

VEROKIA DRAGOON STORY



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(The information below was published on an ITMedia blog post announcing multiple upcoming releases for the Shounen Alchemist website)

“Verokia Dragoon Story” is a dream collaboration between the ever-talented Ryukishi07 and Takahito Ekusa of “Binchou-tan” fame.

Commentary from Ryukishi07

Hello, this is Ryukishi07.

Thanks to everyone’s support, we were able to complete the “Higurashi no Naku Koro ni” series. And with Alchemist’s help, we were able to release a PlayStation 2 version of the game.

As such, I am now in a transitional period, moving on from “Higurashi” to my next work. In the midst of that, Alchemist approached me asking if I could write another more comfortable project, and given my weakness of being unable to refuse, I felt compelled to accept their offer and write it. (lol)

The content is really some light military fantasy. The stage is 20th century Europe on the cusp of armed conflict. The story centers on a small country that chooses to fight not with armored combat vehicles, but with armored infantry. I hope you enjoy the mood, the ambiance, and carefree tone of this work.

Commentary from Takahito Ekusa

Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live the king! I am the illustrator, who felt those strong cheers pushing on my back as I descended to the earth just now. I am very much so looking forward to Verokia Dragoon Story!

(The concept art illustrations below were also included with this commentary)



Ordeze



Schaup

“Verokia Dragoon Story”



Planned for release on the evening of May 11th, 2007. Please wait until then.

Thank you.



Cavalrymen used to be the stars of the battlefield.

How the sight of them astride a majestic horse stood out in all its glory, the way they put their offensive power to use and overran their enemies with imposing strength, none would doubt that these were the main players in war.

During that era, there was still pride on the battlefield; there was still honor. But when spears, designed to counter the charge of cavalry, were replaced by "guns," it signaled an end to the era of proud cavalrymen....

The era of horses being used for their offensive power was going away, and they found themselves relegated to mere tools of transportation. Cavalrymen were armed with guns, and there came to be a type of soldier known as the dragoon (that is, dragon cavalrymen), but these were little more than gunmen given the mobility of a horse, and in battle they often found themselves dismounting to fight.

And one who has to dismount to fight is no longer a cavalryman.

Already, war would no longer need heroic offensive strength. It was becoming the domain of cowards who lurk quietly behind cover, take aim, and shoot their enemies with precision.

Eventually, there would come to be a type of soldier that reclaimed this offensive power. ...The arrival of the current king of land combat, the "battle tank."

But in this story's world, it remains uncertain whether or not such a thing will finally make its appearance.

The stage is the kingdom of Verokia, in a certain part of Europe.

A puny kingdom whose history sprang from a past rebellion against the Habsburg dynasty, though it lived at the mercy of historical world powers such as the Roman empire, it prospered by taking advantage of its geographical situation in the margins between those world powers.

Of course, the shadow of World War II is approaching fast. The world powers' borders will likely be redrawn over and over again on the map.

.....As a result, one cannot find the name of Verokia on the world maps of today.

The kingdom of Verokia may be puny, but it's a country that honors its old traditions.

The parade for the changing of the guard at the royal palace, held by the royal cavalry guard, is a formal event steeped in centuries' worth of history, and has been greatly popular with tourists who like small countries like this one and enjoy visiting.

Although, the nation's pride in its cavalry, derived from its historic victory over the Habsburg dynasty, was dissonant from the countries of Europe arming themselves with one new weapon after the other in the aftermath of World War I, leaving a severe deficiency in their military defenses....

With their major defeat in World War I, the neighboring fascist countries were made to pay astronomical reparations, and the frustration from their resulting chronic domestic recessions was channeled into attacks against their neighbors. With these expansionist policies being taken up, it was thought to be only a matter of time until Verokia, nestled on these borders, would be drawn into the fires of war.

Yet despite this, the nation's military was slow to keep up with the recent arms race.

Ordeze, the eighth princess of the kingdom of Verokia, was always grumbling about the king's lack of a sense of danger.

Ordeze is but 1 of 12 children to King Verokia.

The princess, whose beauty during her early years was most reminiscent of the queen, was moved by the stories she repeatedly heard from her wet nurses, of the episode of the kingdom of Verokia's founding, of the glorious Verokian cavalry unit's victory over the Habsburg dynasty, and at the age of 12 she entered the army as an officer of the royal cavalry guard.

But it was not just her beauty that was reminiscent of the queen, but also her temperament.

The women of Verokia were said to be particularly strong even among the women of the countries of Europe, and the names of many female knights are inscribed in the cavalry unit's glorious history. That blood undoubtedly flowed through Ordeze as well.

When she turned 16, she declared that the cavalry unit was little more than a tourist parade unit and a shell of its former self, and announced that she would transfer into an actual combat unit. At first, she was strongly discouraged by those in charge, including the king, but the more she was told no, the more she flared up, and this too is the saga of Verokia's women. In the end, the king relented and told her to do as she wished, and had her transfer carried out smoothly.

Ordeze certainly may have had a sheltered upbringing, but once she entered the military she tirelessly learned all manner of things, so as to be not a member of the royal family but a member of the military. This likely had much to do with the efforts of the military's top brass, who held good will towards her. It may have been, more than anything else, that they wanted to convey their fears about Europe's dire state of affairs to the king, through her.

Not all that much time has yet passed since the end of World War I. But one can be sure, the fires of the next war are fast approaching.

1-1

It was such a day when an incident occurred. A skirmish between the Verokian border guard and a patrol unit from a fascist military transpired in the forest of Albright. A battle of guns ensued.

When the report came in, Ordeze had just returned to her seat after her promotion to colonel.

"Welcome back, Colonel Ordeze. Congratulations on your promotion."

"Ugh, I tire of hearing so every time I pass by someone; that's quite enough. More importantly, where is McCoy?! Inform me of what really happened at the battle in the Albright forest."

"Yes, I'm right here. However, well... what do you mean by what really happened?"

"Ugh, I tire of this farce! Do you expect me to believe a propaganda article written for the masses?"

Ordeze slammed the newspaper's extra issue, which had been making the rounds, down on top of her desk.

'Sudden accidental battle with fascist military scout unit,' it read. 'Our valiant forces boldly fought them back,' continued a glowingly optimistic account of the battle.

"Hahaha, oh dear, you're a sharp one, Princess...."

"Don't you dare call me Princess; you are to address me as Colonel! Don't tell me even you would believe this is what really happened?!"

"It is as you've discerned, I fear. While neither side suffered casualties in the battle of Albright, one might say that it was, in truth, a complete defeat for our side."

"I was able to surmise that from the beginning! Since when do we extol a defeat as a victory here in Verokia?! I mean to say that it's lamentable; how will those who can't accept a defeat for what it is ever grow?!"

Ordeze was an honorable military type who took pride in victory but could also recognize when she'd lost. A good many of her subordinates had probably fallen in love with her because of that disposition. But McCoy, her second-in-command, on the other hand, would say 'Damn, this is just my luck,' and seemed to feel that he'd been burdened with an assignment to protect an ill-tempered princess.

For a time, Ordeze continued to furiously lash out over the propaganda articles. If he made the mistake of interrupting her at times like those, he might have to deal with the consequences himself. This was a piece of advice that McCoy had gleaned in dealing with the princess so frequently.

"Let's get straight to the analysis of the situation. The forest of Albright was a densely timbered woodland, as I recall."

"Yes, that's right. Because our national border is not delineated by rivers, the borders claimed by both sides have historically been ambiguous. I suppose there have been quite a few discussions about establishing a clear border line, and even erecting a fence along it, but as the borders claimed by our two countries are simply too far apart, we've yet to accomplish even this much. In reality, while there have seldom been any cases of this escalating into a gunfight as it did this time, there have been quite a few past examples of accidental confrontations between the border patrols on both sides."

"I see; so essentially, you mean to say that to both sides, this particular battle was an accidental incident, if I'm hearing you correctly?"

"Err, yes. That is to say, there was neither an offensive nor a defensive, but a straightforward contest of strength, I guess."

"And you mean to say, I suppose, that we took a crushing defeat in this straightforward contest of strength?"

"That is, essentially, what happened."

Breathing a deep sigh with a huff, Ordeze leaned back and tilted her head up to the ceiling.

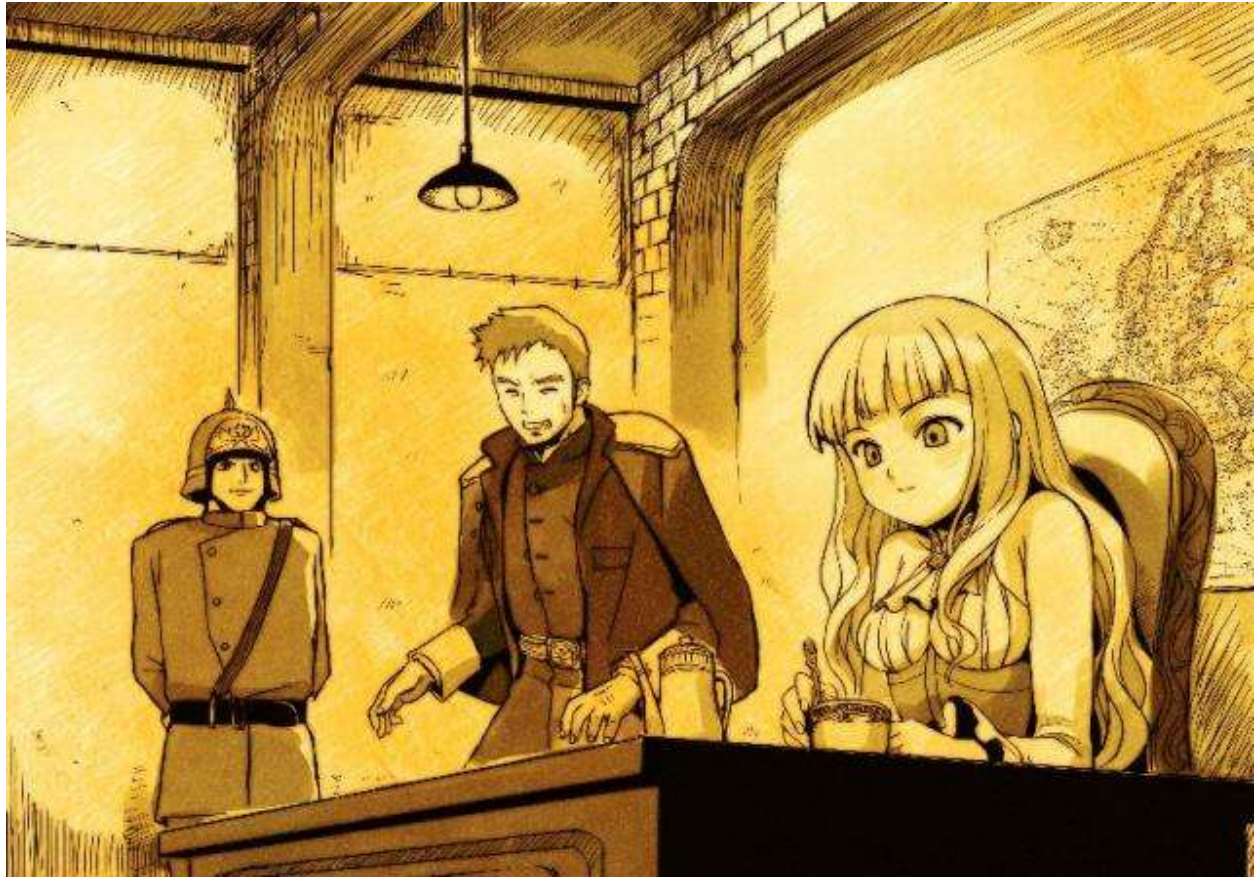
To her, this humiliating defeat was an opportunity to strengthen the military. She wanted to bring the sheltered royal family, who were still living in the greatest fantasy about the Verokian knightly order of old, back to the present reality. And bring their military forces up to speed with the present times.

But some despicable person in power, who would apparently stand to lose something if more of the budget went into the military, and predicted that this would happen, chose to falsify the report on this latest defeat.

