead and he could see a dim light ahead.

“Woohoo! We’re saved!”

Tir gave a little shout and caught Ted’s eye and they raced out. Slipping by Cleo, they burst out of the nest exit, leaping into the dazzling evening light.

“!”

They stopped and stood frozen at the exit.

“What’s wrong, young master?” Why’d ya stop?” Pahn asked curiously. They both turned to him and put their fingers to their lips.

After the three others and Kanaan caught up, they looked outside without making a sound. “I see... so that’s how it is, huh?” Gremio murmured in his usual voice, whether or not the pain in his leg had abated.

They could see the bandit’s hideout perched on its hill just a little ways from the exit of the ant’s nest. It seemed they’d gone underneath the fortress via the ant’s den and had ended up at the back door of the fortress.

Cleo spoke while rummaging around in her bag. “Young master... We don’t have many people and we’re exhausted from our earlier fight. We’ve applied medicine to it, but I’m worried about Gremio’s injury.”

“Yeah. What should we do?”

From her bag Cleo pulled out several sheets of cloth and a little leather bag filled with oil as well as a number of daggers. “Nothing’s better than a surprise attack at a time like this. Happily, we’re at the back of the fortress, and they’ve posted no watch. We set the place on fire, throw the bandits into confusion, and attack.”

This time Pahn spoke. “How about this? We split into two groups. One group goes in from beneath and fans the flames, throwin’ the bandits into chaos. And the other waits at the front gates to catch the fleeing bandits.”

“I see. That’s a good idea.” Kanaan interrupted. “Good. I’ll fight this time, too. I was just warming up earlier.”

Cleo gazed at Kanaan in amazement. “Well then, where would you go, Lord Kanaan?”

“Inside the fortress, of course. I’ll go and knock ‘em senseless!”

Cleo huffed a laugh but didn't say any more.

At the end of their short discussion, everyone's roles were decided. Tir, Cleo, and Kanaan would wait inside the fortress. Gremio, Ted, and Pahn would wait at the front for the ambush.

"All right, let's settle this before the sun sets!"

Cleo wrapped her daggers and Ted's arrows in cloth and soaked them in oil. Then Cleo used the flint to ignite them. "So we'll go around to the front, then."

Putting the flint away in his bag, Gremio said to Tir, "Please do be careful, young master!"

"I will. Don't push yourself too hard, either, Gremio."

Even as they spoke, the flame took to the daggers and arrows and began to burn brightly.

"Ted! Go!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

Their voices cheerful, Ted and Cleo sent flames hurtling toward the fortress. Ted's arrows and Cleo's daggers thunked into the fence surrounding it and smoke and flames began to rise. Using the thicket as cover, everyone snuck towards the fortress. They divided, went to their posts, and waited for the fire to spread.

Eventually, men's voices rose in panic and sounds of confusion came from within. Tir gripped his staff and listened as the turmoil grew louder. The two leaders he had met the day before in Rockland - the thin man and the man who called himself 'Varkas of the Whirlwind Axe' - both ought to be inside this fortress as well. Just thinking of them made his fighting spirit soar even higher.

And so the fire spread, burning down the fence gate.

"Here we go!"

"All right!"

Tir and Cleo kicked aside the grass and began running at almost exactly the same time. Kanaan lagged a little behind, carrying a flashy decorative sword that looked like it was never expected to see use in actual battle.

The three of them ran up the slope, finally arriving at the fence. Cleo kicked down the remains of the back gate and nimbly slipped inside.

“Bastards!” A bandit brandishing an axe suddenly attacked Cleo. Tir silenced him with a thrust of his staff over Cleo’s shoulder. They switched places. Tir took down the bandits nearby and Cleo covered the ones further away. Unnoticed, Kanaan disappeared.

The two of them drew closer to the fortress, whose outer walls were already scorched, and smoke began to pour out of the windows as well.

“Inside, young master! Catch the leaders!”  
“Got it!”

But then...

“There they are!”

Roaring angrily, ten-odd bandits attacked. There were even more bandits at the headquarters than expected. The brawl increased the distance between Tir and Cleo. Cleo shouted, “Young master!”, hitting vital points with her daggers. “I’ll take care of these guys! Go in, hurry!”

Tir heard Cleo’s shout at his back, kicked in the back door and rushed in.

Big iron pots and pans flew out of the kitchen into the hallway as several bandits tried to gather together daily necessities in a panic. Tir struck down one surprised bandit after another, and from the hall saw a staircase leading up. Just as he was about to run up the stairs -

“H-haruna?!”

Tir stopped in shock. A bandit standing at the top of the stairs carried Haruna in his arms. Staring at Tir in surprise, the man’s voice rumbled down the staircase: “Didn’t you fall into the ant’s nest, brat?!”

It was Varkas of the Whirlwind Axe.

“Let her go!”

“Hah! First you set fire to a guy’s fortress, now you’re a prince here to rescue the princess, huh?”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Varkas launched himself out

the window, still holding Haruna. In that instant, Tir saw Haruna scowl furiously at Tir over Varkas' shoulder. Not just that, but she clung tightly to his neck.

“Gh...!”

Uncomprehending, Tir ran up the stairs in one bound and leapt out the window.

He hit the ground running in pursuit. As he did so, the thin accomplice hurried up to Varkas leading a horse.

“Sydonia! Give me the horse!”

Varkas placed Haruna on the horse and mounted it behind her. Then they and the man called Sydonia shot out of the flame-wreathed back gate. Tir jumped on a nearby horse too, spurred it on, and shot through the gate.

“Tsk! What a persistent brat!”

Down the mountain path and out of the woods, they came out into the meadow.

“What a pain in the ass...” Varkas suddenly reigned in his horse and shouted, “you’ve stumbled into your own graveyard, brat!”

Tir's entire body was alive with tension. He'd been so focused on saving Haruna he hadn't stopped to think about the two-to-one odds of the fight. Still riding with Haruna, Varkas charged at Tir.

His bloodlust was staggering; he was no small-fry bandit. There was no time to think about it. In the blink of an eye Varkas had galloped alongside Tir and was swinging his axe. Undaunted, Tir responded to his attack, but Varkas' skill with the axe was stunning. One moment they exchanged blows and in the next Varkas was already launching his next attack. His axe really was a whirlwind, roaring as it swooped down.

Tir was on tenterhooks as they traded blows. Sydonia was at Varkas' back. It was clear that he was watching their fight closely, ready to step in and provide assistance if need be. On top of that, Haruna was on Varkas' horse. One slip up and he might injure her... so Tir deliberately lowered his staff, leaving himself open.

Tir simply waited and Varkas raised his axe high.

“Oriyaah!”

Varkas swung his axe down - just what he had been waiting for.

“Guh!”

He raised his staff with both hands and stopped the blow at the axe’s shaft. The blade of the axe shone coldly right at the tip of Tir’s nose.

“Yah!” With a shout, Tir bent his body with all his strength. He had read Varkas’ movement to catch the blade of the axe on the staff.

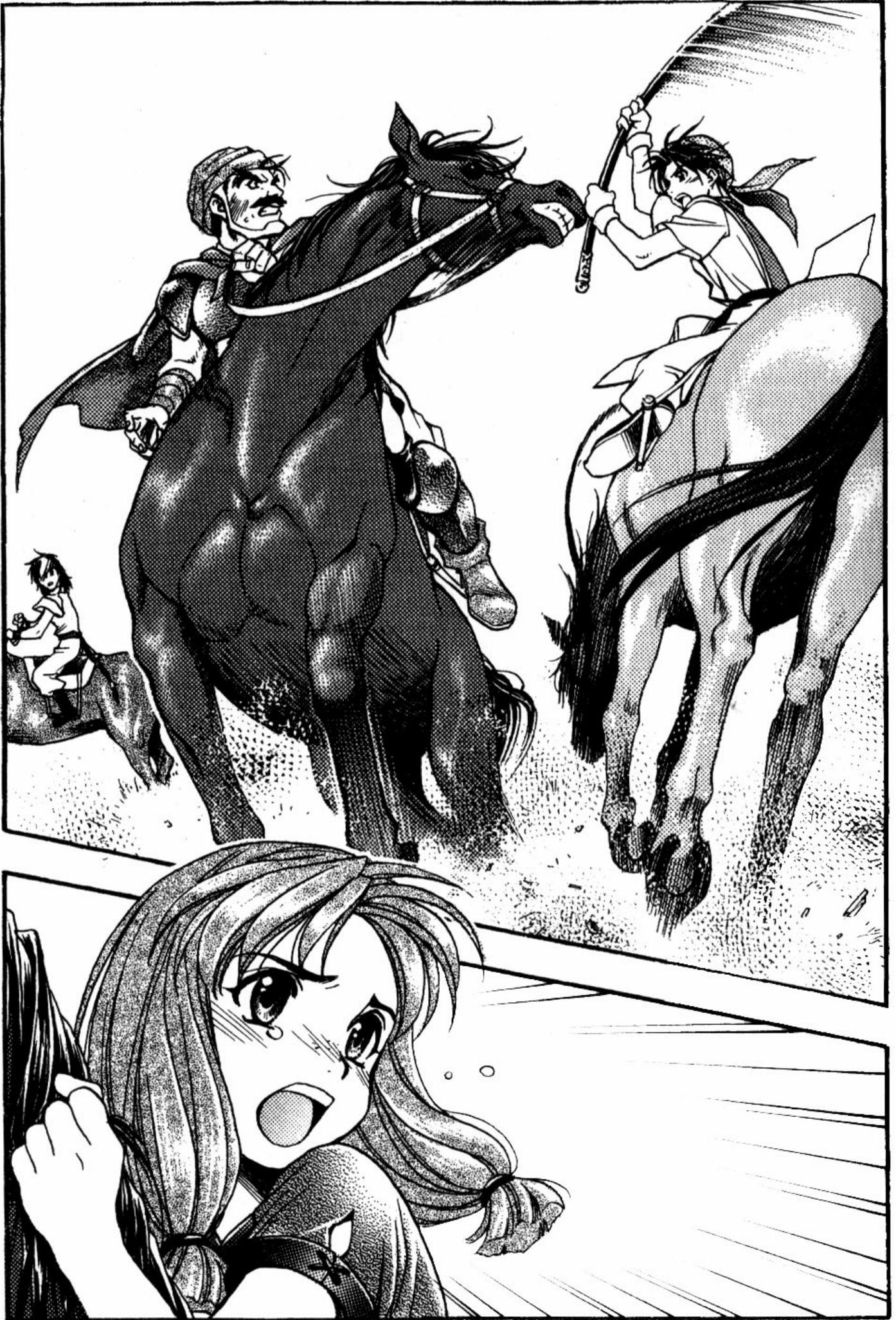
“What’s the?!”

He knocked Varkas’ axe out of his hands and sent it flying. When Tir used the recoil of his bent body and swung his staff with all his might -

“Stop!” Haruna suddenly shouted, clinging to the horse’s neck.

His staff halted just short of striking Varkas’ face.

“Why are you doing such terrible things to uncle Varkas?” Haruna sobbed, “Stop, just stop...”



She buried her face in the horse's mane and her little shoulders shook.

Tir silently lowered his staff, then asked, "Haruna, why are you...?"

"Uncle Varkas isn't a bad person! Why are you attacking him? He saved the townsfolk! The imperials are the real bad guys!" With that, Haruna raised her head. Rage smoldered in her eyes the same as it had when they met this morning.

"What... that all ya got?" Varkas said, sounding as if he had prepared himself for the worst.

Tir hung his head. "I guess I... have no reason to attack you..."

Haruna's words, her eyes... they brought tumbling back all the suspicions he'd been harboring deep in his heart.

The people laughing and pointing at Grady's burning mansion.

The taxes that were supposedly still in the storehouse.

"Varkas... Please, tell me. What is happening in Rockland?" Tir asked, still hanging his head.

Varkas barked with laughter in surprise. "Hmph, now this's interesting... you lot are Imperial Guard, ain't ya?"

"What of it?"

"Heard it from Haruna, see. Thought all imperials were like Grady or Kanaan, but looks like some of ya have got spine. It's simple enough. 'Governor' Grady's been taxing the townspeople somethin' terrible. Taxes they paid before he came along weren't nothin' in comparison! You followin' me so far, brat?"

Tir didn't reply. He felt like Varkas' words were slowly squeezing his own heart.

"That bastard uses his title of governor as an excuse to suck the civilians dry. But that's the usual way of things, ain't it? Throw those who don't pay taxes into prison, keep 'em there however long ya like."

"But that's..."

"That ain't the half of it, see. Seems since that Kanaan fellow showed up things have gotten even worse. He's imposed a tax for growin' facial hair, a tax for

wearin' clothes, a tax for a married man'n woman sleepin' in the same bed - "

"You're lying!" Tir shouted. "There's no way our Empire would ever allow that!"

It was the sad cry of a heart that had lost its way. A scream straight from Tir's heart, the heart that had gone on believing in the empire that Barbarossa governed, the empire that his father protected.

"You think so?"

Varkas suddenly shifted his horse, bringing into view Haruna, who was behind the horse's neck. She wasn't crying any longer, but the emotion brimming in her eyes hadn't changed.

"It's true. The empire treats us like scum..."

"Haruna, tell me one thing..." Tir said to Haruna, whose eyes were downcast. "Did you deliberately lead us on this path to the fortress?"

"Yes... I led you straight to the ant's nest so you'd be caught by uncle Varkas..."

Tir didn't blame Haruna; It was the empire that had forced her to make such a cruel decision.

"You get it now, brat?" Varkas growled, menace returning to his voice. "That's why we take money from Grady and return it to the town. Haruna's family don't come here to pick herbs, and the other folks don't come to hunt boar or gather firewood. They come to get back their money we stole from Grady."

As Varkas had finished speaking, Tir pointed to the woods with his staff. "Go..."

"Hm?"

"I said go. I don't want to see your face in Rockland again."

"Heh. Fine by me." Varkas grinned and moved his horse back. "We've got more than one base. We'll lay low there until things die down. But I'll leave ya with one thing, brat." Varkas stared at Tir. "Rockland ain't the only place bein' abused by the Empire like this. We'll fight to the bitter end if the Empire continues to torment its people."

"....."

Varkas turned the horse around. He turned his back to Tir, who was still silent,

led his horse to Sydonia's side and murmured,

“What about Haruna's family?”

“Hm... no cause for concern. I got them out of town long ago.”

“Good job. If that's taken care of, we've no more need for this place.”

Listening to their conversation, Tir turned his horse around, his shattered heart weighing heavy in his chest. The fortress at the top of the mountain was already wrapped in flames, black smoke rising into the sunset-stained sky.

“Oh, right...”

Tir turned back around at Varkas' voice.

“What's your name, brat?”

“Tir McDohl...”

“Heheh. I'll remember it. Might be we'll meet again someday.” With that, Varkas, Sydonia and Haruna disappeared into the depths of the forest.

## CHAPTER 05 - END

*Check in weekly for updates. Translated by rin-uzuki [ RinUzuki@gmail.com ].  
Thanks for reading!*

# Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —

«-[first](#) // [archive](#) // [Ramsus-kun](#) Scanslations

- ★ Chapters [0-1](#) complete translation
- ★ Chapters [2-3](#) complete translation
- ★ Chapters [4-5](#) complete translation

For your reading pleasure and enjoyment, below the cut are the full rough English translations of **chapters 6 and 7 of the official 1998 Suikoden I Soul Eater novel**. Individual page translations can be found in the chapter [6](#) and chapter [7](#) tags.

## Chapter 06: The Hunted Rune

Tir suffered a great shock in learning the truth of Rockland. Until today, his faith in the empire had been unshakeable. He had believed that everyone living under the protection of the empire was happy... but he knew now that was nothing more than his own convenient perception of reality.

Tir tried to believe in the empire as his horse trotted on. Varkas had been cornered and would have uttered any lie to escape, that was it. The empire, surely, couldn't be wrong - as soon as the thought formed, Haruna's words and the image of her eyes brimming with resentment towards the empire came unbidden to his mind.

Well, even so, perhaps only Rockland suffered like this - but, no; Gremio was honest to a fault, and he had said before they got here that Rockland wasn't the only town defaulting on its taxes. The more he thought about it, the deeper his foundations of belief crumbled. At last, he looked toward the heavens. How could the empire... how could our empire allow this?

“Young master! You're safe, aren't you?!”

Gremio's voice brought Tir back to reality and he realized he had come all the way back to the fortress without knowing it. Twilight had already begun to envelope Mt. Seifu, but the wind whistling through the fortress whipped the flames into a blaze and Tir saw Gremio, Pahn and Ted's smiling faces illuminated in its glow.

“We got ourselves a huge haul! How about on your end?”

Tir took in his surroundings upon hearing Ted's voice. There were ten-odd bandits the three of them had defeated and tied up tightly. Some bandits were lashed together with grass, too, presumably after the rope ran out.

“Some of 'em slipped away and attacked us, y'know, but we musta caught us this many in just ten minutes!”, boasted Pahn and Tir drew his horse close to him.

“Where are Cleo and Kanaan?”

“Cleo came right out, but went back into the fortress looking for you, young master. I haven’t seen Kanaan. We decided he probably got scared and ran away, as usual.”

“I see...”

“What’s the matter, Tir?” Ted asked in concern and his hands stopped tying knots. “Did you get hurt?” He had read Tir’s unhappy expression right away.

Although he knew and was sympathetic to the fact that his news would bring Ted and the other’s heroic efforts to naught, Tir had already made up his mind.

“Please listen up, everyone. I realize what I have to say may sound strange...”

Tir continued when he saw that he had their attention. “...but could you please untie the bandits?”

“What?! Why?!” Gremio cried, shocked.

“What’s this now, after we went to all the trouble of catchin’ ’em?”

“What are you saying, young master?”

Pahn couldn’t hide his confusion at Tir’s sudden request, either. “We didn’t come here to play around. Everybody’s been fightin’ here to save Rockland and to restore dignity to the empire, yeah? But, young master, you - “

“Yes, I understand.” Tir stopped Pahn mid-sentence. “I understand, but... I’m sorry. I want to do this.” Tir looked down as if, in doing so, he could escape their gazes.

For a moment, the four of them were enveloped by the crackling sound of the flames. Gremio and Pahn remained silent.

And then Ted alone shot Tir a smile while simultaneously managing to look mildly disappointed. “Sure thing!” Ted said, beginning to undo the knots he had just finished tying. “I know ya wouldn’t ask us to untie ‘em without good reason.”

“Thank you, Ted.”

Tir dismounted and worked to untie the captured bandits himself. Gremio joined them in liberating the bandits after a moment. Only Pahn still stood with

his arms crossed, gazing in sour dissatisfaction at the bandits fleeing into the woods.

Cleo emerged from the fortress as they were at their task. Kanaan also appeared after the blaze died down. He turned his face, dyed black with soot, to the twilight sky and let forth a foul stream of abuse. “Godsdammit, that bastard Grady went behind my back! I came all the way here because he told me there was stolen treasure in the fortress, but there’s not a damn thing here, is there?!”

Giving everyone in front of him a bitter smile out of sheer reflex, Kanaan jogged over, huffing and puffing, he was so out of breath. Kanaan continued to wheeze for a short while, but then lifted his head like something had just occurred to him and surveyed their surroundings in confusion. “Hey, what about the bandits? Didn’t you catch any?”

Ted and Cleo were silent. Gremio looked as if he might speak, but the words didn’t seem to come. When Pahn made a quiet noise of derision, Tir gathered his resolve and stood before Kanaan.

“The bandits escaped.”

“Wh-what?!”

Kanaan was incensed. He seemed as if he might cut Tir down with the sword he held in his hand.

“No treasure AND you let the bandits escape? You would dare have me return to the capital in shame?! Explain yourselves, scum! Depending on the situation, I may just have you court-martialed!”

“It’s all because I failed to capture the leaders.” Tir spoke quietly, looking down as if to avoid Kanaan’s wrath. “Since we were unable to capture the leaders, capturing the underlings would be dangerous because the bandits would likely attempt to finish us off and rescue their comrades. Even if they didn’t retaliate today, they certainly would have attacked the town within a few days.”

This, of course, was a lie. An excuse Tir had cooked up while untying the bandits. And he couldn’t let himself falter in his lie, even when Kanaan was worked up into such a frenzy over the treasure.

Whether or not she knew what he was up to, Cleo covered for Tir: “That is one

good reason. If we had pursued the bandits, they would have fought back viciously, like cornered mice attacking a cat. We would have to prepare to suffer even greater wounds. Letting the bandits free here is an excellent way of showing them just how tolerant the empire can be, isn't it?"

"Hmph..." He seemed to basically accept what they said, but Kanaan kept glaring at Tir, unwilling to give up the glorious achievement of suppressing the bandits.

"Hmph! So you're taking all the responsibility for the leaders escaping?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Looks like I overestimated you scum. Shouldn't even have brought you trash along!"

"I am sorry we couldn't be more helpful..."

Tir resigned himself to Kanaan's insults. Like being stuck between a rock and a hard place, he was torn between what he believed was right and the fact that he was a subject of the empire, with only one choice left to take.

Finally, Kanaan snatched away the horse Tir had ridden in on and, skirting the pitfall, started down the path Gremio had cleared through the bramble.

"Don't let it getcha down, Tir! Those bandit bosses fought ya two-on-one," said Ted. "Not catchin' 'em ain't nothin' to be ashamed of."

"Honestly", Gremio chimed in, "I was surprised when you asked us to free the bandits, but I didn't realize you had such a well-thought-out reason!"

Crestfallen, Pahn said, "I shoulda backed you up and gone in the fortress too, young master..."

Despite everyone's attempts to console him, Tir's steps were heavy as they headed down the mountain.

—

They returned to town without incident, rested one night at the inn to recover from their fight, then left town as quickly as possible the next day. Kanaan also left Rockland with them, but he was in fine mood, the complete opposite of the day before. Grady had given him a "gift" of a little leather bag as they left -

clearly a bribe. Kanaan tied that bag to his horse's side and it must have been stuffed full of gold coins, given how it jangled and clanked in time with the horse's stride.

When, after three days, they finally arrived at the castle in the capital, its rampart walls bathed in the light of the setting sun, Kanaan turned his horse towards the five others and beamed; "Ohh, we're back in the wonderful capital of Gregminster at last! I'm off to report to Lord Kraze, so this is where we part ways. You're never allowed to set foot in the castle again."

"Huh?! What the devil do you mean?"

Kanaan laughed scornfully at Gremio's shock.

"That's what I've decided. You totally useless scum are just a nuisance to the imperial guard. So I'm firing the lot of you. Don't ever show your faces in front of me again."

"Wh-what did you say?!"

Nobody could hide their anger this time, especially Pahn. Tir was so surprised he couldn't even speak.

Kanaan looked around at all of them and then gave Ted a creepy smile. "But I can still use you, Ted. You're in the imperial guard now, so come with me."

"Huh? Me?"

Ted seemed surprised for a moment, but then quickly recovered and whispered in Tir's ear: "Well, I'll just go for a bit, then come back. I wanna see what Kanaan says, yeah? I'll go and tell that Grady right just how hard everybody fought!"

"Ted..."

"It's all good, just leave it to me. So you guys head back to the mansion first! I'll be back in time for dinner." said Ted, and walked through the rampart walls along with Kanaan on horseback. The four left behind returned to the mansion.

While everyone else was sighing in enormous relief at the entrance, Tir alone ran up the stairs. He kicked open his door roughly, threw aside his staff, and fell onto his bed. Was this really happening?

Now that they were home again, Tir couldn't stop going over and over what he had done.

The people of Rockland are being worked like slaves and exploited through taxes by Grady and Kanaan and, though they did it violently, the bandits came to save them.

Faced with these two facts, Tir had thought he would certainly do what he thought was right. But this cruel expulsion that had been thrust at him the minute they returned to the capital was as good as dragging his father's name through the mud.

His father had personally recommended him to the emperor, had opened the way for him to join the imperial guard - and Tir had disgraced him. Of all the things Kraze or Kanaan might say, this alone was unbearable.

"Young master..."

Tir raised his head. Cleo was standing outside the door he had left open. She came into his room still wearing her armor and sat down next to him.

"What's wrong? You haven't been yourself since we set the bandits free."

"Cleo..." sniffled Tir, and Cleo reached out to touch his face. Her hands were rough from endless training, but just then they felt like the warmest thing in the world to Tir.

"You can tell me what happened", she said. The tears she wiped away from his face glittered on her fingers.

He told her all about the events at the bandit fortress and everything he had heard from Varkas and Haruna. Cleo was silent for awhile, and then quietly said: "What's most important is that you did what you thought was right, young master. It certainly is too bad about being taken off the imperial guard, but there's a reason for it. I know Lord Teo will be glad you followed your heart rather than suck up to scumbags like Kraze and Kanaan." Her lips quirked upwards in a smile.

This smile was one she never showed in battle; it was a feminine expression, like a warm hug. Seeing her smile suddenly reminded Tir of something else... but what? Leknaat the Seer's expression when she had smiled as if she were hugging

him - that was it. Come to think of it, she had said the same thing. 'Believe in your own choices'.

"You're right... thanks, Cleo. I'm sure father will understand."

With Tir cheered up, Cleo returned to her room to get out of her armor. Pahn went to the castle to return the borrowed horses and Gremio bustled about preparing supper.

Night soon fell and Gremio's special stew sat steaming on the dining table. Everyone was intent on forgetting their worries and sitting down to enjoy their first normal dinner in a long time. But...

"Ted's late..." murmured Gremio while setting up the tableware.

Ted had said he would be back in time for dinner, but even after the stew grew cold, even after it was reheated to lukewarm temperatures and everyone finished eating it, worrying about him all the while, he still hadn't come back.

Gremio mumbled "Rain, huh?" in subdued tones while clearing up the tableware.

Tir gulped down his after-dinner tea and ran to the window, where the rain fiercely beat against the windowpane. Ted's gonna get soaked coming home in this rain, Tir was thinking when he heard Cleo shout Ted's name in alarm from downstairs.

He pushed aside Gremio and ran out of the dining room. The clatter of the dishes Gremio had dropped followed him out of the room, but Tir couldn't spare it a second thought when he saw Ted's body at the foot of the stairs. Cleo held him in her arms, and he moaned in pain. "Urgh... d-damn..."

He had left behind puddles of water and streaks of blood at the entrance.

—

"Ted!" Tir shouted, "What happened, Ted?!", practically falling down the stairs in his haste.

He tried shaking Ted's shoulder as Cleo held him. No response. Tir stared at Cleo in disbelief.

"It's okay. He just passed out," she said calmly. "But he has a terrible fever

from these wounds. Quick, carry him to a bed!”

Immediately after she spoke came the sound of booted feet tramping by in the street outside. Everyone exchanged glances.

Cleo lowered her voice to a whisper. “We risk being spotted from outside in the room on the first floor. It’s not good for Ted’s wounds, but let’s carry him to the second floor.”

While Pahn opened the front door a crack and peered out, checking on the town, Gremio came down the stairs and together they carried Ted up to Tir’s room on the second floor. They laid him down on the bed. Cleo exposed his wounds and applied emergency first aid treatment. Ted’s wounds were deep; his flesh had been ripped up from his right arm to his chest, and the area around the wounds was swollen as if it had been burned. Cleo wiped away the blood that oozed out. “Hmm... strange...” she murmured, bandaging his wounds.

“What’s strange?” Tir asked, staring into Ted’s face, distorted in pain.

“His injuries. I don’t know for sure without taking a closer look, but these don’t seem to be simple sword or burn wounds. These injuries came from magic.”