"Is our enemy outside our borders, or within? How lamentable this is...!"

"There, there. How would you like some cocoa? If you're in a bad mood, Colonel, maybe you just need a little something sweet to drink."

"...Hmm... very well then, I will take it."



Since recently learning this secret technique of improving her mood just by giving her cocoa, McCoy had come to rely on this approach at critical moments. Ordeze tilted the cup with its sweet aroma toward her, and was immersed in pleasure for a short while as a warm and comfortable expression came over her....

McCoy tried to take this opportunity slip out of her office, but in the end, it didn't work.

"I am not finished speaking to you yet, McCoy!!"

"Eheh, err, my apologies, heh, heh, heh...."

1-2

After that, she called in the members of the guard unit who were actually involved in the battle, and had them recount how the battle truly went down.

It seems the court of inquiry has imposed a strict gag order, but at times like these Ordeze's royal status comes in handy. Most likely, none of the officers will keep their silence if she swears to them on the royal coat of arms that she won't disclose her sources.

...She is, after all, the Verokian army's idol.

".....I see. So, it would appear the fascist troops are deploying machine guns. I suppose that, while our own infantry troops' firearms have recently been upgraded to semi-automatics, a heavy firepower upgrade is urgently needed."

"That's how it is, eh? Gun battles these days are no longer about pointing and shooting. It's about firing all over the place, putting up a bullet curtain and pinning down your opponent."

"Captain, your reconnaissance unit should have been equipped with heavy machine guns, if only a few. Were you unable to make effective use of those?"

"No, ma'am! Needless to say, we had intended to, but as both our sides are aware that a machine gunner is a formidable enemy, those would be aimed for right away."

"I suppose that's logical. The soldiers with stronger weapons will, as a general rule, be targeted first."

"You likely know this already, Colonel, but when setting up heavy machine guns, the line of fire must be considered carefully in their placement. It would most likely be fairly simple to set one up in a blind spot of the enemy's line of fire, but then we'd be unable to put our line of fire to good use."

"I'm aware. That's why the machine gunners charge ahead with cover fire from their allies as they're exposed to the enemy's onslaught, and set up their machine gun stations. They must then overwhelm the enemy with their firepower. ...I see, so do you mean to say that before you could do this properly, you had already allowed the enemy to erect machine gun stations?"

"The fascist infantry had been highly trained in coordinating a battle of guns. One cannot deny that in terms of coordinating our gun battle tactics as a group, our side has been left far behind..."

"I understand how you feel. Despite the fact that we've suffered a defeat which we ought to be learning from, the citizens are intoxicated by a false victory, and the top brass have no intention of admitting our defeat. This is no way to reward our wounded soldiers! I will be the one to clear away your regrets, Captain. McCoy! Wouldn't you say there's room to reconsider the other day's proposal after all?!"

"When you say the other day's proposal. Heheh, Princess, I mean, pardon me-, Colonel, you make outlandish proposals every day, so I'm not quite sure to which you're referring."

McCoy tried to hide it, pretending to scratch his head as a nervous laugh came out of him, but he thought for certain that it would most likely be *that.*

If battles of guns are evolving, there is but one manner of evolution to make in pursuit of attack strength. That is, a bulletproof assault weapon, the "battle tank."

But the king expressed his disapproval of the weapon known as a battle tank. He says the battle tank is a machine, not a soldier. That its boorish appearance is unsuitable for a kingdom with Verokian cavalymen as its ancestors, and that it would only make the glorious battlefield into something barbaric.

Because of that, he'd just recently shut down the kingdom's battle tank development with a negative statement, horrifying the armory's administration. As the king was at times strangely stubborn about certain things, he sometimes succumbed to his vice of being unable to recognize his own misgovernment.

Upon receiving this statement, the armory halted all battle tank development, intending not to resume it until the king retracted his statement.This may well have been an indication of the Verokian army's intention to withdraw from modern combat.

Of course, Ordeze felt great indignation at this. She expressed so much indignation, in fact, that she was not allowed to meet with the king.

However, Ordeze wasn't discouraged. She is, after all, a princess of Verokia. If battle tanks are no good, she said, then they should think of another weapon, and *that* was what her crazy idea the other day was about.

"Captain, I would like to order your guard unit to test a new weapon. After his majesty the king's order prohibiting battle tank development, I searched from every angle for something to use in its place, and this is the result I've arrived at!"

<To be continued>

The protagonist of this story.

The eighth princess of the Kingdom of Verokia. A passionate royal family official currently serving as a Colonel in the army.



2-1

"Fu, fu, fu, do you know what this is, Captain?!"

"N-no, ma'am! I do not know what that is, Colonel Ordeze!"

"Right, McCoy! Where again is the document from the other day?! Why can't you present the document with a 'ta-da' at a perfect opportunity like this!?"

McCoy, still a little remorseful that he hadn't yet thrown the document away, complied with her request and presented *it* to her.

It was a single presentation board.

Ordeze stood up straight with a proud look on her face and an 'ahem,' as the eyes of the captain of the reconnaissance unit went wide in shock. And with McCoy full of regret, thinking 'if only I'd thrown it away yesterday, I wouldn't have to deal with this hassle.' The stark contrast between their three expressions was amusing.

".....C-Colonel. What the hell is this...?"

"Mhm. Modern gun battles are contests of bullets flying back and forth. And so, we inevitably develop new weapons to counter that!

However, battle tank development was forbidden by his majesty. But why?! It's because his majesty wished to emphasize combat between human beings. War must always be fought between fellow humans. Even if machines are used, the task must not be left only to machines! This was what he had in mind when he banned the development of battle tanks!

In which case, our only choice in human combat is furnishing bulletproof equipment!! Do you still not understand, Captain?! This is not one of those fanciful fairy tale cavalryman paintings. It's a new weapon that I conceived myself, being tested and developed by the armory at this very moment! It's the newest anti-ballistic suit of armor, the Model II-B type!!

It may appear at first glance to be an antiquated suit of armor, but its anti-ballistic capabilities have the seal of approval, and the Type I in particular displays such excellent defensive strength that it can even withstand a direct hit from a 20mm autocannon!"

"...Well, it may not punch a hole through, but I think the soldier inside might still be left writhing in pain after taking a direct hit. And anyway, Colonel, the Type I was rejected because its obscene weight made it completely unusable by infantry, so."

"Mhm. I found that to be a problem, as well. Guns and mobility are the weapons of infantry. For the infantry, it may even be so difficult to use that they lose a leg.

However! What if there were a defensive branch of the military that does not require mobility?! That is, if we deploy them in a fortified machine gun battalion, granting the machine gunners armor designed with durability against sniping in particular, it will no doubt make for powerful gunner emplacement! If our bases are already built durable, this may not prove to be so important, but one may find it especially useful at times when bases must be moved at dizzying speeds and encampments constructed with no time to spare! Personally, my thinking is that Type I anti-ballistic armoring could perhaps be employed in infantry pillbox bunkers!!

It's just that the Type I has a known ventilation issue, an issue which could cause our soldiers to collapse in hot weather. This was addressed in the Type I-B and onward, improving the wearer's comfort without reducing its defensive strength! And furthermore, there is interest in granting mobility of use to our armored soldiers when war horses are deployed generously and made full use of.

Ohh, it's just wonderful-!! Its appearance is just like that of our Verokian cavalymen of legend! I can't believe it! To think the fruits of our modern combat technology would bring us full circle, filled with the Verokian majesty we know and love! What an unbelievable twist-!!

Of course, I was not so shortsighted as to stop my research there. The Type I is distinguished by its tremendous defensive power, but the tradeoff for that is the excessive weight it bears. Therefore, in comparison, the Type II retains 70% of the bulletproof capability, while reducing the weight by half!

Ahh, it's wonderful, wonderful, just won-derful! Were I queen, I would have awarded the first class Sirius medal to the armory's development staff in recognition of their glorious achievement!! Currently, a Type II is in development with a separate manner of use in mind."

"...Colonel, have another cup of cocoa. This one is a different brand."

"Right, thank you for the trouble. Hohoh, this is quite scrumptious! There's a secret ingredient, isn't there? Do you intend to test me with such impious cocoa?! Mmm, such magnificent flavor...."

McCoy addresses the captain in a low voice, so as not to be noticed by Ordeze, who continued to drink with a very pleased look on her face as she rambled on about such things.

".....Captain, you can tell me your honest opinion if we keep it quiet, so, mind if I hear it?"

".....No, sir... that is, uh...."

"It's okay, no need to worry. The colonel values the opinions of actual combat soldiers. ...I mean, she won't listen to a word I say if I tell her it's no good. But maybe if someone like you, who serves on the front lines, would have a word with her. Can't you speak with her and tell her how absurd this all is? ...It's alright, the colonel is an angel until she's done with her cocoa."

"Hm? It sounds like some grumbling is going on over there. McCoy, I can tell from your expression. You're displeased with something, aren't you?"

"N-no, ma'am, what do I have to be displeased with? It's just, the captain here who will be directed to the front lines, he seems to have something or other on his mind."

2-2

".....No, Colonel, ma'am, um, uh....."

McCoy figured that the words were caught in the back of the captain's throat, but that he would probably laugh off this bizarre armor. ...If he doesn't laugh off this strange armor now, an experimental unit equipped with this weird armor as a centerpiece will probably be assembled, as a preliminary step to deploying it in actual combat.

...And if such a merry troop were formed, our dear princess would volunteer to be its commanding officer; it's clear as day! And if that happens, even I might end up having to wear that sluggish armor, drenched and stinking with sweat! Still, an ill omen passed through the back of McCoy's mind. ...There's something else wrong with the stuttering captain's aura. Before he could think of what that ill premonition was, the captain said it out loud for him....

".....I-IT'S AWESOME.....--!!"

".....HUH???"

"H-h-how wonderful this is, Colonel!! I enlisted in this unit myself admiring the legends of Verokian cavalry, so I've been training hard all this time, but there was something about it all that was different from what I aspired to be, myself.

...Or rather, ma'am, it was my own inability to recognize it!! But, Colonel, as soon as I saw your magnificent figure in that suit of bulletproof armor, I was enlightened!! Ahh, that was what I had truly always wanted to do!!

Ahh, long live the Verokian cavalry-!! It's wonderful; it's most awesome; I wanna wear iiiiiiit!!"

"I-is that so-?! I thought that, surely, an officer on the front lines would understand me! Do you also understand the dignity of this suit of armor, of armored soldiers, of the Verokian cavalry?!"

"Ahhh, Colonel, I'm so deeply moved, my vision is blurred with tears-!! Ahhhh, I'm so glad to have been born in this countryyyyyyy!!"

".....nbelievable...."

At the sight of Ordeze and the captain tightly embracing each other, tears of gratitude flowing between them, McCoy feels all the energy draining out of him.....

When she starts this wailing, the change in her course of action is quick as lightning. Ordeze's arrangements were made swiftly. Thus, a border patrol platoon was equipped with the new combat prototype, the anti-ballistic suit of armor.

...McCoy had thought it would be largely unpopular in the field, but his expectations were betrayed once again. On the contrary, it was astoundingly popular among field soldiers. So much so, in fact, that some soldiers even started to envy its awesome appearance. It could be said that this was in character for the Verokian people, who greatly preferred romantic fancy over reality....

In order to distinguish the military branch bestowed with this anti-ballistic equipment from conventional infantry, it was given the appellation of "armor-upgraded infantry (or more commonly, armored soldiers)." This naming somehow conveyed its awesomeness, and there were constant hopeful applicants for it.

This was how the bulletproof armor suit's testing period began. In any case, it's not lightweight. Because it's a suit of armor after all, it's extremely heavy. That weight, in fact, psychologically made one feel protected, making it well-received. But it would ultimately be extremely tiring to wear, considering the usual marching. It was therefore thought better to march on horseback in the traditional manner, so horseback riding skills would be essential for armored soldiers.

It was thought that this would raise the threshold for aspiring armored soldiers, but that alone would not be enough to deter the burning passion of the Verokian youth who aspired to become cavalry. As horseback training became the most popular field of study, despite the neighboring fascist countries' trend of producing new combat vehicles one after the other, there came to be an unusual phenomenon by which the cavalry's popularity grew.