“Magic... so you’re saying someone attacked Ted with magic?”

Then Pahn came in with a puzzled look on his face.

“Something weird’s goin’ on. I didn’t spot any suspicious figures, but the imperial guard are wandering around the town. Maybe the imperial guard are chasin’ Ted...”

“That can’t be!” shouted Gremio. “Are you implying that Ted did something at the castle?”

Don’t you know what kind of boy Ted is, Pahn?!”

“Come on, I’m just sayin’ there’s a chance. I’m sure it’s just some kinda misunderstanding...” Continued Pahn, with a look in his eyes like he had made up his mind.

“We can’t afford to screw up while Lord Teo’s away. Shouldn’t we tell the imperial guard, just in case, Cleo?”

Cleo placed her hand on Ted’s forehead, checking his temperature, and turned

to Pahn.

“We can tell them anytime. It’s not asking too much to wait until Ted wakes up and we hear his side of the story.”

Pahn gazed at Ted doubtfully, then left the room without another word.

For a short while, the room was filled with the sound of the rain falling outside.

While the sound of the rain grew stronger, Tir tried to imagine who would attack Ted. The magic wounds, the imperial guard on the prowl... there was no doubt the two were connected, but no matter how he wracked his brains, he couldn’t figure out how.

His body twisted in pain and Ted’s eyes opened a fraction. "Urgh... gh..."

Tir spoke without thinking. “Are you okay, Ted?”

Ted mumbled, “Y-yeah... that you, Tir...?” and his right hand twitched once or twice under the blanket.

“Stop, Ted!” cried Cleo, “you’ll open your wounds!” but she seemed relieved to see he could move.

He took a moment to rest, then said to Tir, “Tir... gotta favor to ask of ya...”

“What is it, Ted? I’ll do anything!”

“Thanks...” said Ted, then looked away from Tir for some reason and sank into silence.

“Ted... what’s the matter?”

Ted finally opened his mouth in response to Tir’s voice. “Could ya... take off my glove for me?” he said, and lifted his right hand out from under the blanket.

All the dried blood made the glove stick to Ted’s skin. Tir gently peeled the glove off.

“That’s it, perfect... can ya see that thing there?”

The rune Ted had used to save them all in the ant’s nest was engraved into the back of his hand.

“It’s... the thing you used back then...”

“You got it, Tir. This is what I wanted to talk to ya about before, back in Rockland... There’s said to be twenty-seven true runes in this world... and this is one of ‘em. It’s the cursed rune, Soul Eater...”

“A true rune...” whispered Cleo in awe. “Rune fragments are common enough in this world. But you say this is a true rune...”

“That’s right, Cleo. But it’s thanks to this thing that I’m such a mess; that witch Windy is after this rune. Shit. What the hell’s she doing here?”

Hearing Ted’s words, the puzzled expression Tir had been wearing finally cleared in comprehension. The riddle was solved. The court magician, Windy. The magic wounds. The prowling imperial guard. It seemed the truth was that the imperial guard were chasing Ted, who escaped Windy. Cleo and Gremio reached the same conclusion and went back to their own rooms to gather their armor and weapons in preparation for the situation at hand.

With one puzzle still left unsolved, Tir held onto his staff and asked Ted, “But why’s Lady Windy after your rune?”

Ted gazed at Tir and answered between gasps of pain at his injuries. “I don’t know the reason, but... she’s tried to steal it before, too. But for three hundred years, I kept the rune hidden and I wandered the world... I only just used its power at Mt. Seifu, and look what happens...”

“Three hundred years...”

Then Tir remembered a description related to true runes he had read in some book ages ago: due to its power, the bodies of those who possessed true runes no longer aged.

“Ted...”

Tir held tight Ted’s hand that bore the rune. Whatever burdens of the past Ted carried didn’t change the fact that they were still best friends.

Ted looked like he had made up his mind. “I don’t think I’m gonna survive these wounds... when I mentioned a favor... what I mean is... I want ya to... to protect this rune from that witch. This goes beyond friendship. It ain’t right, maybe it’s downright shameful for me to ask this of a friend when I know it’ll bring ya nothing but sorrow... but you’re the only one I can ask. Please, Tir...”

Tir didn't reply for a long time. Accepting would mean that Windy would also target him. In the worst case scenario, he might be forced to flee the capital himself. The conflict in his heart was so overwhelming, it couldn't be expressed in words. He certainly had his doubts about the empire, but his father had a brilliant position as one of the five great generals. It was clear that if he became a fugitive, he would tarnish that reputation. Not to mention Ted was injured and if he accepted the rune now, Ted would most likely lose his only method of defending himself. After debating the matter for some time, Tir answered. "I can't do as you ask. I'll protect you, Ted, so just..."

Ted gave a little shake of his head at Tir's words. "It's no use, Tir. You've seen the power of this rune, yeah? Whaddya think'd happen if it fell into the wrong hands?"

"But..."

"I don't wanna pass the Soul Eater on to somebody who doesn't get it. Tir... ya don't need to think about what'll happen to me. Ain't this... more important than that?"

Ted, who had travelled for three hundred years, hiding the rune on his hand. Ted, who endured a harsh life of wandering in a body still that of a small child's. Tir grasped the words he spoke now; his motive was to continue protecting the rune.

"It's my life's wish. Please, Tir... you're the only one who can..." Ted suddenly hung his head.

Seeing the tears shining in his eyes, Tir finally made up his mind. "Okay, Ted. How do we do this?"

"Thanks, Tir..." Ted said, and squeezed Tir's hand back. "This rune is cursed and all... it may bring ya bad luck. When it does, go ahead and blame me for it. Just... don't let Windy get her hands on this rune..."

Ted inhaled, staring intently at Tir.

"Give me your right hand, Tir."

With a turn of his wrist, Ted pressed their palms together.

“Soul Eater! I command you - part from your current master, Ted, and join your new master, Tir McDohl!”

Darkness gushed out of his palm the instant Ted finished speaking. It was the darkness that had engulfed the ant queen at Mt. Seifu.

“Gh?!”



Tir unconsciously squeezed his eyes shut, but the darkness permeated even his eyelids, dying his whole field of vision a darker and darker black. His body and

soul were filled with an awful fear that he was sinking in a fathomless sea of darkness.

And then the darkness swallowed everything.

“T-Ted?!”

The instant he finally forced words out of his throat, the darkness vanished. Silently, he opened his eyes. The Soul Eater now occupied the space on the back of his hand.

“Tir...” Ted let go of his hand and lowered his wounded arm. “Thanks... so much, Tir... I never slept easy, not once, these three hundred years... but now... seems I can finally rest...”

“Ted?!”

Just as Tir began to speak, a series of loud noises came from downstairs. The sound like a door being forced open continued and then the harsh sound of booted footsteps rang out.

Cleo had been about to walk into the room, but muttered “That noise... it couldn’t be -”, spun on her heel and ran back towards the stairs. Gremio followed after.

Tir made to run downstairs too, when Ted tugged on his sleeve. He followed Ted’s glance straight ahead to the gloves Tir usually wore. Tir nodded wordlessly, put on the gloves to hide the rune, and then, gripping his staff, headed downstairs.

“Kraze!” Cleo’s enraged words came from downstairs. “What business do you have in Lord Teo’s mansion?!”

The commotion stopped as soon as Tir looked down from the atrium. Kraze stood in the entrance with several imperial guard soldiers behind him, leering unpleasantly. Beside him stood Pahn, hanging his head in shame.

Kraze’s high-pitched voice resounded and he looked up at Tir as he came down the stairs. “Hmph. So the young master McDohl is in! Just hand Ted over quietly, hmm? We know he’s here since Pahn, truly loyal to the empire, so kindly told us!”

“Pahn! This is your doing?!” shouted Cleo and Pahn quietly answered, “Ya gotta understand, Cleo. I was thinkin’ it’ll be bad enough for Lord Teo that the young master got fired from the imperial guards and all. I don’t wanna cause Lord Teo any more trouble than we already have. I just can’t do it. I won’t betray Lord Teo’s trust like that.”

“But...”

Cleo still faced him head on, but suppressed any further spoken judgements of Pahn’s feelings.

He quietly looked away from her. “I know... but this was just too much.”

“Hmph. So what will you do?” Kraze walked towards Cleo. “Will you bring him out or won’t you? I received these orders from Lady Windy... if you refuse, then the lot of you are to be considered traitors. Hey! Arrest them all!”

At Kraze’s command, the imperial guard soldiers all drew their swords at once. Cleo and Gremio, as well as Tir, all stood blocking the staircase, earning a scowl from Kraze. Tir gripped his staff tightly. Ted was injured. Dishonor didn’t matter - he could never sell out Ted.

“W-wait...” croaked an anguished voice from upstairs.

Tir turned around and saw Ted, wearing his bloodstained gloves, leaning against the wall and making his way down the stairs. He rushed to his side. “Ted! Stop!”

Cleo and Gremio stood in front of the stairs without a moment’s hesitation, protecting Tir and Ted from Kraze’s soldiers.

Though his face was twisted in pain, Ted whispered in his ear, “Tir... they still think I have the rune. So... while they’re takin’ me in, please, run... run as far, far away as ya can...”

Staring at Kraze, Ted took one step down the stairs. Tir propped up his shaking frame.

“But if they catch you, you’ll...”

“Go, Tir.” Ted smiled. It couldn’t ease the pain from his face, but was his desperate attempt at his usual smile. “Tir. It’s okay. In all these three hundred

years, only you were my friend. Thanks for listenin' to my request earlier... now it's my turn to watch your back."

"But Ted, I..."

Ted continued down the stairs of his own free will. Tir looked down the stairs and saw nothing less than a broad grin spreading over Kraze's face. He looked as if he was enjoying himself.

"Hurry..." Ted whispered. "Go!"

Once Ted had made up his mind to go down those stairs, Tir could no longer stop him. Ted shook Tir's hand off his small shoulder.

That fist always ready to meet his. Those eyes that always crinkled in laughter whenever he told a joke. All of those things and more made up his best friend, but now Ted was leaving right in front of him. Tir realized he had been powerless to stop him the minute he'd slipped away from his side. The sound of Ted taking one step, and then another, filled Tir's chest with bitter frustration and sorrow.

"I will absolutely come and rescue you", he whispered, fists clenched.

Ted whispered back, "Don't you worry about me... I'll get away, just watch."

Eventually, Ted made it down the stairs and stood before Kraze, who pushed aside Gremio and Cleo.

"Hey there, Ted", sneered Kraze. "Seems like you decided to come along quietly, eh? Should have done so from the st..." he stopped mid-sentence in surprise as Ted lifted his right arm into the air.

"W-what are y-?!"

"And you seem like you really want to be my rune's next victim, Kraze... Fine by me. Sounds great, in fact. And since ya want it so bad, you'll be the first to go..."

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Ted made a show of removing his glove.

"Yeeeeeek! Fall back, fall back!" Kraze retreated to the door, terrified, in the company of Pahn and the imperial guard.

Tir, Gremio, and Cleo took the opportunity to turn tail and dash through mansion. Fighting back tears, Tir flew out the kitchen back door and into the

town and the pouring rain.

## Chapter 07: Leaving the Imperial Capital

How in the world had the capital come to this? whispered Tir's heart as he lay staring up at the soot-stained ceiling badly in need of repairs.

At the moment, he was with Gremio and Cleo in the attic of The Red Moon, the Gregminster inn famous for its delicious food. They had safely escaped the mansion thanks to Ted acting the decoy for them, but they couldn't slip through the castle gates because Kraze had swiftly and secretly posted checkpoints at the gate guardrooms.

While the three of them were frantically scurrying about town trying to escape, carrying the rune Windy was after and, moreover, branded as traitors, they had bumped into an old familiar face - Marie, the proprietress of the inn. Her plump figure wrapped in a white apron, a helpful smile adorned her pale, smooth features as she said, "Now don't you look like you've got a story to tell. Come on in for a while! I'll put the inn fees on your tab."

And that was how they decided to hide away for the time being in the attic of Marie's inn, among the dusty, neglected beds with springs poking out of them and the rusty pots. But despite the soft towels Marie so kindly gave them to dry off their soaked bodies and the hot soup she treated them to, Tir's spirits remained low.

The tyranny of the governor in Rockland and now this cruel treatment of Ted, who had committed no crime... How Ted had been wounded pained Tir beyond belief.

He spoke, unable to contain his seething anger. "Gremio, Cleo... How in the world has the empire come to this? The situation in Rockland, and now here with Ted... when did the empire become a country that does such terrible things without shame?"

"I feel the same way. I had heard rumors, but I never imagined things had gotten this bad." Cleo continued to Gremio, who had raised his head: "I recently heard that Lord Barbarossa has just about turned a blind eye to the government and that's why assholes like Kraze and Kanaan are doing as they please!"

“Lord Barbarossa? I don’t believe it...”

Tir couldn’t help but be surprised at Cleo’s words. Barbarossa had been so dignified at the time of his audience. He had never thought that such a grand emperor could make an error like this.

“I don’t want to believe it, but...” Gremio trailed off, his expression forlorn. “But more than the corruption running rampant in the empire, I just thought His Majesty was different than our ruler of old.”

The three of them fell silent then. In the flickering light of the candle, wavering in the cold breeze seeping in through the cracks, they each struggled with their own pent-up emotions.

Gremio lifted his head wearily and broke the silence.

“We can’t do anything about the empire now, no matter how much we think. More importantly, what are we going to do next? We can’t rely on Marie’s assistance forever.”

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking about that this whole time, but...” Tir hesitated.

There was only one solution in his mind, but that solution just exemplified how powerless he was. But there was no other way.

“Let’s go north. I think our only choice is to go north and consult father.”

“I think that’s a good idea. As things stand, it’s likely that our voices, like those of the masses, won’t reach His Majesty’s ears. If something is wrong with this country, Lord Teo can communicate that directly to His Majesty as a general.”

Cleo’s words made Tir’s heart feel a little lighter. Maybe she guessed at his feelings, because she smiled a little, then stood and peered out the dormer window, checking on the situation outside.

“The imperial guard soldiers are still out there. Let’s wait for this mess to die down. We’ll lose everything if we run out and get caught now.”

“Got it. Let’s wait.”

The three of them fell asleep that night wrapped in blankets that Marie brought up for them. Tir slept fitfully on his bed. It may have been the rain pounding on the roof. Or it may have been his thoughts, running in circles trying

to plan how to brave the dangers ahead of them.

—

Tir was restless all through the evening of the next day. When Gremio asked, “is something wrong, young master?”, he replied “no, it’s just staying cooped up in this room and all”, but his heart was already elsewhere.

Ted... did you really get caught? Tir’s heart had been weighted down by these sad doubts ever since yesterday evening. He had said he would escape, but Ted could hardly take on the soldiers in a fair fight without his rune.

He wouldn’t pursue Ted’s trail too far, but he at least wanted to get a good look at the mansion. He thought that if he took a look at the mansion he might be able to deduce how the battle went and if Ted had been able to escape. So after lunch was over, he grabbed his staff when Gremio and Cleo weren’t looking. He went down to the second floor and, moving slowly so as not to attract any attention, headed for the exit.

Just as he grabbed the doorknob on the light-brown door, Marie’s voice called out behind him, “Y-young master Tir! Where are you going?!”

He took off running without even another thought. Even if he told her what he was up to, there’s no way she’d let him go. Once he got out the door, he couldn’t put the brakes on and smacked right into someone just outside.

“Ouch! Watch where you’re going, you little pipsqueak!”

Tir picked himself up off the ground, staring in stunned surprise at the cursing fellow. The epaulettes marking a commanding officer of the imperial guard gleamed on his shoulders and five soldiers stood behind him, scowling at Tir.

“S-sorry, sir!”

He bowed right away and quickly slipped by them, knowing how bad it would be to let his face be seen.

“Hey, you!” One of the soldiers grabbed Tir’s arm and held him in place. “Hold on a minute, will ya!”

The five guards surrounded Tir.

“We been up all night huntin’ for rebels and just came here for a bit of a break

to catch our breath and all when you come runnin' out, brat!"

Tir couldn't very well keep looking down forever. Nor could he get angry at the insolent guard's words, no; apologizing was his only hope of escape. While he apologized, one of the soldiers peered at Tir.

"Wait a minute... feel like I've seen your face somewhere before... Where, though? Hmm... ah, that's it! You look like that wanted brat."

Just as the commanding officer was getting started, Gremio's cry of "Young master!" came from within the inn. From the sound of it, he and Cleo had come down from the attic.

Cleo sprang from the entrance and began forcing her way through the guards. "Just what do you think you're doing?!", she demanded, but Tir secretly signaled her behind his back and she stopped. There was no doubt that all the town's imperial guard soldiers would come running if they raised a fuss here.

The commanding officer bent at the waist and took a good look at Tir's face. "Young master, did he say? Now that's mighty strange. Seems we just caught the McDohl brat skipping out on his bill, boys! He's even carryin' that black staff of his. Raise your head!"

Tir kept his head down.

"You deaf or somethin'?!" he bellowed and drew his sword from its sheath in one clean sweep. He raised his sword, bringing it right under Tir's chin, slowly tipping it upward.

"How about this, then? Look up or lose your nose."

But Tir gritted his teeth and stared down at the sword. "Gh..." He wouldn't lift his head.

"You don't know when to give up, kid!"

Cleo finally drew her daggers and Gremio came out too, axe swinging. The soldiers' hands went to their sword hilts. And when the gleaming sword was at the tip of Tir's nose...

"All right, bigshots, that's far enough", rumbled a deep voice behind him. "And you can stow the knives, sis."

Everyone looked to the source in surprise and found a man leaning against the door frame, watching them with a faint smile playing about his lips. He was unkempt, had a five o'clock shadow, and looked in need of a haircut. His huge arms bulged out of his leather tanned leather vest and his torso was thick as a tree trunk.



He turned to the imperial guards and walked over to the commander, not the least put off by his questioning glare, and clapped him on the shoulder like they were old pals.

“Hold yer horses, imperial guard hotshots. Let’s not do anything dangerous, now. Just try usin’ those noggins of yers for a minute. Ya really think there’s a wanted criminal in the world stupid enough to stick around town and then just go for a stroll?”

He pushed down the vice-commander’s arm. Tir kept his eyes on the lowered sword. Was this man... rescuing them?

While he may have lost some of his momentum, the commander didn’t seem entirely convinced. “Ah. Ahem. Well, you’ve got a point, but... just in case, we’ll...”

“You’ve done enough already”, the man insisted. “Just look, he’s still got his head down, right? It’s not that he wouldn’t raise his head - he couldn’t! Take a good look. The kid’s gonna burst into tears any minute now!” Right on cue, Tir sniffled and acted like he was wiping away tears. “Now you’ve gone and done it. Shamelessly makin’ a kid cry... you really gonna let that be yer crownin’ achievement of the day? Heard ya were up all night lookin’ for the rebels. Must be exhausted. How about I just kick out this brat and his rotten pals, y’all come in, take a breather, and enjoy some peace and quiet, eh?”

Maybe his sheer willpower persuaded them, or maybe they were just too tired after the night’s excursions to care, but the commander finally resheathed his sword.

“Hmph. Watch where you’re going from now on, brat.”

The commander glanced sidelong at Tir, glaring, and took his soldiers into the inn.

The fellow shoved Tir and kicked Gremio’s butt.

“Ouch! W-What are you doing?!”

“Quit yer whinin’ and get outta here already! You’re ruinin’ the view for the honorable imperial guard.”

Though the man shoved Tir and yelled at him, something felt strange about it. However he had gone about it, this man had saved them from certain disaster. Gratitude suddenly filled Tir's heart.

The man pushed them a short distance from the inn to a shady spot under the trees, where he stopped kicking Gremio, a broad grin split his face, and he said:

“Heheheh. Should be fine here. That was close, huh?”

He looked back to the inn. They followed his gaze; the inn was already emptied of imperial soldiers and the entrance was free of commotion. “You saved us. Thank you”, Cleo said, though her expression wasn't exactly happy - she had been on the receiving end of more than one of his kicks, as well. However, the man didn't seem to care in the least.

“Well, we were both in trouble. Wasn't sure how I was gonna foot that bill for lunch...” he said and gave his round belly a pat, smiling in satisfaction.

“Bill for lunch?”

The very instant they looked back to the now quiet-inn once again, Marie flew out of the front door in a great rage. She crossed her arms angrily and began looking about.

Tir was astonished. He had just thought the fellow had said all that to the commander and had chased the guard off to save them.

“What?! You used us to skip out on your bill?!” Gremio hissed as Marie gave up and went back into the inn.

“Come on, s'all good, ain't it? Just a bit of give and take and now we're all safe as houses, yeah? Good job with the waterworks back there, kid. See ya 'round,” said the man and turned to leave the dumfounded group behind.

Acting on impulse, Tir shouted “w-wait, please!” to the man's retreating back.

“Sure. What's up? Even if ya wanna thank me, I couldn't eat another bite! I'm stuffed.”

Tir took a step towards the easy-going fellow who had turned toward him. “The truth is, we're in trouble... if you don't mind, could you lend us a hand?”

“Young master, no!” Gremio grabbed him by the sleeve. “How can this lout

possibly help us shake off our pursuers?”

But Tir was thinking something else. Quick-witted, he had the nerve to stand up to the imperial guard and talk them down. He was certainly shady, but Tir felt like taking a gamble and seeing if this fellow might know how to get them out of the capital.

“Hoh! Yer bein’ pursued? That right? Hmm.” A grin spread across the man’s face once more as he stood before Tir. “So you guys’re the rebels the imperial guard are lookin’ for. Thought ya were just some little kid at first, but...yer a McDohl, huh? I see...” Said the man, staring at Tir. He rubbed his hand across his stubbly chin as if he’d just thought of something fun. Then he lowered his voice and said to Tir, “All right, I’ll help ya out! But only on one condition...”

“Oh boy, here we go...” Gremio grumbled, but Tir wasn’t fazed.

“Agreed. But only provided that you get us out of this town safely.”

“You got it, just leave it to me.” Then he walked over to Gremio like he’d just had a bright idea and began to pat him down. “Hey, you! This axe your only weapon?” He patted down Gremio’s chest, sides and feet looking for other weapons.

“Yes, it’s basically my only weapon...” answered Gremio, puzzled. “But what are you planning? Please don’t cause a ruckus.”

“Yeah, sure thing.”

The man finished searching Gremio and in the end approached the castle gates with only his own sword in hand. He exchanged a handful of words with the guards at the guardroom. The three couldn’t contain their surprise. Up until now, the guards at the guardroom had been staring at passerby with eyes as wide as dinner plates. But now they suddenly stretched exaggeratedly and began leisurely strolling toward the park in the center of town. Tir, Cleo, and Gremio were speechless. The man beckoned to them from the gates. “Come on!”

“Uh, okay...” They jumped out from the shadows of the trees and ran through the castle gates with a sidelong glance at the now completely empty guardroom.

They were safely out and after some time, halted in the meadows. “You got us out so easily! Just what kind of stunt did you pull?” Tir couldn’t resist asking.

“Aw, simple...”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a leather purse, holding it in front of Tir. In case they weren't paying close enough attention, the man gave a little shake of his arm and the bag jingled.

“You mean you...”

“You guessed it, kid! I bribed the bastards. Only had to say, ‘You been working real hard! Maybe this'll help make your day easier. How about it, why not take a break?’ and our honorable guards were already grinnin’. Don't matter if yer strong or weak in the empire - everybody's weak to gold.”

“Gods, that's sad”, spat Cleo and Gremio wondered aloud, “but didn't you say earlier that you don't have any money?”

“Well, ain't that why ya'll made a little donation?” the man grinned as if amazed and pressed the purse into Gremio's hands.

“Here ya go. Keep a closer eye on it next time.”

“A closer...?” AHH! This is my wallet! You took it!” Gremio shrieked. The man had patted him down earlier to grab his wallet. Before Tir even had time to admire the man's quick work, he turned to him and said, “Kid. Haven't forgotten what I said before, now have ya?”

The taller man grinned down at Tir.

His heart beat a little faster, but a deal was a deal.

“I haven't forgotten. Your “one condition”, right? I made you a promise and I intend to keep it.”

“Heheheh. Yer a real good kid, ain'tcha? Wouldn't expect nothin' less from a son of the McDohl family. Well, it ain't nothin' too hard. There's just somebody I want you guys to meet.”

“Oh?” The request was so simple it was almost anticlimactic. “Who?”

“Can't tell ya just yet. Ya know Lenankamp, the town southwest'a here?”

Lenankamp was located southwest of Gregminster, beneath the Tornal Canal. It was the second largest town in the Arlus region after the capital; a popular

stopping point for travelers and peddlers bound for the capital, it boasted its own system of aqueducts.

“The person I wantcha to meet’s there. Oh yeah, kid, I didn’t catch yer name.”

“I’m Tir McDohl.”

“That right? I’m Viktor. Nice to meetcha. Okay, ready to head out? Lenankamp’s nice. Damn good food and the beer’s not bad, either. Guess ya might still be a bit young, but one sippa Lenankamp beer’ll turn you off the watered down imperial crap they serve here for life!”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Talking with Viktor, Tir resolved to go to Lenankamp before he had even quite realized it himself. He knew he wanted to go north as soon as possible to find out if his father could locate Ted, but he didn’t think it would hurt to go with Viktor just for a little while.

Tir shouldered his staff and asked, “Got it. How far is it to Lenankamp?”

“Eh, on foot? Oh, we can make it in about a week, I guess” Viktor said, turned his back on the castle gates and stepped into the meadows.

Next came Tir with Cleo and Gremio following after. When they walked some ways and the capital faded into the distance behind them, Tir suddenly turned back towards Gregminster, where they had lived all his life. He wondered if the day would come when he would be able to return.

**[TO BE CONTINUED IN CHAPTER 8]**

*Check in weekly for updates. Translated by rin-uzuki [ RinUzuki@gmail.com ].  
Thanks for reading!*

# Suikoden I: Soul Eater Novel Translation —

«-[first](#) // [archive](#) // [Ramsus-kun](#) Scanslations

- ★ Chapters [0-1](#) complete translation
- ★ Chapters [2-3](#) complete translation
- ★ Chapters [4-5](#) complete translation
- ★ Chapters [6-7](#) complete translation

For your reading pleasure and enjoyment, below the cut are the full rough English translations of **chapters 8 and 9 of the official 1998 Suikoden I Soul Eater novel**. Individual page translations can be found in the chapter [8](#) and chapter [9](#) tags.

## Chapter 8

Tir and the others began their journey to Lenankamp on foot. It seemed an especially difficult trip to them, as they would have said it was far even on horseback. Not to mention that the three of them had left the capital without even preparing. At first they were full of worries about food and sleeping outdoors, but...

“Heey, Gremio!” Viktor shouted from a nearby field, “Caught us tonight’s dinner! Hurry and skin it right away for us, would ya?”

Sitting by the fire in the fading light, Tir, Cleo, and Gremio turned to look as Viktor came jogging over the field carrying a wild rabbit in his hands. Gremio reluctantly stood and began preparing to cook, but Tir ran over to Viktor in high spirits.

“That’s amazing, Viktor! How’d you catch it?”

“Heheheh. How? I catch my breakfast, lunch, and dinner - that’s how! Yer gonna starve if ya set out on a trip without bein’ able to do at least this much.”