...But in Verokia, with its complex topography that could even be described as a natural fortress, there were doubts about the effectiveness of operating military vehicles. And as a result, there was plenty of room left for the cavalry's efforts.

The armored soldiers thus forged had at that point become known as the "dragoons (dragon cavalry)," an appellation that hearkens back to the good times of old. Dragoons could essentially be called cavalry-upgraded gunners. A type of soldier that existed in antiquity, it appeared only for a brief window of time thanks to the evolution and proliferation of firearms, and so too did its figure vanish in the blink of an eye. But a number of the dragoons' valiant exploits have been recorded in the history of the Verokian cavalry, and so there were many young people who used the term "Verokia Dragoon" with admiration.

"I see, the Verokian cavalry certainly was a daring cavalry unit, whose name resounded throughout Europe for a time. Taking up that name will boost morale a good deal, perhaps by 20% in comparison!

What is it, McCoy? Are you already out of breath?! Perhaps your basic training has been insufficient! How would you like me to add 100 push-ups to it?!"

"Hyeeh! S-s-surely you jest!"

"What do you think? Are you not beginning to appreciate how wonderful this armor is, just a little? Certainly, this armor does not provide 100% protection against enemy fire. I may have to admit it's inferior to fascist battle tanks by that metric alone.

However, a battle tank cannot begin to imitate our ability to traverse uneven terrain! This ability should be put to most effective use in trench warfare and fortified combat in particular. It will also minimize direct damage from howitzer blasts and so forth, and will also render many offensives ineffective with its deterrent effect to frighten soldiers away. And furthermore, it should give the

impression that infantry guns are ineffective, producing an unimaginable psychological effect on our enemies!

Nevertheless, the toll of physical exhaustion this exacts will not be slight. Be that as it may, it can be reduced through tempering oneself on a day-to-day basis with pride and honor! Ahh, it's just wonderful, the majestic figure of the Verokian cavalry!! Ahhh!!"

McCoy was getting fed up with Ordeze's sportslike enthusiasm, but he certainly could feel a certain appreciation, regarding this anti-ballistic armor. One of the key issues in the prior gun battle in the forest of Albright was securing machine gun positions, so there certainly might be some merit in providing strong armor to the machine gunners. In present-day infantry combat, the presence of machine guns is something important enough to decide victory or defeat. Needless to say, the enemy recognizes this as well, and will come aiming for the machine gunners right away. For this reason, the casualty rate for machine gunners on the battlefield is extremely high. The fascist military, confident though it was in its military strength, had prepared a second machine gunner at each gun position, so that if the primary gunner fell another could immediately take over and carry on the battle.

But Verokia is a small country. However many may partake in its military forces, it simply does not have enough manpower to tolerate losses. With this in mind, it was never out of the question to consider improving the defenses of its machine gunners.

".....Though, normally, I'd say we oughtta address that by upgrading to battle tanks. Oh, man, oh, man...."

"You do grumble quite a lot, McCoy. But I suppose there's not much to be done about that until you feel its effect for yourself. You will soon see. If we go for it, we'll eventually make it happen!"

"No, no! Surely it would be preferable if we never have that opportunity...."

All of McCoy's ill premonitions were on the mark, and now he and Ordeze march through the forest of Albright day after day in an experimental platoon of dragoons specially set up for the border patrol, awaiting the next spontaneous outbreak of battle....

2-3

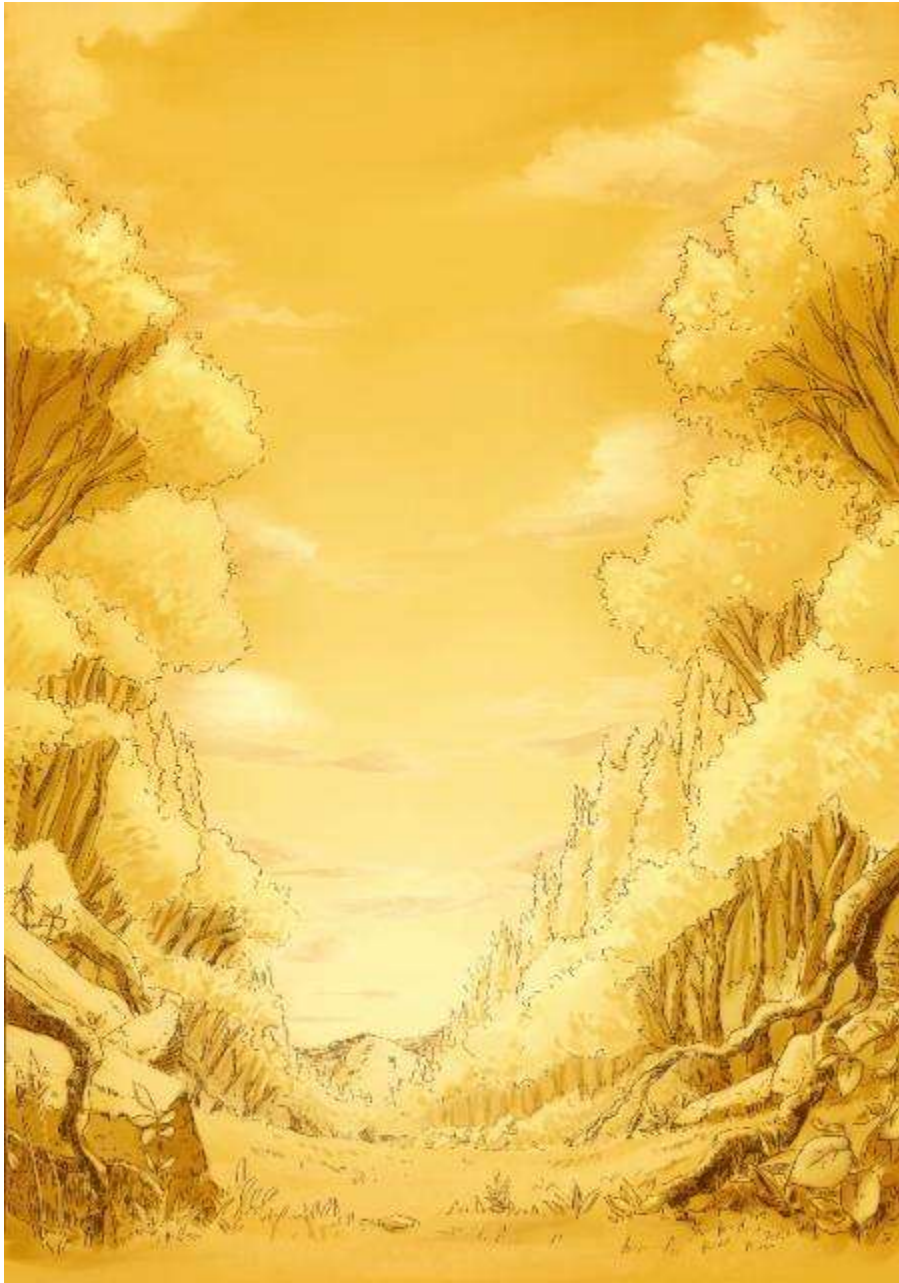
And so, research on this bulletproof suit of armor progressed by leaps and bounds during this short trial period. Particular points of emphasis were improving its ease of maintenance and comfortability. As defensive strength and mobility are opposed to one another, taking the one further means sacrificing the other. Minor modifications were made over and over while keeping a close eye on those factors.

As a result, every soldier in the platoon had a suit of armor with a different model number, and so they looked less like an awesome knightly order decked out in matching armor, and more like a ragtag band of hooligan mercenaries.

But despite this, the soldiers' morale didn't decline in the slightest. The reason was, they had the honor of being, themselves, at the forefront of the dragoons they so admired. And on top of that, they were under the direct command of the army's idol, Colonel Ordeze, with as an added bonus, the honor of being verbally abused by her personally while they were already worn out.

...McCoy let a sigh escape, as if to say, 'ahh, it must be nice to be young.'

But news about this suspicious experimental platoon, scant though it was, began to reach the front lines of the fascist troops. And so it rather quickly made its way up the ranks, eventually reaching the ears of Major Schaup, commander of the prior gun battle in the forest of Albright.



"What was that?Ghosts of the knightly order are roaming around in the forest?"

"Y-yes! That has been the rumor among the scouts. There have long been rumors of the ghosts of the Verokian cavalry appearing in the forest of Albright, so..."

"That's absurd. In this day and age, with us nearing the end of the 20th century, there's no such thing as ghosts.Be that as it may, it would appear that information was not quite so ridiculous. You see, I have an old neighbor in the intelligence department, and from what little I overheard, Ordeze, the eighth princess of Verokia, has created a clandestine experimental platoon within the army, and is conducting trials with it in the Albright forest area."

"You mean to say there's an experimental unit testing new weapons?! Ever since the Verokian king banned the development of battle tanks, Verokia has been limited to infantry tactics. And besides, they're stuck in the last century..."

"Consider the possibility of a battle tank unit, top secret even to the king.I was thinking of such, but I cannot help but be bothered by these rumors among the scouts."

Schaup was a prideful man from a Prussian noble family. He had the rationalism of a military man, but at the same time, as a noble, he hadn't lost sight of his desire to seek honor through combat. In the midst of his dismissive stance toward the ghost rumors among the soldiers, he couldn't help but get the impression maybe there was some truth to it.And if they were true... how laughable it would be, and how characteristic of Verokia... and how beautiful...!

And so, he had a premonition.That these are no ghosts, but truly Verokian cavalry. That they've developed a suit of armor for contemporary gun-based combat, not armor for vehicles, but armor that infantry can run in, and that they've reclaimed their glorious figure from times past!

"Ah... it's beautiful.... Ahh, the Verokian cavalry..., I, too, would like to see it with my own eyes. And from what I've heard, Princess Ordeze, the eighth princess, is supposed to be exceedingly beautiful.Ahh, a beautiful cavalry unit, spearheaded by a beautiful heiress. ...Ahh, something so beautiful it's sacred..... I'm enchanted...."

The officers let out a sigh as if thinking, 'ahh, if only he didn't act like this, our major could also have been assigned to the waffen-schutzstaffel or something,' and other similar thoughts. It was a bad illness of Schaup's.

"Gentlemen, our military will give no quarter to the acknowledgement of ghosts or any other unscientific beings! With these rumors spreading within territories under our jurisdiction, if we cannot to identify their true form, it would be an embarrassment through ages to come! Starting today, we will tighten our patrol of the Albright woodland area! We will tear off their disguises as ghosts of the Verokian cavalry!!"

* * *

Ordeze's experimental platoon, itching to conduct tests in actual combat, and the fascist military's scouting unit, prowling restlessly around the forest of Albright, hoping to see Ordeze's face. Since both sides shared the intent to face off against one another, their wish came true rather quickly.

Glibly betraying McCoy's nightly prayers that it wouldn't be fulfilled.

"Are you positive that they're fascist military scouts!? All dragoon knights, equipment at the ready, dismount and prepare your guns for battle-!! Ahh, my twice-daily prayers, morning and night, that we may encounter the enemy, were worth it!"

"Ahh, so you prayed twice a day, did you? That must be why I lost, tohoho."

"What are you whining about, McCoy; we are deploying for battle!!"

It had been thought, based on what they'd heard, that the positions of both militaries would have quite some distance between them within the deep woodland, but that was never the case. Soon, the experimental Verokia dragoon platoon and the fascist military's compulsory reconnaissance company will face off against one another!

<To be continued>

3-1

"This is Major Schaup, commanding officer of the fascist nation's reconnaissance company. You are invading our country's borders. I hereby inform you that you are to depart at once!"

"Hmph, what a funny thing to say! I am Colonel Ordeze, commanding officer of the Verokian military's dragoon platoon! This forest of Albright has been within our territory since 1600 AD! You are the ones invading upon it; depart at once!"