Thanks to the fact Viktor was a seasoned traveler, they were able to travel for those seven days without a single discomfort. Plus, Tir learned various things from Viktor while they traveled: ways to skillfully catch rabbits, ways to fish, how to sleep comfortably outside, sheltered from rain - Viktor taught him nearly everything he felt was essential for traveling. As time slowly passed in this way, Tir came to trust Viktor. But, in contrast to Tir, there was one subject Viktor remained silent on.

“Where were you born, Viktor?”

No matter how many times Tir asked, Viktor would just laugh and say “That’s a story fer another day!” and never once spoke of his past or his origins. This seemed to bother Gremio, who thought they couldn’t trust Viktor, but Tir felt the opposite; like this quirk just gave Viktor a greater depth of character.

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The four of them finally arrived in Lenankamp on the seventh day of safely

traveling on foot. The roads were neatly paved with flagstones, the houses were made of stone and had an air of elegance about them, and among it all were smiling and laughing people coming and going. Tir felt like Lenankamp overflowed with a cheerful liveliness that the capital lacked.

After some time, they took a street downtown bustling with people. Viktor turned to them and said, "Okay, I'm gonna go on ahead to have a chat with that person I wantcha to meet. If ya go a little ways to The Zelkova Inn, give 'em my name and they'll give ya a room."

"Got it."

Tir watched until Viktor disappeared into the crowd. Gremio stood at his side, his expression unhappy.

"Who in the world is this person he wants us to meet? I can't shake the feeling that he's plotting something..."

"I couldn't care less if he were" said Cleo, perhaps tired from the long journey. "I just want to take a hot shower. Why don't we check out that inn he mentioned?"

Of course, Tir and Gremio were tired out too, so the three of them headed straight for The Zelkova Inn and slipped inside. The person in charge of the inn seemed to be expecting them.

"Yes, yes, Viktor sent you, right? Our best room has a vacancy. Right this way, please."

The room that the smiling employee led them straight to was so massive it seemed far too big for them. There were four wooden beds, a rather large table, and a comfortable chair sat by the window. Perhaps to fill the huge room somewhat, a clock as tall as Tir stood in the corner.

With a glance at Gremio, who groaned, "this room is huge! I bet it costs more potch than we all have combined", Tir dumped their bags and ran to the window. He opened the window and took a deep breath. It was the first time he really felt how far they had come from the capital. A town he had never seen before stretched out before him. Even the wind seemed different somehow; he felt like the smells it carried were different, too. Tir's heart had been fit to break

when they left behind Gregminster, his hometown. But before he was even aware of it happening, while watching the people of Lenankamp working in the sunlight, the thought formed in his mind - Hey, this might actually be fun.

After the three of them caught got their bearings, each of them did their own thing. Gremio peered into his purse and kept on grumbling. Cleo, being Cleo, jumped in the shower as soon as she could. Tir settled down into the chair by the window to wait for Viktor. But even after Cleo got out of her shower, which was so long Tir had begun to wonder what in the world she was doing in there, even after they had eaten a meal that rivaled Gremio's cooking, there wasn't even the slightest sign of Viktor.

"For now, let's wait for him. If he doesn't show, it won't be too late for us to go North to Lord Teo."

They followed Cleo's advice and let themselves rest for a while. The streets that had been bustling with people gradually lost their human inhabitants and instead filled the town with flagstones gleaming coldly in the moonlight. The night wore on and the clock in the corner of the room slowly began to chime.

And then... a voice whispered in between the chimes of the bell, "Hey, Tir..."

Tir had already slipped into bed. He pushed aside the blanket and sat up.

"Is that you, Viktor?" But Viktor was nowhere to be seen.

The clock kept chiming as Gremio lit a candle. It ceased after the twelfth chime and they could hear the voice once more.

"Over here, Tir..."

Tir turned in the direction of the voice. Gremio squinted and held up the candle, but the clock was the only thing there.

"?!"

The clock suddenly slid to the side before their very eyes. As soon as the staircase underneath came into view, Viktor suddenly popped up.

"Hurry, down here!"

"Down where, now?" Tir asked, climbing out of bed. "What the heck is this staircase?"

“Just hurry, kid!”

He felt a little funny about it, but Tir followed Viktor down the stairs. Cleo followed after, and Gremio came last, muttering, “a hidden path! I said he was suspicious...”

They walked down the stairs into an underground area and Tir’s body was engulfed by cool, damp air. When he listened closely, he could hear the faint sound of running water. Unexpectedly, when he looked to the end of the staircase, it was bright, as if illuminated.

Since Viktor called back over his shoulder, “All right, here’s the last one. Watch yer step!”, Tir kept his eyes glued to the floor and stepped into the brick-inlaid area and the brightening pool of light. Off to their side ran the underground waterway; the source of the earlier blast of moisture and sound of water. Then Viktor turned to face him and Tir jumped without meaning to.

“Huh?!”

At least he had thought it was Viktor right there in front of him, but Viktor had vanished and in his place stood someone else - a young woman with chestnut hair hanging down her back and a cold gleam in her eyes.

“Wow, that reaction’s a first,” exclaimed the woman, looking a trifle concerned. “I hope my mug’s not that ugly!”

“Now that ain’t it at all,” laughed Viktor. “Odessa here’s so darn pretty that ya damn near jumped outta yer skin, right, Tir?”

Tir saw that Viktor was standing behind the woman he had called Odessa. Viktor turned to look at her.

“So these are the ‘new friends’ you were telling me about?”

“Yeah, that’s right, and just wait ‘till ya hear this! This kid here, Tir, he’s - ”

“This... woman is the person you wanted Tir to meet, Viktor?” Cleo kept her voice low, controlled, but it still echoed around the waterway. Tir turned in surprise. Cleo and Gremio had come down the stairs too, unnoticed, and were now glaring at Odessa and Viktor. Cleo reached her hand behind her back and drew her daggers. Before Tir could even shout, “Cleo, what are you doing?!”, she

quietly stepped forward, held up her daggers and declared, “Odessa. I’ve heard of you. You’re the leader of the rebel army, aren’t you?!”

“What?!” Tir looked at Odessa in astonishment.

The rebel army was a cruel organization said to be bent on invading the Empire’s territory, murdering and pillaging to their heart’s content. Tir vividly remembered his father going off to fight the rebel forces any number of times but he couldn’t believe that Viktor and this woman, Odessa, were part of them. Gremio took up his axe, too, and moved in front of Tir.

“Wait a minute, Gremio”, said Tir, flustered, but he didn’t stop.

“I knew you were suspicious, but good heavens, to think you’re part of that awful rebel army! What are you plotting, leading the young master to this cellar? You won’t lay a finger on him as long as I’m here!”

“It was stupid of us to get caught in such a simple trap.” Cleo cried. “I’ll protect the young master with my life, if it comes to it!”

“H-hold on, now. ‘Awful’? You got us pegged wrong!” Confused, Victor drew his sword as well and stepped in front of Odessa, just as Gremio and Cleo stood at the ready in front of Tir.

The narrow path next to the waterway could fit two adults standing side-by-side at most. Only the passage stretched on before them: to the right was the wall, to the left was the waterway, and the opening made by the clock had closed back up before they knew it, so there was no escape back the way they had come.

Gremio and Cleo had organized themselves to defend Tir and hadn’t yet gone on the offensive. Viktor only made to protect Odessa as well, so the two groups stood with their weapons at the ready doing nothing but glaring at each other. But the sign that more was to come arrived suddenly as footsteps echoed in the passage.

Peering in the light cast by the lamps lining the wall, Tir saw a young man with his blue cape flying come dashing in. The sword he carried in his hand shone silver.

“What?! Imperial soldiers?!”

Just as the young man's angry voice echoed in the waterway, another man appeared. He also ran into the passage, his body encased in silver armor and longsword in hand. Blue-cape attacked Cleo and a massive sword fight ensued. Cleo beat back his determined assault and Gremio boldly leapt into the waterway, defending Tir against the reach of Longsword's weapon.



They were just getting started but Tir, Viktor and Odessa desperately tried to stop them. Before long, the sound of blades clashing had turned to endless heavy breathing. Exhausted, the four finally sheathed their weapons, reaching a cease-fire.

“Whew... too bad,” panted Gremio, sprawled on the cold bricks. “if we could just capture you rebels, then the young master could return to the capital...”

Tossing his sword aside, Viktor flopped down on the ground. “Yeah, right, dumbass...” he wheezed. “Ya think they’d really give ya that victory?”

“I suppose not...”

“Yeesh.” Odessa eyed the pair of them incredulously. “Hotheaded, much? That was uncalled for, really.”

Then the smile returned to her face and she sat down next to Tir, who was quite out of breath. “So you’re... Tir, was it?”

“That’s right...”

“I don’t know the empire’s been spouting, but what do you think? Do we seem like some terrible rebel army?”

Tir examined Odessa and the two who had come rushing in more closely. Odessa certainly didn’t match the brutal rumors he had heard, and Blue-cape and Longsword both seemed like highly skilled, exceptional warriors.

“No... no, you don’t.”

“Right?” Replied Odessa, her eyes sparkling. “Well, doesn’t matter what you call us, but for now we’re calling ourselves the Liberation Army. Do you know what that means to us?”

“Liberation...?”

“That’s right. But this is no place to talk - come this way, new comrades.”

He watched Odessa walking down the passageway, then used his staff to push himself up off the floor. He was curious about Odessa’s words - her ‘liberation army’ and ‘new comrades’.

“I had no idea the Liberation Army was anything like this...” Tir kept groaning to himself.

They had taken about fifty steps down the passageway where they had just fought and entered what looked to be a frightfully old brick construction storage room. Then they all sat crowded around a plain wooden table as everyone finished introducing themselves. Blue-cape was the devoted second-in-command of the liberation army and his name was Flik. Taciturn, Longsword said only that his name was Humphrey. There was also Sanchez, a middle-aged gentleman in charge of business and finances who hadn't joined in the earlier fight.

Sitting across the table from Tir, Odessa turned to him, smiled and said, “So? Do you understand us better now?”

According to her, the rumors of the Liberation Army's cruelty were complete nonsense: in reality, they were forming a resistance movement to save the people suffering under the cruel reign of the Empire. The Empire spread groundless rumors because they were afraid of the people supporting the Liberation Army.

“Course he gets it,” Viktor butted in. “Hello! Yer talkin' to Tir here... you know, son of the Empire's own general, Teo McDohl, and the guy who just got framed and is bein' hunted as a traitor by the Empire. S'why I brought these three here and all.”

Now Tir understood what Viktor and Odessa meant by “new comrades”. Apparently under the irrational impression that Tir would join their liberation movement because he was also being pursued by the government, Viktor had introduced the three of them to Odessa as “new comrades”.

Though Tir did want to right the wrongs of the Empire's misgovernment too, he couldn't respond right away. He had only just found out about the Liberation Army, not to mention his Imperial General father hanging around in the back of his mind.

“Ms. Odessa... I certainly believe I want the Empire to change, but I don't have any intention of joining the Liberation Army.”

“That's right. How did you even think the young master could join your

Liberation Army, anyway?” Gremio chimed in from the rear.

Flik looked from the two of them back to Viktor in astonishment. “You mean you didn’t even ask them to join us before you brought them in?”

“Uh, well, not exactly...” Viktor mumbled. “Ain’t it fine to convince ‘em little by little? Didn’t look like they got anywhere else to go, anyhow...”

Odessa, however, turned her steady gaze to Tir. “I see. It’s fine if that’s how it is. Viktor tricked you, huh?”

“I didn’t trick nobody!” spluttered Viktor, but Odessa kept on smiling.

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Viktor’s always dragging in people he likes. Please feel free to stay with us awhile if you don’t have anywhere else to go. But, Tir, I want you to remember one thing.” She stood and looked down at him. “You just said you want the Empire to change, right? Even if the Empire hadn’t also given you personal cause for grievance, you’ve seen how the people are suffering under the Empire’s rule. You feel this way because of what you’ve seen with your own eyes and heard with your own ears.”

Instances of the Empire’s oppression flashed through Tir’s mind. He thought of Rockland. He thought of Ted.

“You must not lie to yourself about your own feelings. That is too great a crime; even if you turn your eyes from the truth, it is you yourself who will suffer in the end. This I have found for myself.” Odessa’s words burned into his mind like a fiery brand, snapping him out of his dark reverie. He sensed something in them; “This I have found for myself...”

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Fascinated by Odessa and her philosophies, Tir left the Liberation Army hideout thinking that he wanted to stay in Lenankamp just a little while longer. Unbeknownst to Tir, the desire to stay a little longer and get to know Odessa and the Liberation Army was beginning to form in his heart.

When he consulted Cleo and Gremio, their opinions were split two ways. While Gremio argued that they go north, Cleo said, “It might be good to stay here a while and figure out our situation better. Even if we return to the Empire, it would be in our best interests to know more about how the Liberation Army

ticks.”

In any case, whatever the reason, majority ruled two-to-one that they stay in Lenankamp. Tir got the chance to speak with the members of the Liberation Army the following day, too, since they were staying at The Zelkova. Though Viktor seemed to take Odessa’s remark about having tricked them poorly, he still entertained Tir and company in his usual light-hearted fashion. Of course, he reminded them they were welcome in the Liberation Army, too.

Flik, the second-in-command, was a hot-headed young man. He called himself ‘Blue Lightning Flik’. Maybe because he held such strong beliefs about the Liberation Army, he seemed to view Tir, son of the Imperial General Teo, as an enemy. Flik got so fired up whenever it came to Odessa that Cleo had to wonder if he was in love with her.

The guy with the longsword, Humphrey, was always taciturn when and wherever they met, but Tir couldn’t help but like him when the mouth on his giant, terrifying face opened just a little and out came a muttered greeting. Sanchez was a knowledgeable man who was always neatly dressed and groomed. Perhaps coming from a well-off family, he chose his wine with care at dinner.

Tir spent so much time meeting so many different people that the night had grown late before he knew it. Just as he returned to his room after a practice bout of staff sparring with Gremio out in the yard of The Zelkova, Viktor emerged from the hidden passage underneath the clock. “Hey, Tir”, he said. “Odessa said she wants to talk to ya.”