"...D-dragoons? That has a noble sound to it.... ...So very valiant and awesome, is it not...? Well, this is how combat with the honor of nobility ought to be! Though, I find the sound of 'armored grenadiers' and its ilk to be not unpleasant either, I suppose. Ahh, but I dare say 'dragoons' sounds more awe inspiring..... Having been born a man after all, I want to feel the sensation of armor on my body at least once! So, I want an order of knights in armor under my command!! Ahh, I envy you, Princess Ordeze....!!"

"S-such disrespect! I am a soldier before I am a princess! You are to address me as Colonel Ordeze!"

"Very well! I beg your pardon, Colonel. If neither side intends to withdraw, then we must honorably face off against each other as soldiers. Notify all platoon commanders, prepare for attack! How about we put the strength of the legendary Verokian cavalry to the test, and see if it's the real thing after all is said and done?!"

Historically speaking, the 2nd border patrol unit's gun battle in this forest of Albright was the Verokian cavalry's first time in actual combat. According to the records of the Verokian side, it was the fascist troops that fired first, but in the records of their opponent's side, it was in fact the Verokian troops that had fired first. ...Well, who cares about that? The fact is, they both engaged each other in combat!

"M-Major! It appears their armor really does repel gunfire...! It's unbelievable, what the hell kind of armor can repel rifle bullets?!"

"Hmph, so it's as I thought, and of course it would be! If their armor couldn't repel gunfire, they'd be better off not putting it on at all! And regardless, for them to sacrifice mobility by putting it on, it can only mean that they're confident in its defensive strength!"

"There's no doubt-! That was a ricochet sound just now!! Th-this is hopeless, Major-, this can't even be called a gun battle!!"

This "dragoon shock," from the infantry firearms proving ineffective, might not be mentioned by name in historical records, but it's said to have been comparable in severity to the later "Matilda shock" on the African front. But contrary to what the shock received by the fascist soldiers might suggest, the Verokian dragoons were also feeling bewildered. Maybe to the eyes of the fascist

soldiers, the armor was invincible and could deflect all incoming fire, but in reality that wasn't so. While some parts of the armoring held sturdy, other parts were weak spots, and though there no fatalities, more than a few of them had to be wounded. Furthermore, there were some who panicked at the shock of bullets strongly striking their armoring, mistakenly thinking their armor had been penetrated. But there were many dragoons who could feel more than glad to boldly expose themselves and fire, deepening their confidence in their armoring.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! How do you like that, you fascist soldier scum?! Are you shocked?! This right here is a new weapon, the bulletproof suit of armor! You lot will never muster the firepower necessary to pierce this invincible armoring!"

Even cool lines like those would sound neither dignified nor petty if spoken quietly from the shadows. But Ordeze said them while magnificently exposing herself to her opponents' line of fire...!! Schaup couldn't help but feel deeply moved by such majesty.

"Such incredible beauty, such awesomeness! Ahhh, it's wonderful, this right here is the battle I've been waiting for-!"

"Major, keep your head down! You'll be hit by a stray bullet!!"

The lieutenant pulls Schaup's head back, his gaze full of brilliance. These were lightly equipped, contemporary infantry. If they were to expose themselves magnificently, as one did in medieval warfare, they'd be prime sniper targets! ...He would later advise the top brass to outfit the infantry with noble armoring, but it isn't hard to imagine how he will be laughed at.

"We're attacking, McCoy, bring the machine gunners forward! Our firepower will force the enemy to retreat at once!"

"Roger, you've got it! All knights, cover the machine gunners, fire-!!"

At this instruction, the dragoons dole out a fierce wave of gunfire all at once. All the fascist soldiers can do without any armoring of their own is cower until their foes' magazines run out...! But doing so would allow their opponents to advance and gain ground. And on top of that, they'll still have to counterattack!

"Lieutenant, the Verokian machine gunners are coming out! Snipe those bastards-!!"

"But, our gunfire isn't gonna work on those armored guys, is it?!"

"They aren't invincible! It seems effective if you take indirect shots or hit them under the arms, so drive them back with a bullet curtain-!! If we let them set up machine gun stations here, we won't be able to hold our position!!"

"Uohhhh, w-what is that-?!"

"What's going on?! O-ohhh...!!"

Peering at the spectacle through his binoculars, all Schaup could do was let out a surprised sigh of astonishment. It wasn't a suit of armor that was repelling their fierce gunfire with clamoring sounds;

it was a shield! And a shield is an honorable tool given to a knight! To think one would see such a thing in such callous times as these.....!

3-2

"You must be shocked, fascist soldiers! This is yet another new weapon we're employing, our trump card for strengthening the armor of our machine gunners, the bulletproof shield!! Our lightweight, impenetrable defensive power, made of a rare metal sparing no expense, cannot be pierced by your trifling infantry guns!!"

"Hey there, no lazing around, cover the machine gunners-! Not even we can block hand grenades, so don't even let them show their damned faces-!!"

Donning a suit of armor, wielding a shield... and in their other hand, a machine gun, the longsword of the current era! If such a thing were so brazenly stood up in front of someone, they wouldn't stand a chance! Whatever it takes, they'd have to stop it from being set up, no matter what. Knowing this, the fascist soldiers desperately try to return fire from behind cover, but as their shots are blocked by the powerful shields and suits of armor, they're unable to hinder them! A hand grenade would probably blow them away, but the other side of course knows that they'd be unable to defend against them, so they fire intensely to prevent exactly that. On the other hand, the machine gunners felt like they were desperately holding up umbrellas as they walked through a storm of lead bullets. At the shock of each hit against their shields, each emitting a fearsome sound, they shuddered with the knowledge that under normal circumstances, each shot would be powerful enough to pierce right through them and bring them down. Yet their shields didn't even budge...!

"...I can't believe this. They don't even flinch in the middle of all this gunfire...! It's..... it's beautiful!! That's right, this is the battle I imagined! This is how it oughtta be, how it oughtta be, ahhh!!"

"M-Major! Let's fall back one rank!! We failed to impede them setting up their gun stations!! We're already in range of the enemy's firepower-!!"

The time between the machine gunners coming out and the gun stations being set up may have been just a few seconds. But in those few seconds, the common sense of contemporary combat was turned on its head.... At last, the machine guns of the Verokian dragoon platoon were set up in positions so daring as to be normally unthinkable. They commence a fierce counterattack with cutting-edge heavy machine guns they'd purchased from a neighboring country with the funds freed up by the ban on battle tank development. If only their armoring had been even more perfect. Undoubtedly, they'd have been able to drive them back with an all-out assault, a traditional tactic of the Verokian cavalry, without leaving all the attacking to the machine gunners. Thus, though it still marked a transitional phase for Ordeze and the dragoon platoon, perhaps this victory could have been described as an overwhelming victory. However, despite that, there was no substitute for a true overwhelming victory.

"Any further combat will be letting our losses go even more to waste. Order the entire company to withdraw! I've come to like you, Princess Ordeze! As a show of respect to your beautiful and noble way of fighting, I shall have us withdraw for today...!"

"Again, Major, keep your head down-!!"

Schaup had wanted to gracefully pull out, but it seemed that wouldn't be possible in the midst of such fierce fire. As he was dragged away into an unceremonious retreat, he felt quite disgraced, himself. The roar of the machine guns continued until all the fascist soldiers had fled. Overwhelmed by the fearsome pressure of the entire platoon firing on them at once, the thunderous sounds and dust clouds rising from the impact of bullets, all the fascist soldiers could do was flee with their tails between their legs.

"Colonel, the enemy is withdrawing, let's pursue and attack!!"

"No, the outcome has been decided. There is no need for that. McCoy, have them cease their fire!"

"All knights, cease fire!! Hey you, I told you to stop, I'm talking to you, someone beat mister trigger happy over there over the head! How much do you think each of those shots costs us?!"

In addition to not being able to hear each other well through the armor, they also had no radio communication, so the order hadn't quite made its way to all of them, and it took a little bit of time before Ordeze's cease fire command made its way to them. This, too, would probably be a point to improve on in the future. By the time all the members of the platoon had finally stopped firing, the fascist troops were already gone, and the countless scattered shell casings and stillness in the area let them know that they'd achieved a complete victory.

Cheers arose throughout the crowd. That was the moment when the value of the experimental dragoon platoon had been proven in real combat...!

"Colonel Ordeze, congratulations to you! This is a complete victory for our side! The enemy is retreating with their wounded at the rear!! Our own losses are exceedingly slim!"

"However, I'd say there's still much work to be done on research and improvement! There may be risk based on the type and angle of the bullet. And I would also go as far as to say that there's a need to research proper tactics befitting the dragoons."

"I suppose you're right. An excellent soldier begins to display his true worth when he's utilized by excellent tactics! We will now conduct an examination of the battlefield, and after we depart, we will consider our findings!! Then, all knights will submit a battle report regarding wearing their suits of armor. And then we will begin armor maintenance, or rather, before that, we will examine the shots taken, examine the outcome of the battle, and then, and then-!!"

"Before any of that, someone get some cocoa prepared for Colonel Ordeze, and make it extra sweet! At this rate, I won't even have time for a smoke... huff~!"

Ordeze was in a moment of supreme bliss as she drank her cocoa. McCoy removed his heavy armoring, and although he thought he hadn't taken a single shot, he realized there were bullet holes in his own armoring. So, though he didn't want to acknowledge it, he would have to commend its

defensive strength. ...However, the era is moving away from infantry weapons, so although the pieces are moving in the direction of armored vehicles, the fatherland will be doing battle from here on out in such an unprecedented manner. ...And because it was so half-baked, it wasn't a very good thing.

"...I bet the newspaper extras are gonna make a big fuss about this! If we're unlucky, the king might find this pleasing and tell the Verokian army to convert all its troops into dragoons. Ahh, and then our princess will probably come up with another outrageous idea, just for the fun of it...! Well, at least I'm not bored, I guess... tohoho."

This is the most trivial issue. The real issue is that the enemy, having been involved in today's battle, will bring back combat data on the experimental platoon. The fascist armies are powerful. They may even decide to reinforce their border with Verokia as a result of this incident. And if the fascist military were willing to dispatch a pridefully, powerfully armored corps, they'd likely be unstoppable.... In any case, whether anyone wants it or not, the era will bring an avalanche of conflict upon itself. ...Without a fighting spirit like Ordeze's, the entire history of Verokia, from its establishment onward, would probably be erased and wiped away in a matter of days, like never seen before. It's an era when one must fight to survive.

And thus, the following day's newspaper extra didn't betray McCoy's expectations, and caused quite a stir in the royal capital.

'First battle of the Verokian army's newly-formed dragoon platoon drives back fascist scout troops once again! A return to glory for the Verokian cavalry!'

Anyhow, this victory is the real thing and not an exaggeration, so the writing is spirited. As if subtly implying that the victory yesterday was misinformation. Princess Ordeze was suddenly treated as a national hero, the whole country was excited about the formation of the dragoon force, the army's popularity soared, and there was a deluge of youths aspiring to join, in pursuit of romance. ...Though, even for such a fuss to be made over such a minor victory, it really illustrates what a puny country this is.

3-3

However, as you and your kin are aware, none of the grand exploits of the Verokian dragoons remain in recorded history. While they certainly did put up a good fight within their own region for a time, none of that had any real impact on the war situation. Just like how, no matter how many stones you cast into it, you can only disturb the reflection of the moon on a pond. In contrast to battle tanks becoming heavier, the greater infantries were becoming more lightweight. The Verokian army's dragoons resisted this trend as an increasingly heavily outfitted infantry. As their exploits only lasted for a short while during the great war, it isn't even uncommon for researchers to treat them as a laughing stock merely for their existence. That this infantry's armoring and whatnot was a whole 500 years out of date. And yet, this very day. Infantry are evolving to be more heavily armed. With

the invention of the handheld infantry anti-tank rocket launcher, the status of the battle tank as the king of land combat was now threatened.

The panzer division sending up dust clouds, charging at their enemies, and overrunning them, is already little more than a fanciful image, and it's even said that contemporary combat begins with an infantry unit of a select few, equipped with high-tech weaponry, sending the rear into disarray. This elite infantry reinforces their bodies with bulletproof vests and receives computerized instructions from advanced communication devices, connected to the net for advanced operations. And with their strong firepower, they're capable of achieving tremendous results in battle. In other words, these too are increasingly heavily armed infantries. Considering that the helicopter units that convey them are sometimes referred to as cavalry, is it really such a romantic mindset to wonder whether the Verokian army was 500 years behind their time, or whether the world took 50 years to catch up to Verokia? Fighting hard all the way up until the end of the kingdom of Verokia, the imperial dragoon guard division was capable of coordinated operations with their powerful bulletproof armoring and powerful wireless devices after all, and had tremendous anti-tank firepower in excess of even the standards for infantry equipment at this time. It could even be called the very beginning of contemporary elite infantry. Using tactics that put their advantages as infantry to the utmost use, they haunted the fascist troops like a phantom in their attacks. As they continually obliterated countless armored vehicles, the Verokian dragoons became a name of great renown, for a time. And what's more, for a long time after the fall of the royal capital, they continually refused to surrender their territory to the fascist regime.

According to record, Princess Ordeze assumed her post as the first commissioner of the dragoons in 1941. Establishing her own unique tactics with the dragoons, she put up an unimaginably good struggle for such a puny country, and continued to be a source of grief for the fascist troops. In recognition of her achievements in battle, she was awarded the special Andromeda medal in 1942, and earned her title as marshal of the army. While today's researchers agree for the most part that she caused trouble for the fascist troops, she never had any effect on their advances, and yet a certain subset of researchers fascinated by Ordeze will say that, specifically by ignoring the existence of the Verokian dragoons, the fascists made a very slight but fatal mistake in the course of their war against the Soviets. According to some researchers, she died in combat in late 1942, struck by a stray bullet. But there is a theory that she was the leader of the national dragoon regiment, an underground organization that carried out resistance activities against the occupying Soviet forces in 1946, and theories still float around as to her whereabouts.

It's sad to say, but they are not to be found anywhere today. Not the name of that princess, nor the name of the nation of Verokia, nor the name of the Verokian dragoons who gave such a valiant effort, even if only for a blink of an eye...

And here is where the story begins.

Shounen Alchemist Summer Comiket news.

We have new information to announce, coming at Comic Market 72, August 17-19.



Announcement 1:

New developments coming for “Verokia Dragoon Story”?!

A promotional movie is being released!!

A promotional movie will be shown at the Alchemist booth, created by famous 3D animation company Romanov HIGA.

And an image song, sung by... Wha? Really, her?!



The Verokian dragoons, gallantly intercepting an enemy tank unit...

The movie also teases just a bit of future story developments.

Look forward to it!!

Announcement 2:

Coming August 31, our website is being redesigned!

And new series are coming, one after another!!

Coming in September, a redesigned Shounen Alchemist webpage! Aiming to make the web magazine easier to read and understand, the updated design is set to release 8/21.

* For full details, check the pamphlet being distributed at Comiket.

And **that series** you’ve all been waiting for is finally coming!

Plus, a series from **an author you all know** will be coming to Shounen Alchemist!

Please continue to support Shounen Alchemist as our catalog continues to grow and grow!!!

Promotional video

(Note: The previous announcements section is depicted exactly how it was originally published on the Shounen Alchemist website. Unfortunately, the 3D promotional movie it mentioned was not preserved, but the image song 'Drive on Dragoon' sung by Ayane is still available on YouTube)

[~ Verokia Dragoon Story ~ 「 Drive on Dragoon 」 Lyrics / AYANE - YouTube](#)

X 1-1

Winter, 1942. Gruntwalt, capital of the kingdom of Verokia.

This beautiful medieval city with centuries of history has already been turned into a witch's cauldron, boiling its components down to rubble and billowing with dense, pitch-black smoke....

"You've all fought gallantly for your fatherland! Our military honors the bravery of all Verokia's combatants, and offers you the right to choose between either an honorable surrender that you can boast of for generations to come, or laying down your lives and dying like dogs, rotted away by the elements without any sort of history to leave behind! You have all already fought bravely and fulfilled your duty! Surrender, just surrender, just lay down your weapons and surrender. Dragoons, just remove your bulletproof suits of armor and surrender!"

The fascist imperial military was remonstrating them over booming loudspeakers. In urban warfare, such attempts at remonstrance have never succeeded, but the mental exhaustion of being made to constantly listen to broadcasts in the enemy's language around the clock wore down the Verokian military garrison without a fight.

However, the soldiers of the Verokian military vowed to endure it, clutching their weapons down to the last, and defending their own positions to the death. The reason being that, at this point, they have no other territory to retreat to. Because their capital, Gruntwalt, is the last of their nation's land.

With an ancestry of gallant cavalymen who achieved victory over the Habsburg dynasty, they resisted down to the last soldier, and down to the last shot. Several times, they'd repelled large scale assaults in exchange for sacrifices that could not be made light of, until there were little left of them.

However, the imperial military, with its overwhelming military strength, had been slowly but surely chipping away at the Verokian military's territory without fear of shedding blood, forcing them to pull back...

Seemingly pushing their way through a city of rubble as they advanced, there came an imperial armored unit convoy, feared as kings of the land and proudly held up as the strongest even among those. Behind them, as if in hiding as they pressed on, were imperial armored grenadiers. This caterpillar trampled upon beautiful structures that had stood for centuries and came straight out of the Middle Ages, now crushed and reduced to pebbles by enemy bombardment. This scene was, quite literally, nothing short of a bulldozing...

"You all fought bravely for your fatherland! Lay down your weapons and surrender, just surrender!"

To the citizens still cowering in the shadows of the rubble, this grand military march, accompanied by the shouting over the loudspeakers, signals that the fatherland has met its fate.....

"We repeat. You needn't choose to die like dogs! You've all already fought gallantly and completed your duty! Choose an honorable surrender! You all have the right to make that choice! Disarm yourselves, just disarm yourselves!!"

--To all knights, from Ghost Leader. Show them that there's a third option. Attack, attack, attack!!"

All at once, the fascist military convoy was enveloped in a blast of pure white smoke. The line of anti-personnel landmines set up on the road had exploded.

And that exact moment, the dragoons emerged in unison from the second story windows of the structures lining both sides of the alleyway, and from holes among the rubble, their bodies clad in bulletproof suits of armor!

In their hands were multipurpose howitzers, unrivalled in power. However, when such anachronistic figures in suits of armor held these in their hands, they may have looked more like the lances wielded by knights on horseback in the days of yore.

This state-of-the-art portable howitzer, the "Sir-42 Silver Lance," while being a disposable handheld infantry cannon, could withstand about 30 rounds of re-use. And it could be used in a variety of different ways depending on the warhead, be it a shrapnel fragment shell for anti-infantry use, a HEAT warhead for anti-tank use, a smoke bomb, a gas bomb, and more. ...Its complex design was never intended for mass production, and its final production numbers were never very large, but this was, without a doubt, a weapon that was certain to prolong what life the kingdom of Verokia had left.

These "silver spears" burst into flames at once, firing one after the next into the fascist military convoy. The fascist military's tank armor was the stuff of legends, but the topmost part of them not so much. This one weak point on the battle tanks was pierced by HEAT shells, and the kings of the land couldn't do anything but be silenced in the blink of an eye. And the shrapnel fragment shells fired alongside those hit the fascist soldiers, who were already panicked by the landmines, without mercy.

The fascist soldiers who were lucky enough to be spared from this preemptive strike attempted a counterattack, but in the middle of the thick, dense clouds of smoke billowing up, all they could do was fire off into what they assumed would be the right general direction. Then, with metallic twangs mixed in, different from the sounds of shells hitting brick, they trembled with fear. The reason being that, regardless of whether or not they hit their targets, these were the sounds of bullet shells being deflected. And those sounds, as such, told them who these targets were...!

"These aren't the national dragoons!! They're the imperial guard dragoons!! That's not cheap armor for show; these are real bulletproof suits of armor!!"

"It's the dragoons, the Verokian dragoons--!! Guns won't work on their armor! Help us!!"

"Calling Ghost Leader. Ambush successful; their retreat has been cut off. We'll now proceed to annihilating them!"

"Calm down, they're not invulnerable. Return fire with flame grenades! Flamethrower operators, forward!!"

X 1-2



"Make them pay the price for trampling over Gruntwalt, with these lead bullets! Ghost One, commencing cleanup!!!"

"Roast 'em whole with your flamethrowers!! Roast 'em to a crisp like wild turkeys inside their armor-!!!"

"Don't let them, target the flamethrower tanks!! Ghost Two, do you have a visual from over there?! They're aiming your direction!"

"Put up a bullet curtain with your shotguns and shatter those windows! Their armor isn't perfect!! Forget this idea that dragoons are invulnerable-!!!"

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, oh my god-!! Hans is hit, his fingers were blown right off-!!!"

"August, enemy soldiers are invading your building!! Watch out, they have flamethrowers!!!"

"I'll treat you bastards to a whole roast in hell with your fallen comrades!! Burn in heeeeeeell!!!"

"Die, die, die, die!! Gyaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh-!!!"

"Fire, fire, fire, fire-!! Exterminate those fascists, drive them out of the capital! Cover the land in their spilled blood-!!!"

"God damn it, they shot a field medic-!! They shot a wounded soldier!! Fuck, fuck, fuuuuck!!"

"Help, help, heeeeeeeee-!!! Heeeeeeeeeeeee-!!!"

"Long live the fatherland, glory to the kingdom of Verokia! Shoot those imperial dogs dead!! Don't even give them a chance to grovel-!!"

"Show them what they did to our familieees-!! We have no villages to go back to anyway....!!"

"Our retreat is cut off, counterattack!! They're not wearing armor, make beehives out of 'em!!"

"Beat those dogs down-!! Long live the fatherland, long live the fatherland-!!"

"Ghost One to Leader, the volunteer soldiers are caught in the fray! Our line of fire is obstructed; we can't fire-!! Have the volunteer soldiers withdraw!!"

"This is Ghost Leader, the national volunteer military is under the direct control of the home minister, we can't give them orders!! Cover the volunteer soldiers as much as possible!!"

"I repeat, our line of fire is obstructed; we can't fire!! God damn it, throw their grenades back at 'em-!! Stop standing around like idiots, aghhhhhhhh-!!"

"Those armor-less bastards are no match for us!! It's time to die, eat this, I'll tear you to shreds-!!"

"Fuck, those goddamned fascists-, they're blowing away our volunteer soldiers with their anti-armor shotguns-!! Shoot this way, you fucking cowards!! We're your opponents-!!"

"Shoot, shoot, shoot, exterminate them!! Those bastards are deaaaaaad-!!!"

"Take cover!! Aim for the flamethrower tanks!! Gyahahhhhhhhh-!!"

"Ha-hah-! Take a look, we've got a whole pork roast!! Kill them all, burn them dead-!"

"Grenade-, grenade-!! Throw it back, throw it back!! Uohhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

"Dear god, bless my family and my comrades in arms-!! Uoahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-!!!"

"August, come in!! Don't be hastyyyy-!!"

"Shoot, shoot, shoot, run, run, run-!! Shoot, shoot, shoot, kill them, kill them, kill them-!!"

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-!! Gyahhhhhhhhhhhh-!!"

"Burn every last Verokian to death!! The fires of hell oughtta suit you, aghh-!!!"

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, help, help, help, help-!!"

.....It's said that, assuming the historical documents left behind are accurate, the battle for the capital, Gruntwalt, had the greatest number of casualties, in the shortest amount of time, of any urban battle in World War II.

And though the number of wounded was extremely small, it's noted for its extremely large number of casualties.

The existence of the Verokian dragoons, who wore bulletproof suits of armor to repel the bullets of the fascist troops, inevitably led to the deployment of weapons that could crush them. ...It was an ironic outcome. The very same suits of armor meant to protect them invited the weapons that could kill them most brutally.

In order to pierce the dragoons' bulletproof suits of armor, large numbers of anti-tank guns were deployed on the Verokian front to penetrate their armoring. Not only could they penetrate bulletproof suits of armor, they also possessed enough power to shatter the humans inside into pieces. In addition, terrifying flamethrowers were deployed in large numbers, capable of burning whatever was inside the bulletproof suits of armor to ashes. Of all the weapons to use on someone, this is undoubtedly among the most horrifying. ...However, these terrifying weapons were ideal for efficiently killing the dragoons concealing themselves in the trenches and streets.