“Me? Why?”

Leaving this mystery unanswered, he fell in step with Viktor and they made for the secret passage. They could see Flik coming up. Scowling, he shoved Tir aside as he came out of the passage.

“I’m just gonna say one thing, Tir. I don’t trust you. Remember that.”

Tir had no idea what to say to this sudden declaration, but Viktor threw him a lifeline. “Knock it off, Flik. Ya worry too much. Tir ain’t like that, I promise.”

“Damn fool! Your word I trust least of all.” Flik sullenly pushed past Viktor and

left the room.

Cleo and Gremio hurried in. Tir told them he would be back, then took the stairs down to the underground waterway. Sighing, he stood at the waterway side-path. He couldn't get Flik's words out of his head. He understood where Flik was coming from. The Liberation Army was an organization that had to avoid the Empire's attention. It was completely natural for Flik to be suspicious of Tir, who not only possessed an Imperial general of a father, but just happened to tumble into the Liberation Army's lap - and then refuse an invitation to join, too.

"Something wrong, Tir?"

Turning at the sound of her voice, Tir suddenly found himself staring straight into Odessa's eyes.

Does she see me the same way Flik does?, wondered Tir, but she just smiled. "I'm sorry, were you already in bed?" Odessa asked while walking along the passage.

Following after, Tir replied, "No, it's fine. Viktor said you wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes, though it's not a big deal. I heard from Viktor earlier that you..." she trailed off as she walked to the storage room table.

Tir sat across from her. Looking at him, Odessa continued: "Viktor told me about what you did in Rockland. That's what I want to talk to you about."

Odessa's words jogged Tir's memory. Sitting around the fire mid-journey to Lenankamp, Viktor had asked "Whaddya think of the Empire lately, kid?" That's when he had spoken about Rockland.

She smiled in the light cast by the candle in the middle of the table. "It may be strange to say, but it makes me happy - You're just one person and you stood up to the Empire. So I feel that I, blessed with so many comrades, must try even harder."

"How was that standing up to Empire? I didn't even really help the people of Rockland."

"You're right, it may not have been a grand move, but it gives me strength! I've

been feeling just a tad discouraged, in truth.”

Tir couldn't help but be surprised; he had never thought of Odessa as anything but a strong, unwavering woman.

Smiling almost shyly, she went on. “The Liberation Army has been recruiting among the townsfolk, and everyone - Flik, Viktor, and Humphrey and Sanchez, too - they're all expecting that I'll put a stop to all this. But, you know, there are times I want to run away. Things get harder when I start wondering if I can live up to everyone's expectations”, she said, then fell silent, gazing down.

It seemed to Tir that Odessa thought she wasn't living up to the title of Liberation Army Leader. She carried everyone along on those thin shoulders of hers, but she was still just one woman. Looking at Odessa still so down, a question began to bubble up in Tir's heart. What had driven her up until now? What had she seen, what had she heard, that had made her warn him as she did yesterday?

“Ms. Odessa...” Tir began, making up his mind. “Maybe this is none of my business, but... why did you start the Liberation Army?”

“You want to know, huh?” She asked, smiling in a somehow lonely way.

The sound of water running through the channel enveloped them for some time. Instead of being refreshing, the echo made the atmosphere heavy and oppressive. It was Tir who broke the silence. “Yesterday you said, ‘I found that out for myself’. I was wondering what you meant by that.”

“Well, it's not a happy story... the Empire was also pursuing me once, long ago.”

A darkness flickered in her eyes. He felt like he had seen eyes just like them somewhere before... Of course, that was it! Odessa's eyes looked just like Haruna's, back in Rockland. Maybe she couldn't bear Tir's gaze any longer, or maybe to escape the feelings of sadness swelling in her chest, Odessa averted her eyes, heaved a huge sigh, and began her story. “I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but if you really want to know, I will. Long ago, I had a lover...”

She had originally been an Imperial noble. She said that some years back when unfavorable criticism of the Empire began to grow, She had been living with an aristocrat who was part of an anti-Imperial resistance movement. But their

location was discovered, her lover captured and sentenced to death. The one who sentenced her lover allowed Odessa one final request, and she asked to be married before her lover's sentence was carried out. Her request was granted, but though they called the ceremony they held a wedding, it was really nothing but a terribly cruel trick. Armed Imperial soldiers stood in rows in the place of relatives on both sides and they exchanged vows before the gallows. They intended to execute her lover as soon as the ceremony was over.

The minute Odessa's vows left her lips, she snatched a sword from the nearest Imperial soldier and fought until her snow-white dress was dyed crimson. They took advantage of the confusion to try and escape the ceremony hall, but her lover was shot through with an arrow during the Imperial Guard's relentless attack. Odessa kept her grief in check and escaped into the town so the Imperial Guard turned their swords toward her, now a traitor too, and pursued her.

As her story unfolded, Tir couldn't help but feel it seemed just like what had happened to him, multiplied many times over. He bitterly mourned the suffering and sorrow of yet another person at the hands of the thieving country pursuing them. He felt her sorrow was a lot like his own. Perhaps unable to hold her feelings back, her tears finally spilled over.

"But, Tir, don't think that I'm fighting the Empire just for my own revenge. I spent time in a lot of different towns while running from the Empire and saw how the people suffer under their rule, too."

"So that's how this all happened..."

"I do what I do out of love. What's done is done, and nothing can change that. But things can't stay this way. I want to build a country where everyone can smile and live happily. That's why I fight."

Odessa's words left him speechless. Deep in his heart, he wanted to stand by her side and fight with her. Her words fanned the flames of his anger towards the Empire into a roaring blaze. But every time he tried to voice his decision, an image of his father appeared in his mind, pushing the words back down.

Odessa suddenly took Tir's hand, resting atop the table, in hers.

"Tir... I really hope you'll join the Liberation Army; you seem like you have the ability to see right to the truth of matters. I think what you did in Rockland was

wonderful.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and don’t say it’s impossible just because you still hesitate. This fight isn’t something that will end today or tomorrow. No, I believe this will be a long fight that will spread across the entire country, and will keep going as long as our will remains strong. So I wouldn’t want you to join us while you have any doubts left.”

“I’m sorry, Ms. Odessa... I’m still not sure.”

“That’s okay. It’s enough for me that you’re considering it at all. It’s gotten late, so I’m going to head out, but feel free to stay here and take your time thinking. Whatever you choose to do, listen to your heart.” Her smile returned to her face and Odessa gently squeezed Tir’s hand.

Watching Odessa’s slender form as she stood and turned to take the stairs, Tir’s heart wavered once again. Should I go north or should I stay here?

He took a deep breath and stood, gripping his staff.

“Tir?” She called, paused in front of the stairs. Tir ran to her side. Odessa stood stock still, gazing out into the darkness of the waterway.

“What’s wrong?”

“What was that noise?”

Tir listened carefully. He could hear something within the darkness. There was the sound of water splashing and dripping - it sounded like someone approaching.

“It couldn’t be... Imperial soldiers?!” No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Odessa drew her slender sword.

Something glittered in the dark of the waterway. It was the light of the swords being drawn by the Imperial soldiers advancing through the waterway. As Odessa cried, “Why are they here?!”, five or six Imperial soldiers came creeping into the waterway. The Imperial soldiers only had on breastplates and light armor, so they moved quicker than expected. Odessa brandished her sword, stemming the invasion of soldiers from the waterway.

Turning his back on Odessa, Tir took on a soldier who had taken the path and come up around into the supply storage area. But since the inner waterway was dark, he couldn't tell if there were more soldiers. They couldn't attack all at once because the passage was so narrow, but there were too many for Tir to handle.

"Ms. Odessa! Escape above!"

Right after he shouted, the secret door opened and Viktor's voice came rumbling out.

"Shit! Imperial soldiers! How the hell'd they sniff us out?! You all right down there?!"

"No! They're coming down the waterway, the two of us can't hold them off!"

"What?!"

Viktor jumped down into the passageway with a loud thump.

"Odessa!" Flik called from the stairs. "Are you okay?!"

"Flik! Get out of town and escape the soldiers! We can't lose this place to them now!" Odessa shouted, brandishing her sword.

"But, Odessa..."

"I'm fine! Get a move on! You're second-in-command, aren't you?!"

Kicking down the leader of the Imperial Soldiers, Viktor roared, "I'll do somethin' about this place! You take care of the soldiers!"

Flik didn't reply for some time, but his reply came at last during a break in the sound of battle. "All right! Stay safe, Odessa!"

"You, too!" Odessa replied gallantly.

But Viktor seemed to grasp their disadvantage as the enemy soldiers attacked them in waves. "We can't do nothin' here! I'll hold 'em off, so head on up and get outta here!"

"No way! What about you, Viktor?!"

"Dumbass! Yer the leader, ain'tcha?! Everybody's got their hopes pinned on ya. Die and the entire liberation movement gets snuffed out with ya!"

Odessa's protests were cut short by her shriek - an Imperial soldier had crept in between her and Viktor. Another soldier was between Tir and Odessa.

"Ms. Odessa!"

Each of them was isolated in the narrow passage. Tir desperately swung his staff to try and get closer to Odessa, but a soldier in the waterway drew his sword and tripped him up, limiting his mobility. Viktor leapt into the waterway, roared "Godsdamned bastard!" and took down the soldier with a splash. His strength was such that he scattered the soldiers in the passage too, and then jumped back into the waterway right in front of Tir, who was going to Odessa's aid. The Imperial soldiers didn't miss their chance; three of them came up onto the passageway, and blocked off the path to the stairs, the one exit out of the underground waterway.

"Things ain't lookin' good, Tir, bastards got us cornered!" Viktor growled, slowly backing up.

"What are things like up above?" "Even worse. It's a real bloodbath up there, think they brought pals."

"Gh..."

Tir and Viktor retreated to the supply room to back-up Odessa. The soldiers climbed out of the water as well and moved to block Odessa, Viktor, and Tir. Maybe due to the narrowness of the supply room, the soldiers rearranged themselves into two rows in front and behind. Tir counted the enemy while they were at a standoff - there were six.

"You alive, Viktor?"

"Heheh. These guys ain't got nothin' on me. Watch this!"

His roar made the soldier on the left dance. Tir shoved out the soldier on the right and Odessa took care of the one in the middle. They had pushed out the Imperial soldiers and gotten one blow closer to knocking out the vanguard when...

"Arrows?!"

Tir caught the gleam of arrowheads at the breast of one of the rear guard

soldiers, but hadn't been able to figure out a way to avoid them. "Shit!" Tir grit his teeth and took out the vanguard, but other soldiers immediately replaced them. While he was occupied, the soldier knocked an arrow to his bow, drew, and turned to Tir. The bow sang as the arrow flew. Tir was knocked sideways just as Odessa called out his name. He smashed into the wall, but he paid no heed.

"Odessa!"

He turned, but it was too late.

An arrow was lodged in Odessa's chest, her breastplate dyed red.

—

"Odessa!"

As soon as they took down the Imperial soldiers with brute strength, Viktor and Tir leaned over Odessa, who lay prone. Her breath came in ragged bursts. She grimaced up at them.

"What about the... Imperial... soldiers...?"

"Rest easy. We took care of 'em all", Viktor answered.

"I see... so we're... safe, then."

Tir cried, "don't talk, I'll get the doctor!"

As he was about to stand, Odessa tugged at his sleeve.

"Don't bother, Tir... Too bad, but looks like I won't... be needing a doctor..."

"What're ya sayin'?! The liberation movement is nothin' without ya! This ain't the end!"

As Viktor raged, Tir silently hung his head. "I'm so sorry, Viktor, this is all my fault. I knew that soldier had drawn his arrow. If I had just..."

"Oh, Tir... don't say that..." Odessa murmured between ragged breaths. "This isn't your fault. I made my choice... This is just the fate I avoided back then. I knew that Gremio and Cleo's hearts would break if that arrow hit you."

"Odessa, you..."

Tir was astonished. She was the leader of the Liberation Army, the one

everyone looked to, and she had taken an arrow in the heart for the sake of a boy she had only met yesterday. She had sacrificed herself, an act that could never be repaid.

Neither Viktor nor Tir could say a word. But, impossibly, the corners of Odessa's lips twitched up in a smile and she kept speaking. "I don't want to see anyone cry because of the Empire any more. I didn't want to see it ever again, no matter what happened to me. Sorry, Viktor, I'm just doing as I like. Total failure as a leader, huh?"

Tir couldn't bear to see Odessa smile. Hearing her words, he felt like he understood her desire to change this country for the first time. The minute he understood that she was indeed fighting, he felt ashamed of himself for just standing by in confusion doing nothing while the Empire committed atrocious deeds right in front of him.

Gazing at Tir, Odessa opened her mouth to speak once again. "Tir, there are two favors I want to ask of you."

"Please, Ms. Odessa, anything you say." She smiled at Tir's reply and slipped an earring off her ear, hidden in her chestnut hair. "Give this... to a man named Mathiu, who lives in Seika village..."

"Mathiu? Got it." Tir reached out his hand and accepted the earring. It was gold, inlaid with a sparkling jewel, and speckled with Odessa's blood.

"Second..." She turned her head to the side. They followed her gaze to the quietly flowing waterway. "...throw my body into the water."

"What are you saying, Odessa?!" Viktor cried.

Tir also had to protest this horrible plea. "We could never do that!"

"Yeah, I knew... you'd say that. But just listen..." She fixed her eyes on Tir once again. "If word of my death gets out... the liberation movement that's only just begun to bud will vanish in the blink of an eye. You must conceal my death. We cannot let this dim hope, just born, fade!"

Still silent, Tir gave a small nod. He felt that was befitting of the leader of the Liberation Army.

“Grr!” Viktor punched the floor. “Godsdammit!” A single tear fell to the soiled floor .

Tir’s hands also curled into fists atop his knees.