And so, at that time, with statistics on wartime casualties unavailable, it was believed that the leading cause of death for the dragoons was being burned alive by flamethrowers. For that reason, they even self-deprecatingly, or perhaps ironically, referred to the bulletproof suits of armor they wore as "ovens", and themselves as "roast beef"....

Still, going by the latest research, their leading cause of death was, unexpectedly, bullets hitting them through the seams of their armor suits, while the number burned alive by flamethrowers is thought to have been perhaps negligible. However, it's said in the memoirs of dragoons from that time that such a terrifyingly imposing weapon was feared more than any other....

The ruthlessness of close quarters combat involving flamethrowers is incomparable to even the most gruesome of urban warfare. Dying from a bullet or a bomb can perhaps be deemed acceptable as the fate of a soldier. Anyone who holds a gun and stands on the battlefield has prepared themselves for that.However, that's not as painful as being burned into a seared mass of flesh, so as to be unrecognizable by anyone when they're buried. And so, it isn't hard to imagine why the flamethrower was hated more than any other weapon....

Its use by any side has even been repeatedly challenged on humanitarian grounds. Thus, it was seldom used aggressively on the battlefield. ...Consequently, its use was limited only to highly specific situations, like taking out a pillbox bunker.

However..... the emergence of Verokian dragoons robbed this weapon of its guilt. As bullets were ineffective, they were limited to using weapons that would work on opponents who challenged them to gun battles concealed amidst the trenches and rubble in the manner of infantry. So, it was only natural. ...Horrifying weapons were deployed on the Verokian front in massive numbers.

As a result, the deaths of the dragoons were always, always... horrific.

X 1-3

The dragoons, fearing the flames, sniped right away at the enemy soldiers armed with flamethrowers. Or rather, if they were able to aim for them, they targeted the tanks on their

backs. ...Those were easily pierced by their powerful bullets..... and masses of enemy soldiers were engulfed in the spreading flames of hell. And so... this horrific manner of death was shared among both sides on the Verokian front.

Impartially.

And so, this black smoke constantly covering Gruntwalt, and its smell... is proof that the flames of hell even now continue to burn something, or someone, somewhere.

".....Colonel. I've been thinking."

It subtly shows through in his expression, with his right eyelid. There was no vigor in it to speak of, but it was the affable, vague-looking smile of a nostalgic adjutant.

"When you make the armor heavy, the enemy readies guns that can shoot through it. When you make it heavier to withstand those, the enemy readies even more huge guns."

"I suppose you're right. So, would it not then be a good idea to check over our suits of armor even more thoroughly?"

"Long ago, in ancient times... in the era of our great dragoon ancestors. The armor kept getting thicker, so it became more convenient to pound it rather than cut through it, so they made weapons out of these stupidly gigantic mallets. ...I do wonder just how far they took it in the end."

"The weight of weapons and suits of armor is limited to what a person can withstand. And either way, mobility is an even more powerful weapon than attack strength or defensive power. I suppose we may have seen a certain amount of evolution in weight, but I'm afraid that may have reached its peak with the advent of guns."

"Meaning, in other words, that each person's armaments will be different depending on their own capabilities.I'd say the current era has easily broken through those individual limitations. ...That is to say, the seesaw game of weapons getting heavier, then armor getting heavier, no longer has any limits."

In the future, the seesaw game of attack and defense has no limits to speak of. ...But the weight of the dragoons' bulletproof suits of armor is limited to what a human is capable of wearing. Meanwhile, the armaments of the fascist military have no such limitation.Because their weapons, which couldn't possibly be carried by a person, are instead carried by fierce steel beasts.

To begin with, the weight of weapons and suits of armor isn't equal. Although a suit of armor may be heavy enough to protect one human, a gun that can kill masses of humans weighs no more than that. And so, this is the inevitable result. Eventually, armor gave in to the ceaselessly escalating value of weapons.

Already, the legend of the Verokian dragoons, who took pride in their invincible majesty, isn't even a shadow of its former self.... They certainly have defense strength impossible for standard infantry to deal with, and are able to leverage that via unique forceful tactics.However, the enemy brings along a whole array of weapons to resist the dragoons, and devises a whole slew of tactics for them.

The invincible legend of the Verokian dragoons, burned into the minds of troops of both sides, is in reality already an illusion....

The array of ruthless weapons intended for anti-dragon combat was, naturally, used even against types of soldiers who didn't have bulletproof suits of armor.And their manner of death went far beyond what's considered acceptable in warfare.

The anti-armor rifles and anti-armor shotguns intended to pierce bulletproof shielding blew the un-armored soldiers to bits and pieces. ...Thus, the combat medics had to witness cold-blooded cruelty the likes of which they'd never thought existed in this world.

Hand grenade tactics intended for anti-dragon combat made mincemeat of the soldiers without suits of armor. Even if they were lucky enough to escape, their whole bodies were filled with shrapnel, and until the grim reaper came for them, they could only choose to pray for God's protection, or to repeat the names of their mothers.

So, to escape that terror..... the entire Verokian military was, one after the next, made into dragons by their bulletproof suits of armor. And in order to shoot through that armoring..... the entire fascist military, one after the next, became armed with terrifying weapons.

And the end of that journey, the very last stop, the place where it all ended, was the urban battle in the capital, Gruntwalt. While it was a puny country that went away mostly without any of its history being recorded, that urban battle would be the single most gruesome in the entirety of World War II.....

X 2-1

In the capital defense force front line command division's tent, Ordeze was sipping black broth as something of a substitute for cocoa. Its color gave it the vague appearance of cocoa, lending her a little bit of the desired sensation, but the flavor was far from it. ...Though it was called a substitute, in her mind she grumbled that it was presumptuous to call this cocoa, but the words didn't leave her mouth, and her worn out expression didn't distort in the slightest. Her face had an eyepatch over her right eye. ...That sparkle in her eyes as she witnessed the dragoons' revival could no longer be found in her remaining left eye.



The audible explosions and earth tremors were the echoes of the capital air defense unit's anti-aircraft artillery, firing off in an effort to impede the fascist air force reconnaissance at least enough to give them some grief. ...Verokia's air force was feeble to begin with. Their control of the airspace was quickly taken from them. Meaning, if one sees the shadow of an aircraft in the Verokian sky, it will always belong to one of the fascist empire's military aircraft that they so take pride in....

".....These so-called invincible suits of armor are in fact the opposite; they bring about the most cruel of deaths, huh?"

"That is not even close to true. The bulletproof suits of armor worn by the Verokian dragoons are a symbol of valor for the entire Verokian military. Their defensive strength inspires dread in the fascist soldiers,"

Otto, who would probably be my final adjutant, begins speaking with resonance, in a tone that sounds almost like he's reading off a cheat sheet, probably with the same things he says to rouse up the new recruits. Needless to say, those words fell on deaf ears with me....

It's believed there are 3 reasons that a country as puny as the kingdom of Verokia was able to endure until the end of 1942 in the face of the fascist empire. One was its low degree of strategic importance. The significance of Verokia's existence within Europe was miniscule. Thanks to the reichsfuhrer's grand strategy directing the war effort to other fronts, the offensive against Verokia was constantly postponed. And time after time, that military strength was diverted to other fronts, or perhaps other strategies.

Another reason was the Berre river, a natural line of fortification. Before the war began, the Verokian military had strategized a thorough blast blockade of all bridges across the Berre river. For the overwhelmingly inferior Verokian military, after all, the Berre river was a more reliable line of defense than any rampart wall. And as the fascist forces understood the importance of the bridges over the Berre river, they also understood that capturing them swiftly would be the key to a successful blitzkrieg. Because of that, they made it an absolute priority to capture those bridges before they could be demolished, and used an air combat strategy to carry out their operation of capturing the major bridges all at once. It was known that the soldiers of the fascist forces always had, throughout the war, superior weapons compared to the allied forces, but the elite fallschirmjagers who dropped deep into enemy territory were equipped with even more exceptional weaponry. However, these armaments were essentially designed for combat with infantry. They were usually only supplied with limited equipment so they could hold out until they joined up with the main ground troops, and combat against armored vehicles was basically never considered. And the Verokian military was mainly an infantry without battle tanks. Instead of being evolved to use vehicles, the infantry was instead evolved into cavalry. Those fallschirmjagers had plenty of weaponry, so there shouldn't have been any doubt that their operation would succeed. If those vital bridges on the Berre river were captured, Verokia would fall within the week. This was the initial assumption. However, that initial assumption would be completely betrayed. And this, right here, was the last reason. The miraculous variety of soldier that only the Verokian ground troops could possess. "Armored infantry," which, while they were infantry, also donned bulletproof suits of armor with enough defensive strength to completely resist standard infantry guns. Because they were embraced as the "Verokian dragoons." The bulletproof suits of armor that protected them was made of a super-rare metal that was only produced in the land of Verokia. This made it possible for them to remain infantry while also possessing defensive strength equivalent to that of armored vehicles. The fascist military intelligence department certainly had gotten hold of the information that Verokia intended to make practical use of bulletproof suits of armor. ...But they had to suffer a severe defeat before they would believe such an absurd thing. The fallschirmjagers of the fascist military, when they saw these dragoons marching in a single line straight through their curtain of machine gun fire with no fear or hesitation, they were horrified and dubbed them "panzer armeise (armored ants)." One can garner, from the few historical documents that remain, just how terrifying these "panzer

armeise" beings were to the fascist troops, who were cut off from their armored vehicle reinforcements by the Berre river, and against whom infantry weaponry wouldn't work. Thanks to the ferocity of the Verokian dragoons, the Berre river line of defense was well-protected, and the blast blockade was successfully carried out. The fascist troops' blitzkrieg was a complete failure. In order to cross the Berre river, they would have to allocate an enormous number of troops to the task. And furthermore, the invasion of Verokia was always a secondary priority compared to the numerous large scale invasions of other regions which were to follow afterward. Due to all these factors combined, the kingdom of Verokia managed to endure until 1942. Some overly romantic researchers like to exaggerate the military conquests of the Verokian dragoons more than necessary, but however excellent their bulletproof suits of armor were, they don't change the hopeless disparity in military strength compared to the fascist empire. If just one of the aforementioned factors had not been the case, Verokia would have vanished from the map before the day was out. And then, when that day did finally come, it was the end of 1942. ...That's all there is to say on the matter. The fascist empire, advancing its campaign at a breakneck pace as it sought a millennial kingdom for itself, started to show its true colors in the process. With America's entrance into the war and the Soviet counteroffensive, the tide of the war began to turn. The allied forces began to gradually surround the fascist forces in a massive siege. At this point, the reichsfuhrer noticed that the Verokian front had been neglected all this time. He was afraid. He thought that perhaps this puny country might eventually serve as a bridgehead for an allied forces counteroffensive.And that was the moment when all 3 of the factors allowing Verokia to endure vanished at once. And its fate was decided.

X 2-2

--And then, at the tail end of 1942. The capital, Gruntwalt, was under siege by the armored troops of the fascist imperial guard. It was hard to believe such a puny country had held out for this long. Even after the Berre river defensive line was breached, the Verokians destroyed the major transportation networks in each area themselves, delaying the fascist troops' advance to the maximum extent possible while fighting battles of withdrawal. As they gave it their all from day to day, they continued to pray for the advancement of the allied forces and a resulting shift in the imperial forces' course of action. Though this wouldn't take long to bear fruit within the course of history, the kingdom of Verokia no longer had even that much remaining strength.... The legend of the Verokian dragoons, whose name was previously invincible as they'd hoped, was already just a fantasy. Driven out by flamethrowers and hand grenades.There was no longer any space left for an honorable death by bayonet.

"Your excellency! When will you raise protest to the home minister?!! We need to get the volunteer soldiers involved-! Damn it-!!"

In a suit of armor covered in dust and blood, Major Pestalozzi enters into the tent. Indignantly, he slams his helmet down on the ground. ...On his cheeks, pitch black soot follows the wet lines left by his tears.

"Major, that's no way to speak to her highness Ordeze! You'll be court-martialed for this lese-majeste,"

"Be quiet, Otto!! The only true disrespect on the battlefield is from those who abandon their comrades in arms! I, too, sympathize with the major's regrets. I've already raised strong protests to the home minister, repeatedly, but I haven't received any response since the other day...."

"Shithead-!!"

Pestalozzi kicked a wooden crate, making no effort to hide his frustration. Again and again. Seeing this, Ordeze thought that, without a doubt, he'd kicked it once for each subordinate he'd lost. ...But she secretly wondered if she could kick it that many times with her own foot. '...If, perhaps, I had to kick it once for every death I was responsible for, I wonder how many times I would have to do it?I have no doubt it would be more than enough to break my foot....' ...And, she was dismayed that her own tears for the deaths of her subordinates had dried up. The capital defense forces had been reorganized many times in the chaos, complicating the chain of command. The fascist troops' capture-the-flag contest, changing at a dizzying pace, created doubts about which battle plans were the latest ones, and whether those could be shared among their fellow troops. In the capital at present, aside from the dragoon royal guard division of soldiers spearheaded by Ordeze, there was also a regiment of citizen dragoon soldiers under the direct control of command headquarters, and a mixed capital defense unit, reorganized many times using what military strength remained. And the citizen volunteer soldier unit, under the direct control of the home minister, is another group mixed in. Among all those, the citizen volunteer soldier unit may be called a unit, but in reality it's composed indiscriminately of any interested citizens, supplied with armaments and pushed into irresponsible skirmish tactics. Furthermore, because it's under the direct control of the home minister, its freewheeling guerilla tactics often put a strain on allied units. The linchpin of the Ghost company's battle strategy was luring the enemy along meticulously prepared paths to trap them, and then to quickly annihilate them and retreat. However, a group of volunteer soldiers became involved, blocking the line of fire of the company's heavy machine guns. They couldn't simply abandon them and pull out. The result was a messy gun battle in which countless subordinates were burned alive, crushed to death, killed in ways that made even their faces unidentifiable. ...Maybe they'd defeated even more enemies than that, but it was nothing to be proud of.... Survive even just one more day, and protect the capital. That's the supreme objective. ...So, regardless of how many enemy soldiers they might defeat, if they lose their own lives, it'll be a dog's death....

"Your excellency, I beg your pardon! I bring good tidings! The independent artillery division successfully broke through the enemy siege! They've made their arrival in the capital!"

"We must not let them move on to command headquarters. Guide them this way. The artillery will be brought under the direct control of the dragoon guard regiment."

"Hurry-!! Don't let the artillery become toys for the moles in command headquarters!! Artillery is used to protect the capital. It's not for protecting command headquarters!!" The messenger quickly rushes off, taking off on his motorbike.Command headquarters divided up the elite troops to protect the underground bunker it was holed up in, continuing to exert pressure on all sides. Even in

the current dragoon guard regiment, a number of powerful companies have been pulled out of their positions around the underground command headquarters, delivering a major blow to it....

"Your highness, reorganizing the defense forces without going through command headquarters is a violation of military law...!"

"Be quiet, Otto. If you want to indict me for violating military law, you can do that whenever you feel like it. Just keep in mind, I'll shoot you dead on the spot in order to protect the pride and national interests of the kingdom of Verokia, alright?"

"You, y-you, you would shoot me?! Every bullet we've been given is for protecting the fatherland...! Every one of those, down to the last shot, is to be used against enemy soldiers, and y-you'd turn those against me...?!"

"That's right. At times, a shot fired at an incompetent ally will save a whole lot more allies than one fired at an enemy soldier. Otto..... don't make me shoot you, got it?"

"Ngh..... no.....!"

Ordeze glared at him with her discerning left eye, and the adjutant, who was obsessed with doing things neatly, all he could do was cower away and shut his mouth. Even she probably couldn't measure how much rage showed through in that eye.Noticing the flames of rage burning her from inside her crushed right eye, she unconsciously rubbed at the dull pain through the eyepatch.... However, she wondered if she was herself in any position to turn her gun on this adjutant who was always so full of himself every time he spoke, calling him useless....Intoxicated with the legendary Verokian dragoons, she'd advanced the army's modernization in her own presumptuous manner. Outright criticizing her father the king's ban on the development of battle tanks, she'd continually egged on the evolution to heavy armaments. The descendants of the legendary dragoons, determined not to give their country over to the encroaching fascists as long as they breathed... had dragged the citizens into a battle they never had any chance of winning. On that day, how different was she from this man...? Maybe instead of pointing the muzzle of her gun between this man's eyes, she instead ought to point it at her own temple.

"....."

Breathing a deep sigh, Ordeze once again puts the gun away and sits herself down. And, seeing her once again sipping on her cup of substitute cocoa, Otto finally felt his chest loosen in relief.Once I put the cocoa to my mouth, there are no more arguments with me. ...This has become one of my rules. Just then came the sound of footsteps rushing in. It was the messenger who'd taken off just earlier.

"I beg your pardon! Your excellency, I've brought Major General Burckhardt of the independent artillery division with me!"

"Ordeze, your excellency. I am honored to make your acquaintance once again. News of the dragoon guard division's exploits has reached my ears."

"Major General Burckhardt, were you the one who led them? You've done well to break the siege and return to Gruntwalt."

".....You seem quite emaciated. ...And your eyes, which were once even called Verokian diamonds, have been.... I am deeply sorry for your loss."

"I do regret losing my right eye, but had I been just a little less fortunate, I would have lost my life as well.Compared to the gruesome ends my excellent subordinates have met, this is nothing to whine about."

With these formal greetings out of the way, Ordeze explained the fiery situation in the capital. Unlike fortresses and trenches, the streets in an urban area are built straight for "ease of use." ...And that was fatal from a defensive standpoint. Despite how ancient Gruntwalt was, or rather, because of how ancient it was, it was made in a way that was convenient for traffic, and ironically this also made it convenient for the fascist troops, who were uninvited travelers. And so, if no countermeasures had been taken, the fascist military tanks likely could have easily rammed their turrets straight into the entrance of the underground command headquarters on the very first day of battle. For this reason, Ordeze had barricaded each of the main roads, blasting them into craters, constructing lines of blockade inside of those, creating multiple lines of resistance on streets and intersections, even in the buildings and belfries, putting up repeated resistance in small increments. As a result, Gruntwalt, which was already reduced to a ruin by the fascist air force's bombardment, was further turned into a mountain of rubble, by its own hand. A number of boulevards with centuries' worth of tradition behind them, named for legendary heroes, had been destroyed in an unsightly manner, dug out, and lined with sandbags.... The names of those heroes were far too nostalgic for Ordeze, who had initially resolved herself to join the army out of admiration for Verokia's dragoons.It wasn't as if there was no sentimentality in it for her. But Ordeze had been involved in too many deaths to feel too sentimental about it. Burckhardt, looking at the diagram showing the defensive line within that rubble, lets a small sigh escape.

"Even Gruntwalt, our great city of flowers, has become a pitiful sight, it seems.Even though we had no choice, my heart is still pained to see it."

".....The word capital does not refer to rows of stone houses."

"It is as you say. No matter how many streets are destroyed, as long as the flag of the royal house of Verokia flies overhead, it will continue to be Gruntwalt, our eternal Verokian capital."

Once again, Otto says more than he should have, and it rubs her the wrong way. ...However, her usual retort, 'shut your mouth, Otto,' would not leave her mouth.Because she had been about to say more or less the exact same thing. ...For the defense of the fatherland, we're even willing to suffer sacrificing our historic architecture.As long as we remain in this place, it continues to be our capital.If it had come from my own mouth, it would have sounded militaristic and fierce, and I probably would have gotten carried away in my self-pride. However, hearing it from Otto's mouth instead forces me to face my own ugliness..... and it irritates the festering wounds deep in my heart.

X 2-3

An explanation of the independent artillery division they were leading is necessary. In a standard military, artillery refers to cannons that can be conveyed by traction, by vehicle or something similar. Of course, the Verokian military also had plenty of cannons like that, but in their division the term artillery referred to something else. Needless to say, in contemporary combat, the side with greater firepower wins. It kept getting more enormous, until it became so heavy that it couldn't be carried with human strength. When that happens, the only option is to convey it via traction, with a horse or vehicle. ...This is what "artillery" is. So, it's natural to imagine that if the cannon and the vehicle conveying it were combined into one, it could be transported with greater maneuverability. ...This led to the development of artillery that could transport itself, the "self-propelled gun," or SPG. As a result of this SPG's increased ability to traverse rough terrain, if it were fitted with caterpillars and its body were sufficiently covered with defensive armoring, then there was probably already no distinction between that and a "battle tank." But by the Verokian military's definition, this still remains an "SPG."

The "battle tank" originated as a bulletproof vehicle created to break into trenches equipped with machine guns. Meaning that, though they arrived at the same conclusion, the SPG and the battle tank are different in terms of origin..... and via this sophistry, a loophole could be exploited in the "ban on battle tank development." As an aside, within the fascist military, there was a distinction between an SPG and a battle tank, and they were given aggressive names characteristic of an empire, the "assault gun" and the "tank destroyer." A certain sect of amateurs with excessive romanticism for the Verokian dragoons still genuinely believe that battle tanks never existed in Verokia, but they did in fact exist under the name "SPG".... However, they could only get away with such blatant sophism after being made painfully aware of their fatal lack of firepower at the war's outset. Thus, their development was far behind. It was only from the spring of 1942 onward when these domestically produced "SPGs" were deployed in actual combat. This Verokian artillery was nothing particularly great, in terms of production numbers or performance. It was inferior to the fascist battle tanks by every metric, including mobility, firepower, and armoring. However, thanks to a focus on capturing and using enemy battle tanks, they functioned well enough as a "battle tank troop." In other words, this "Verokian battle tank division," which wouldn't be written in historical records, is the independent artillery division. The dragoons had initially thrown the fascist forces into disarray with their peculiar tactics, but by the turn of 1942, the fascists were even developing weaponry and tactics as countermeasures against them, and as a result were able to effectively crush them.Romanticist researchers may ignore this, but the Verokian dragoons were only able to effectively do battle at the outset of the war, and one couldn't exactly claim that the surviving historical documents overflowed with romanticism.... That's exactly why artillery weapons were welcomed as Verokia's new strength in battle. Even the dragoons themselves lamented that battle tanks entered their development and deployment stages so late, instead of right from the start. The fascist military's specialized anti-dragon weaponry and tactics once again had to return to the drawing board after the Verokian artillery made an appearance. ...On every front, they were extolled and welcome as saviors.When all was said and done, the creation of the dragoons stemmed from the whims of Princess Ordeze, who'd come up with the idea of armoring the infantry to resist the king's order banning the development of battle tanks. One might wonder, regarding these battle

tanks in her own military, glossed over by sophism, just how much are their exploits reflected in her one eye....? It's hard to tell from the historical records that remain today.

One fact that's known for sure is that, in the final battle for the defense of the capital, Ordeze single-handedly brought under her command the independent artillery division led by Major General Burckhardt, which had broken through the siege and rushed to their aid to support them in a do-or-die situation. One theory suggests that even though the artillery achieved demonstrably better results in battle, she treated her own dragoons as superior to them, to somehow satisfy her pride. But the researchers who admire Ordeze even now will adamantly deny that....

Gruntwalt had been surrounded by the fascist forces for quite some time. Every one of the many remonstrances to surrender were denied. All that was left was for the reichsfuhrer to order a final assault.

Verokia's weather is poor in the winter. ...But thanks to that, the capital was protected from the fascist air force. The reichsfuhrer intended for the long-awaited final assault to be a joint attack with the air force. Perhaps it had been adequately explained to him that the Verokian dragoons' last resistance was inflicting damage that couldn't be ignored, and he had come to understand that the empire couldn't afford to lose any more soldiers in vain. Perhaps he'd been expecting Verokia to give in to the pressure and surrender in the meantime. But as long as Verokia refused to give in..... both sides would just have to wait for the day when the skies cleared up.