“Viktor... you’re crying... for me?”

“Yeah, I am. For you, and for your Liberation Army.”

“Hey, Viktor? Next time you see Flik, will you tell him this for me? Tell him I said that his kindness... always comforted me. I may’ve only ever scolded him, but... I...”

“Yeah, I’ll tell him.”

Odessa turned her head and looked at Tir. “Tir, you’re... crying for me too, even though you only just met us yesterday? You’re a kind soul, you are...”

Perhaps something came to her then, for she placed her white, blood-soaked hand atop Tir’s right fist. Her blood dripped onto Tir’s leather glove, already wet with his tears. In that moment, he suddenly felt the back of his right hand grow warm, like Odessa’s spirit was seeping into his hand.

“Tir... those tears of yours, and my blood... remember, under the rule of the Empire, the tears and blood of many more people will be spilt.”

“Ms. Odessa...”

He gripped her hand tightly. All his thoughts were colliding in his heart. Silently, he shut his eyes and felt Odessa’s pulse weaken, as if it, too, sought a reply. All the confusion in his heart quieted and only one thought rose to occupy his mind. Words poured out of his mouth, pushed by that thought.

“Ms. Odessa... I don’t want to see any more blood or tears shed like this, either.” Odessa smiled faintly as she said, “thank you... I thought you would surely agree”, one slow breath after another came, as if confirming her birth into this world and that she had lived her life. No matter what hand fate dealt her, she had lived her own life.

“Tir... see the free world that I couldn’t.”

And then her mouth closed.

When Tir gently placed her hand on her chest, his heart was no longer filled with the image of his father. Instead, what filled his mind was only these words:

“Choose the path you believe is right.”

## Chapter 9

Tir and Viktor sent off Oddessa in the endless stream of the sound of water, and conveyed how they had carried out her tragic final wishes to Gremio, Cleo, Humphrey and Sanchez, who had ended up on the better end of the bloody battle upstairs.

The back of Tir's right hand still felt odd, but since he had overused his arm during the battle with the Imperial soldiers he didn't give much mind to his feeling that something of Odessa had somehow soaked into his hand. More than anything, there was one thing he absolutely had to do: meet the man named Mathiu in Seika village. He didn't know why Odessa had asked him to do it, but that wasn't going to stop him from trying.

Now that the Imperial Army had discovered their hideout, it was no longer safe to stay in Lenankamp and they promptly prepared to leave. Humphrey and Sanchez left in pursuit of Flik. Cleo, Gremio, and Viktor decided to head south with Tir.

Located in the Goran region, to the south of the Arlus region which housed the imperial capital, the Kwaba Fortress was their chief concern because Ain Gide, his father Teo's subordinate, guarded that fortress and he, of course, knew Tir by sight. Gremio's quick thinking, however, somehow got the four of them safely through the fortress. They travelled for five days after that and finally arrived in Seika.

As they entered the town proper, Tir was immediately charmed by the town's uniquely Goran aesthetics. Simple buildings with white mud walls and tiled roofs lined the streets, and the people coming and going wore brightly-dyed clothing. Although the area referred to as the Empire was vast, even just a little ways away from the capital customs and lifestyles were completely different. He was reminded once more just how big the world was. In this town where the very air smelled of dirt, Viktor walked forward, taking the lead.

“Well, first things first. Gotta find this guy Mathiu.”

Shortly after, they came across a strange man quietly leaning against a stone

wall in the middle of town. Thin, with black hair long in the back, he wore leather boots and a halfcoat that went to his knees. They wouldn't have spared him a second glance in a place like the capital or Lenankamp, but he stood out like a sore thumb in this town full of gaily dressed folk.

"Hey man, got any idea where this guy Mathiu's place is?" Viktor asked cheerfully, seemingly unable to stop himself talking to this unusual man who stood out against the scenery. The man casually glanced at him and answered matter-of-factly, "Mathiu? House at the top of those stone steps."

"Yeah? Thanks a lot, pal."

The four of them climbed the indicated stone stairs and arrived at a small house. Tir heard an unexpected sound as they stood in front of the door. "Are those kids talking?"

From all the noise of little running feet and the excited burble of voices, it sounded like the house was filled to bursting with children. Tir knocked lightly at the door and, confirming his initial impression, a young boy appeared. "Oh! Visitors?" he asked cheerfully.

"Uh-huh. We heard a fellow named Mathiu lives here..."

"Professor Mathiu's on his walk now! Think he'll be back soon, though."

"All right then, thanks."

Enjoying the child's quick responses, Tir crouched and started to chat with him. "What're you doing in Professor Mathiu's house?"

"We're his students! He's teachin' us to read and write and loads of other stuff."

"Wow! Is he a nice teacher?"

An impish grin spread across the boy's face at the question. "Well, depends. Normally, yeah, he's nice, but forget your homework or something and..." He placed his hands on either side of his forehead, making horns with his index fingers. But any other description the boy was going to give of the professor was cut off as a quiet male voice behind them asked, "who's an ogre, now?"

The boy took down his hands and, flustered, said, "W-welcome back,

Professor!”

Tir stood automatically and turned around, a little surprised to discover that the man standing behind them was none other than the same one who had given them directions to Mathiu’s house.

“Oh. You’re Mathiu?”

“Yes, I am.”

He quickly slipped by them without another word or acknowledgment of their presence. Pushing the child inside, he glanced over his shoulder and, looking at Tir’s staff, said, “please leave. This is no place for people like you, stained with the stench of blood.”

His words caught Tir off-guard, but he had no intention of leaving. “W-wait, please! We were actually told by Odessa to come here.”

Mathiu paused just short of closing the door.

“Odessa?” he asked and slowly turned back towards them, scowling at Tir for some reason. Tir met his gaze straight on and handed him the earring.

“Yes. This isn’t easy for me to say, but Odessa’s last wish was for you to have this.” “Her last wish?” Mathiu gazed silently at the earring for a moment. A palpable silence fell between them. Finally, he sighed quietly and turned his back on Tir.

“I see. So she’s dead. She was a foolish young woman, risking her neck for a lost cause. I always knew this would happen one day.”

Mathiu’s stubbornly cold behavior left Tir at a loss for words, but Viktor had enough for both of them.

“A lost cause? I ain’t gonna let that one slide, pal. You sayin’ Odessa did all that for nothin’? Who the fuck d’you think you are?!”

Tir stopped him from grabbing Mathiu by catching his eye.

Mathiu shut the door then, and they heard his quiet voice from the other side of the plain door. “I won’t accept that earring. Odessa and I have severed all ties. Please go back to where you came from.”

“Jeez, what an asshole! I don’t like him one bit.”

Withdrawing from Mathiu’s house for the moment, they decide to take a break from their travels for a while and get a meal to eat at the inn. Viktor bashed Mathiu the whole time they slurped at food they had never seen before; wheat flour that had been kneaded and drawn out into thin strings.

“For a school teacher, that bastard sure don’t know nothin’! Didn’t have to go and act like we’re bloodthirsty animals or somethin’.”

Probably because Odessa had been insulted, there was no end to Viktor’s verbal attack. Tir also turned the incident over in his mind as he ate the ‘noodles’, but he was of an entirely different mind than Viktor. While it really was too bad Mathiu couldn’t take the earring, it wasn’t his cold attitude, but his silence when he learned of her death that had caught Tir’s attention. Whatever words might come out of his mouth, that silence seemed to indicate some sadness borne of her death. It was clear from the way he spoke that he knew her well. So why had he said he had no ties with her?

“Young Master...” Gremio said, taking a break from his chopsticks, unused to them. “What shall we do? As things stand, it doesn’t look like he will accept the earring.”

“Yeah, but...”

Now it was Cleo’s turn; “I wonder why she asked us to give him the earring.”

Tir didn’t have the answers to their questions, but the choice was, after all, Odessa’s final wish.

“I don’t know why she asked us to do this, but Odessa gave me the earring believing I would. That’s why I won’t give up.”

“Odessa...” mumbled Viktor, who had been so loud until then. “Yeah, that’s right, huh.”

Tir made up his mind then. “Let’s go and give it another try, anyway. If that doesn’t work, we’ll think about it then.” He drained his bowl of noodle soup, stood up and grabbed his staff. Everyone got up from their seats, exchanged glances, and left the dining room.

Tir led the way but stopped cold right before stepping into the street. “Are those Imperial soldiers?!”

They immediately ducked back into the inn and, opening the door a crack, peered out into the street.

“Damn!” Viktor swore in back. “They followed us all the way out here to the middle of nowhere?” But the Imperial soldiers weren’t acting like they were searching for anyone. As Tir and the others watched, they filed into rank and took the stone steps leading directly to Mathiu’s house. Tir was shaken by a sense of foreboding.

“This isn’t good”, Gremio said, gazing outside.

“Well, let’s go take a look.”

The four ran into the street, holding their weapons tight. Slipping through the crowd, they dashed up the stone stairs. They were nearly in sight of Mathiu’s house when they heard him shout so loud it hurt Tir’s ears. “What the devil do you intend to do with that child?!”

Everyone stopped mid-step on the stone stairs, ducked down, and took in the situation. Several children were in front of Mathiu’s house. Five soldiers were in the garden and one held a crying and shouting boy captive - the same boy who had answered Tir’s knock at the door earlier. It would be reckless to try to save the child. They didn’t know why the soldiers were attacking Mathiu’s house, and they couldn’t just charge in and challenge them to a fight. The four held their breath while the Imperial soldier spoke.

“We’ve finally found you, Mathiu Silverberg! Lord Kasim Hazil is requires your strength. Come back to the Empire nice and quiet, now.”

“Everybody’s heard of the tactician who led the Battle of Kalekka. You’re a legend now. So how about it? Stop hiding away teaching brats in this sad hole of a town. The Empire will pay you whatever your heart desires!”

Hearing this, the four friends all looked at each other. Kasim Hazil was one of the Imperial Generals, on par with Teo. And the Battle of Kalekka the soldier mentioned was a fierce fight over territory that had unfolded five years ago between the Scarlet Moon Empire and the City-States of Jowston up north at

Toran Lake. The Empire, of course, had won. Mathiu's true identity suddenly revealed to them all, Viktor muttered "Y-ya mean he's..."

Mathiu was none other than the famous tactician of the Battle of Kalekka. That was when Tir felt as if he understood the true implications of Odessa's last wish. She must have wanted Mathiu to join the Liberation Army, right? As the cogs in Tir's brain continued to turn, the conversation between Mathiu and the Imperial soldiers carried on.

"I refuse! I don't want to have anything to do with war any more. Please leave." "Pity. This order came direct from Lord Kasim Hazil, so we gotta bring you back at any cost."

"Say what you will, I have no intention of returning to the Empire!"

"Hmph, stubborn old coot."

Shrill metal against metal rang out - the sound of the soldier drawing his sword - and the child's cries grew louder.

"So you're saying it doesn't matter what I do to this boy?"

"St-stop! You let him go!"

"Hmm", deliberated the Imperial soldier, speaking over the boy's shrieks. "What shall I chop off first? His ears? How about the nose? Or maybe..."

Tir couldn't take any more.

"Go!"

"Got it!"

Tir flew up the stairs and leapt into the garden, his staff whistling through the air. Mathiu was the first to react to the sound of his staff - he turned towards Tir in shock, but Tir had no time to meet his eye because the soldier's sword was already closing in on the boy's face.

He kicked his way through the grass, broke into a run and took aim at the soldier holding the sword, who turned toward him. Mathiu's garden had been a peaceful playground for the children, but it transformed into a battlefield the minute Tir knocked the sword out of the soldier's hand with his staff.

They finally drove away the soldiers, leaving the once-green lawn spattered red with blood. Tir had told everyone to avoid killing the soldiers, but Viktor hadn't had the luxury, wounded and trapped between two soldiers; he had taken one's life while fighting back. Which was too bad, but they were just lucky no-one on their side was hurt. The boy who had been captured was sobbing, but his ears and nose were intact.

"It's okay", Tir comforted the boy, patting his head. "You're safe now."

Though still weeping, the boy gave a little nod of his head. For a time, the small garden was filled with the sound of their labored breathing and the boy's weeping. Once they calmed their racing hearts, they began to feel relieved, but it was Mathiu's outraged question that put a stop to the boy's wails.

"What have you done?!"

Tir raised his head at Mathiu's question. He was glaring at the four of them.

"This is horrible. All this killing in front of the children!"

His words set Tir's teeth on edge. Though he didn't know what his reasons were, it was plenty clear from Mathiu's conversation with the soldiers that he hated violence. Tir hadn't wanted to expose the children to bloodshed, either, which is why he had given the order to avoid killing the soldiers. But to no avail.

"What the hell'd ya just say?!" Cradling his injured arm, Viktor charged Mathiu. There was no time for Tir to stop him. He grabbed Mathiu by the collar, blood staining his white halfcoat. "You sleep talkin' or somethin', buddy?! Just how were you plannin' on savin' this kid, huh?! Tell me just how all yer logic and book-smarts was gonna save this kid from those Imperial soldier's swords!"

Mathiu quickly turned his face away from Viktor, an anguished expression distorting his features. Viktor's words were apparently an especially bitter pill to swallow.

"S'not like we or Odessa enjoy doin' this kinda thing, you know! So don't give me that bullshit! I don't give a rat's ass what people think, we saved that kid's life and we're not gonna take yer smack!" Viktor shouted, lowering the arm he had been holding Mathiu with.

Mathiu quickly looked at him, then raised his eyes to the sky, and murmured,

“Odessa...”

Seeing the sadness writ plain on Mathiu’s face, Tir collected his feelings and stepped towards him, holding Odessa’s wishes in his heart.

“Mathiu, I don’t know your reasons for hating war. But Odessa, who you seem awfully close to, was certainly fighting one against the chaos and corruption ravaging this country.”

“I’m well aware.”

“She once told me that you can’t lie to yourself about your own feelings ‘cuz you’re the one who’s gonna suffer in the end, even if you turn your eyes from the truth. Could it be that you’re hurting, too?”

“That may be-” Mathiu cut himself off and his tone changed abruptly.

“By the way, you’re Tir McDohl, son of General McDohl, aren’t you?”

“How do you know that?”

“I heard about you from some people I know in the Imperial Army and recognized you from your skill with the staff and your getup.” Mathiu sighed a little, then said to Tir, “What did she... what did Odessa tell you about me?”

“Just that you’re a man named Mathiu living in Seika village.”

“Of course she hasn’t forgiven me... she told me that I’m a coward for not using the power I have.”

“Odessa...” Viktor muttered.

“I certainly may be a coward. But call me what you will, I don’t want to have anything to do with making people fight other people. I don’t ever want to see those sights again. Those are enemies, those are allies... I never want to see someone end another’s life at my command, even if that means I’m not fit to be seen as family by my own younger sister.”

“You’re... her older brother?”

“Yes. I am Mathiu Silverberg, she was Odessa Silverberg.”

Everyone fell silent at that. Mathiu looked down as if in memory of Odessa. Tir thought then that Mathiu was a kind person. He wanted to fight alongside him,

if he could. These feelings made Tir speak into the silence.

“I understand how you feel, Mathiu. Like Viktor said earlier, we don’t like hurting folks.” He continued after the briefest of pauses. “But sometimes you have to fight, like to protect yourself, don’t you? You have to go on fighting, no matter how drained you are...like we did just now.”

Having said his piece, Tir looked to the children gathered in front of the house. Mathiu’s eyes opened wide, as if he’d just realized something. Turning to the children, who were looking at him with lonely expressions, he took opened his mouth to speak once more. “That’s true. Closing my eyes won’t make war disappear from the world. And however I try to protect the children I teach, they will still suffer once they go out into the world.”

He paused for a moment, then slowly opened his mouth to speak. “All right. From today onward, I will strive for the things she strove for.”

“So you’ll take this earring, then?”

“Yes.”

Tir placed the glittering earring into Mathiu’s outstretched hand. Now Odessa’s last wish was finally fulfilled - or so he thought.



“This isn’t meant for me”, Mathiu said unexpectedly.

“What do you mean?”

Mathiu gently pressed the earring back into Tir’s hand. “Take a close look. There’s something drawn on the inside of the jewel, isn’t there?”

Tir peered into the jewel and it was just as he said - something like a map was reflected there.

“What is it?”

“A map showing all the secret hideouts of the Liberation Army. The one who takes this earring inherits the Liberation Army” he declared, and Tir looked up in shock.

“I do possess some skill as a tactician, but I am not fit to be the leader of the Liberation Army. You, however...” He stared at Tir. “You are.”

“Damn straight! Do it, Tir. Your speech just now was great, too. I believe in you!” Viktor butted in from the sidelines, suddenly back to his usual self. Mathiu continued on. “I believe Odessa thought so, too. That’s why she sent you to me. Please. Accept this earring and her final wish and take full control of the Liberation Army.”

Tir hesitated. “But I...”

He hadn’t foreseen this outcome hidden in Odessa’s final wish and was surprised into silence for a moment at this unexpected thought. Though he had decided to join the Liberation Army, he found it difficult to accept the role of leader when he thought of his father.

He let out his breath in a whoosh and calmed his heart. As before, a single sentence formed in his mind; Choose the path you believe is right.

Repeating these words over and over in his heart, he turned to look behind him. Gremio was watching him intently, a smile on his lips. “I will follow you no matter the road you choose, Young Master. I’m sure Lord Teo will forgive me.” Par for the course, Cleo was smiling, too. “I will, as well. I’m fed up with this rotten Empire.”

“Thank you, Gremio, Cleo”, he said, turning to face Mathiu. He voiced his decision and accepted Odessa’s last wish, inheriting the Liberation Army.

Tir quickly took action after becoming leader. He devoted himself completely to mobilizing their military forces, pushed on by the thought that, even now, people the world over were shedding tears and blood. Lenankamp wasn't the only place hit; hideouts in other areas had also suffered Imperial attack, scattering the members of the Liberation Army, which made regrouping their first and most urgent priority.

“We must gather people to revive the Liberation Army and that earring you accepted is essential to this goal.”

First, he took Tactician Mathiu's advice and decided to make their headquarters the old castle rising out of the island in Toran Lake in the middle of Imperial territory. Once his role as leader was decided, Mathiu pulled some strings and Tir, while blundering his way through small skirmishes with the enemy, travelled around to recruit like-minded comrades.

In Seika, they reunited with Marie, who had sheltered them when they fled the capital. Onil, a rumor-mongering middle aged woman, and Antonio, a good hearted chef, joined them as well as Mathiu's former student Apple, a young lady whose glasses suited her. A man named Chandler that they met at Kuwaba fortress joined them as a supplier of goods. In Kaku, located along the southern side of Toran Lake, fishermen Tai Ho and Yam Koo ferried Tir and company to the old castle. The debt collector Camille, hired to collect on the debt for drink and food stuff that Gremio had amassed in the capital. The inventor Sergei made the castle much more comfortable with his inventions. Gaspar, the professional gambler. And then south in the town of Kouan was an acquaintance of Mathiu's as well as the wealthiest man in town, Lepant, along with his wife Eileen and their prodigal son, Sheena, Giovanni the butler, and Rock the treasurer. Then there was the wandering female warrior Lorelai and, for some reason, Krin the thief. The puppetmaster Juppo and his niece Meg joined in.

They also met an old familiar face while in Kouan. After Tir and the others fled the capital, Pahn had been appointed to a position in the Imperial Army and assigned to this town. When he finally met them again, Pahn said, “I don't think the decision I made that day was wrong. I didn't want to cause any trouble for Lord Teo, but having to ignore my own feelings and suck up to bastards like

Kraze and Kanaan ain't no picnic, either. I realized I want to live honestly with my own feelings, too."

Seeing Pahn had turned over a new leaf, Tir welcomed him into the Liberation Army. People came to the castle on their own, too, once they heard that the Liberation Army had raised its flag.

"Well now, ain't that a surprise! The Imperial Guard brat's leadin' the Liberation Army now!" cried Varkas of the Seifu Mountain bandits with a hearty guffaw. He, Sydonia, and about a hundred of their followers joined forces with the Liberation Army. Haruna and her family showed up at the same time and decided to live in the castle.

As time passed, volunteers knocked on the castle doors one after another. Their occupations were varied, from the first seasoned warriors to those whose roles were only distantly related to fighting. Every time he and Mathiu cracked open the book they kept track of all the members of the army in, they were surprised at just how many people wanted to right the wrongs of this country. At the same time, many people trusted that the Liberation Army would help them. One night when the Liberation army was especially bustling, Tir received a visit from a certain person. When he was meeting to discuss things with everyone in the great hall, the room was suddenly filled with orbs of light of all different sizes. Right before everyone's eyes, the orbs shrunk to one little speck, so bright it was blinding. As the light died away amid the commotion, Tir heard someone speak quietly in front of him.

"It has been a while, Tir." When Tir opened his eyes he saw Leknaat standing there, accompanied by Luc. She was clad in the same white robe she had worn when they met at the Magician's Tower and a kind smile played about her lips. Putting the meeting on hold, Tir led Leknaat to his own room. She stood by the window and, smiling again, said, "So you've finally begun to walk your own path, Tir."

"Yes, but... Lady Leknaat, is this really the right path for me?"

Tir was filled with all different kinds of emotions at these words - about Rockland, Ted, the responsibility he had accepted along with Odessa's last wish... he had certainly chosen the path he thought was right, but in all truth, choosing

one path does not mean throwing away all thoughts of other paths that could have been taken. He had made a difficult and painful choice, and wasn't without his doubts.

As if she guessed what was stirring in his heart, Leknaat said, "You have suffered much in your struggle to reach this point. But now you are surrounded by many comrades who share your goals, aren't you? From now on, you can all pool your strengths and share the hardships that may come. You will never lose your way all alone again."

Tir was surprised at her words. He certainly had lost a lot on his way here but that was also why he was here with the Liberation Army now.

"Yes, now you have many comrades and so their strength will help you fulfil the Star of Destiny you bear. "Star of Destiny?"

She began explaining to him about the Stars of Destiny and how he bore the Tenkai Star of Destiny that would lead the world out of chaos into peace. The Tenkai Star had a central role to play: to make the liberation movement a success, Tir would have to gather together 108 comrades who bore stars of destiny.

"I said this before, but you exist within the great flow of this world and the Stars of Destiny are the ones who move that flow."

He hadn't really understood the Stars of Destiny, but he felt like something clicked when he heard those words.

The great flow of the world.

People had definitely begun to move within that flow to take down the Empire and he himself undoubtedly existed within it now as a leader, gathering them one by one beneath the Liberation Army flag.

He was just surprised at how things came together once he chose that path; bearing a Tenkai star, and leading the Liberation Army himself.

"Tir, many difficult choices lie ahead of you yet. History is only just beginning to be made. Do not lose heart, always follow the path you believe is right. I'll be watching over you, always."

With those final words of encouragement, she entrusted them with her apprentice Luc, who bore a Tenkai Star of Destiny, and left the castle.

Tir gave a little sigh of relief in his room when things had quieted down. He had found a fresh new path in Leknaat's words; he would move forward together with his comrades who shared his vision. He no longer had any doubts. This was the path he had chosen himself.

“Mr... Tir?”

He turned in surprise at the voice and saw Haruna standing in the doorway. Silent nearly the whole time they had been together in Rockland, Haruna had slowly begun to speak with Tir since coming to the castle.

“What is it, Haruna?” he asked with a smile.

She hesitated in the doorway but eventually walked over to Tir and looked up at him, smiling. “Um, well, the stars are so pretty tonight, thought maybe we could look at them together.”

“Sure, of course.”

Tir picked up little Haruna in his arms, walked to the window and opened it. Her weight a pleasant feeling in his arms, he thought, I chose this path just so she could smile like this.

A chance wind blew through the open window, ruffling Haruna's hair. They raised their faces to the stars in the night sky that glittered so bright, they seemed to be trying to outshine each other. He turned to face the eastern sky, as if called by something - and there shone a star so bright it engulfed all the stars around it. He didn't know the name of that star, but the red light it gave off lingered in his heart from that moment on.

—

Irritated pacing echoed within the darkness. The sharp tap of the shoes stopped suddenly as if in surprise, then came a noise like angry breathing, and then the pacing started up again. After this was repeated many times, a dim light floated up out of the darkness. That light grew nearer, illuminating the stone walls.

It was a torch, held by a man dressed all in black, whose footsteps grew closer. A woman's irritated voice suddenly rang out: "You've found him?!"

Seeming to wither under the force of her voice, the man answered, "y-yes, ma'am! Our deepest apologies for the delayed report."

"Skip the formalities, just tell me where he is!"

"Yes, ma'am."

In the small stone room illuminated by the torch, the man in black to whom the footsteps belonged knelt before the woman with the forceful voice and answered, "the soldiers tell me they have traced Tir McDohl's footsteps: after he escaped the capital, it seems he went to Kwaba, Seika, then headed south. After that, he - "

"I don't care where he's been!" Her voice rose into a shrill shriek. "Tell me where he is now!"

"Yes, ma'am!" The man in black rushed to the end of his report. "Right now he's in the old Toran lake castle. I understand he is acting as the rebel army's leader."

"That insolent brat!"

Neither the woman nor the man in black spoke for a short while, and silence filled the stone room until she spoke again.

"Yes. Excellent. We know where he is, so now it's time to reveal our hand."

"It will be as you command, ma'am."

"Good. Do not rest until you have him. Capture him alive and bring him to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The man bowed, then left with his torch. As the torchlight faded away, the stone room slowly filled with darkness once again. Amid the echo of the retreating footsteps, a bewitching laugh shook the darkness.

Heheheh...

Then there was a sound as of dragging chains, and a boy's voice: "Damn it..."

what are you gonna do... to Tir?"

The woman's voice took on a whole new tone and, sneering the anguish in the boy's voice, she said, "How sad, Ted. After everything you did to help Tir escape, he's already within my grasp. It's only a matter of time until the rune is mine."

"N-no... leave him alone, Windy..."

"Heheheh. Say what you want, but you're nothing more than a child without the rune. How do you like uselessly growing old in this pitch black prison?"

The harsh sound of metal scraping and the boy's cries growing louder made her even more cheerful. "You can't break even these chains in your state. This is your punishment for running from me these past 300 years, hmm?" She laughed her shrill laugh, then continued, "Oh, yes, I thought I would give you something nice to celebrate finding Tir."

A strange light suddenly appeared in the darkness. It came from a clear globe resting in the palm of her hand, quivering and flickering in front of him.

"What're you gonna do... with that rune orb?" he groaned, and a black shadow appeared within the orb, starting to grow restless as the boy watched. It seemed agitated, trapped in the globe.

Gazing at the boy, the woman smiled faintly. "Hmm. Seems you've seen one of these before, no? This is a curious little orb that can grant humans the power of a rune. Have you heard of the Conqueror Rune, Ted? The Black Rune?"

"It can't be... the Conqueror Rune?! Wh-what are you planning?!"

She snorted a laugh. "I've decided... to do this."

She walked towards the boy, her steps echoing, then brought the orb near the boy's right hand, shackled to chains embedded via metal hoops in the wall.

"S-stop! No! Stop, damn it!"

He desperately yanked his hand back, but she pinned him down with impressive strength. She glared at the boy, her eyes narrowed in anger. "Ted, you're going to help me get my hands on the Soul Eater Rune!"

"Urgh! Gh... stop... raaaagh!" His screams echoed off the prison walls. When the echoes finally died away, so did the faint light. A high-pitched laugh,

footsteps walking away, and the prison sank into total darkness.

**[TO BE CONTINUED IN VOLUME 2!]**

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Thanks for reading!*