X 3-1

December 21, 1942. The fascist military's meteorological team had foreseen this clear weather several days in advance.

The heavily fogged winter sky, sometimes called the veil of Verokia, was lifted that day. The pure blue sky, which hadn't been seen in oh so long time, looked somehow very sublime. And it probably soothed their troubled hearts, even if only a little. Ordeze gazed upon this sky and resolved herself. She also contemplated how the last Christmas celebrated in the kingdom of Verokia had not been this year, but the year before.

The first wave of attacks began with the fascist air force's oppressive bomber plane squadron. ...Everyone was horrified at the insanity of the reichsfuhrer devoting such unprecedented aerial military forces to such a puny country as Verokia. And then the second attack wave was a preparatory bombardment that came immediately thereafter. The fascist artillery positions, which had the entire extent of Gruntwalt within firing range, beat down all the defensive structures with a good shelling. And then came the third wave.A herd of ferocious steel beasts invaded Gruntwalt all at once from the north, south, east, and west.

And this was the final attack.

"It's a simultaneous attack from the fascist troops!! The vanguard is already within 1 kilometer of us! Evacuate!!"

The meager line of defense they'd fortified couldn't hinder them in the least. The officers hurriedly gathered maps, radios, and the like. The front line command post would have to be withdrawn.Making a front line command post inside the capital was truly enough to make one cry.

"Your highness, evacuate immediately! The front line command post will be made to retreat to the royal palace command!"

".....So, the front line has finally reached the royal palace?"

"Your excellency, leave this to us and evacuate! Have 664 retreat! 661, 663, make up for the difference in numbers with spirit! The only ones who can stop them in their tracks are us, the artillery division-!!"

"....."

Burckhardt seemed as though he'd decided to make his last stand underneath this tattered tent. '...If I leave here, the royal palace is next. And then all that remains is the underground command headquarters. ...Once it comes to that, all that's left is room-by-room siege.' ...Burckhardt, the commander leading the artillery division, probably couldn't accept a fight holed up inside like that.

"Your highness, an order's been issued from command headquarters to retreat! The dragoon guard division is to retreat to the royal palace command!! This is an imperial order from his majesty the king!!"

"That's absurd! Even the artillery division is powerless without support from the dragoons! Whatever happens here, we have to defend it to the death!! Your excellency, even if it's just my team, I beg you, order us to defend it to the death!!"

"Silence, Major-, this is an imperial order from his majesty!! Your highness, let's hurry with our retreat!"

"Excuse me! The enemy vanguard has rushed Shermattan avenue and already commenced attack!! It's just 200 meters from here; pull back the command post ASAP-!!"

On the battlefield, 200 meters is already considered close range. That's because it's well within infantry gun firing range. The sounds of explosions and gunfire are being stifled, and shouting in the fascists' language can be heard.

...It was clear to Ordeze and her group that there was no time left to debate whether to make this their grave or clear out to the royal palace.

"Ordeze, your excellency! You are no mere dragoon commissioner!! You are the goddess of victory for the Verokian army! You are the entire military's hope. Don't you dare die like a dog in a place like this!!"

So Burckhardt admonished her. ...He probably sensed that Ordeze was about to be caught up in something savage and reckless.

".....Your excellency! I beg of you, retreat to the royal palace's underground command headquarters! And then order us to defend it to the death-!! Please give us the honor of offering our lives for the fatherland!!"

"Your highness-!! This is an imperial order from his majesty the king!! Your ride is ready, so hurry and get on board!! I will handle the retreat order for this division!"

"Sh-shut your mouth, Otto!! I am the mother of the dragoons! Under no circumstances will I forsake and abandon my children! Pestalozzi, we're going out there and retaking Shermattan avenue!!"

"Y-your excellency-!! We dragoons will be the shield for you and the fatherland, until our final moments-!!"

"Otto, take your officers with you and return to the royal palace command. And you shall tell my father this. That Ordeze has, right this moment, chosen certain death!!"

At Ordeze's heroic words, all the officers present raised an enthusiastic cheer.However, Ordeze's heart was cold all the way through. The apparent heroism in her words was completely hollow..... as if only reciting a cool line from a heroic picture book she'd read long ago... that was how empty it was.

But despite that, words of bravery pour from her mouth....

"All commanders, listen well!! Dragoon Commissioner Ordeze stands right here-!! Don't let those fascist dogs take even a single step beyond here!! Dragoons, load your shrapnel grenades! Artillery, load your armor piercing ammunition!! Set an example for the volunteer soldiers, Gruntwalt belongs to us-!!"

""""Long live her excellency Ordeze-!! Long live Verokia, glory to the Verokian dragoons!!""""

"Ghost Leader calling all knights! Her excellency Ordeze and our war banners are not going anywhere!! Show those fascists your Verokian dragoon spirit-!!"

"This is Warlock Leader, understood!! Glory to the Verokian dragoons-!! All knights, blades at the ready, prepare your cluster grenades!! Show them the meaning of noble bloodshed-!!"

"All artillery division commanders, we're honored to be able to fight alongside the guard division-!! We'll hold this position until our gun barrels are burnt out-!!"

The subordinates respond one after the next, each trying to sound more brave than the last. ...However, Ordeze couldn't help but feel a certain emptiness hidden behind their words.

All of them understand that they can't survive this, and they're all high on the savagery of it....

".....Your..... your highness....!!"

"Be quiet, Otto! You tell my father..... that..."

"--Ordeze. Have you not been ordered to return to the palace? You are defying your father's orders, yes...?"

When Otto said 'your highness,' he was referring to me.However, aside from Ordeze, there are 12 other people to call 'your highness'....

X 3-2



"...Altiria... my sister....."

Altiria was the third princess out of the 12 royal heirs.A graceful beauty and a woman of talent, a princess whose renown and allure were so great that her mere presence would put the Venus statue to shame. One might feel unsettled at seeing such gorgeous beauty in this tent full of dirty military uniforms. ...Yet, her cool smile was enough to soothe that discomfort. Almost as if she weren't so out of place here.

Rather, it was as if Ordeze, in her military uniform, was the one out of place.Making her feel such an impression, Altiria informed her once again.

"Ordeze, answer me. Why make this place your grave...?"

"B-because, now is the only time the Verokian dragoons can go out fighting...!"

"It is not."

Altiria responded flatly. ...In this moment alone, the sound of combat felt so distant.

"You are royalty. Therefore, you cannot be allowed to die in a place like this."

"S-sister, though I may be of royal birth, I am also an honorable soldier of Verokia...! Up until now, I've fought alongside many officers and men, and I've lost many comrades. That is why, for their sake as well, I would never abandon them here!!"

"Right, I understand.And that is exactly why you don't deserve to die here right now."

"No, I don't think you understand at all!! As royalty, are you not obligated to stand up and lead the fight?! I have no intention of surviving by leaving my citizens to die-!!"

As if to interrupt Ordeze's words, a spire right near the tent exploded. The tent, already full of holes, flapped around wildly from the blast. There should have been lookout soldiers hiding in that spire. They were probably spotted by a fascist battle tank and blown away by its turret. ...This tent was already well within the enemy's firing range. It wouldn't be strange for a stray bullet to fly in at any time.There was no time for any more idle banter.

"Altiria, your highness, this is a battlefield and therefore falls under military jurisdiction. I shall fulfill my duty as a soldier of Verokia. Now, if you'll excuse me...!"

Altiria seemed as if she had a lot more to add. ...However, this is a battlefield, and the enemy is rapidly approaching. As long as she doesn't leave this place herself, her sister will likely remain here without the slightest fear of enemy shells. ...And that's why Ordeze cut the conversation short.

...Actually, that's not quite true. She didn't want..... for her sister to say anything more.

"Stop right there, Ordeze. You have no right to decide for yourself whether you live or die.Do you know why that is?"

She says this with a smile on her beautiful face..... undisturbed even by the sounds of combat all around. Her beautiful hair flutters around her in the blast as she speaks. For a brief while, Ordeze could not look away from those eyes....

"The royal dragoon guards are here-!! Now is the time to make our pride known-!!!"

"Anti-dragon combat-!! Prepare the flame grenades!! Prepare anti-armor rifles!!"

"Leave the battle tanks; the artillery can handle it-! We'll take the infantry-!! Don't let a single one get close!!"

"No flamethrowers yet; you'll get sniped!! They're the ones who'll burn in hellfire-!!"

"Ghost Leader! The supporting infantry have started to detour! Ghost One, be on your guard!!"

"Calm down, they're the ones who can't penetrate this armoring!! Aim for the machine gun station on the cafeteria's 2nd floor!"

"Bring the artillery forward!! The enemy has many anti-armor rifles...! The dragoons can't hold the defensive line alone!!"

"Requesting backup from the flamethrower tanks! The dragoons are putting up fierce resistance! We can't break through!!"

Ordeze. Have you ever wondered why our father ordered a "ban on the development of battle tanks?"

"We mustn't falter! Uphold the pride of the dragoons until the very end!! Glory to the kingdom of Verokia-!!"

"Headquarters, calling headquarters-!! We're getting some powerful resistance from the royal dragoon guards on Shermattan road!! The enemy is teaming up with a battle tank unit! Calling for backup, calling for backup-!! The enemy has a lot of anti-tank guns at their disposal!! They're firing out of pillboxes; we don't have enough firepower-!!"

"God damn it, we don't have enough grenades!! More battle tanks incoming; they're in the artillery's blind spots!!"

"They're aiming this way, evacuate now-, evacuate, evacuaaaaaaaaaate-!!!"

Our father foresaw that Europe would eventually be consumed by the raging storm of war. Would we once again win our independence, just as we fought and won it from the Habsburg dynasty in the past? We've been deliberating on this all this time. Even this very day has been foreseen for many years prior.

"Jean, come in-, Jean!! Fuuuuuuuuck!!!"

"Warlock Two, evacuate now!! They're aiming for you!! They've got recoilless guns aimed at you-!!"

"Bad load, bad load! Evacuate now, evacuate now!!"

"Hey, look-!! The national flag is being lowered at the national assembly hall! Holy shit-!!"

"Launch, launch!! Burn them to the ground! Cremate those dragoons-!!"

"Uohhhhhhhhhh!! Long live the fatherland, long live the fatherland-!!"

In combat, the dragoons would always be burned to the ground by the fires of hell. This is because there is no more efficient weapon to use against their bulletproof suits of armor than fire. Incendiary grenades are hurled in through the windows, and flames erupt through the room. Flamethrower tanks torch the defensive line, overflowing with explosive flame and a foul odor that one would never forget once they'd smelled it.

Amidst this raging fire and smoke, they recklessly fire their machine guns into the smog.... This is a fight of departed souls writhing in agony within the raging fires of hell, despising each other even in death. Here there is no trace of the proud Verokian dragoons that I dreamed of....

X 3-3

Ordeze. The duty of the Verokian royal family is to pass down the culture of this land to our descendants who will inherit it into the future. Father was troubled. War has completely changed

since the kingdom's founding. Is it even possible to fight and defend this land against a fascist empire with such tremendous military power? Do we uphold the spirit of our ancestors and fight to defend our independence until the last? Or are we willing to suffer for a time, and choose to keep our land out of the fires of war? Father agonized over this with his ministers, day after day. Ordeze, evil will not enshroud the land forever. Even if, say, the darkness of evil were to close in on the fatherland for a time. Father maintained his conviction that the darkness would, most certainly, be swept away eventually. Even if it were to be a stain on the history of the royal family. Aggrieved at his remaining options, father filled his head with anguish day after day. Searching all the while for whatever the best option might be for the future of the land of Verokia. However, the warmongers meant to pressure father with their advantages as the majority. All the while, misrepresenting the facts with their toxic rhetoric about fighting to protect our pride and independence.

They started hastening to strengthen the military for the sake of national defense. ...However, the fascist empire would interpret that action in the way most convenient for them.

That's right. Amidst all that, the "order to ban the development of battle tanks" was issued by our father as a remonstrance against the military going over his head, as a last resort to buy time so we could carefully consider our options. And then you, young as you were, weaseled your way into the military on a whim. And then you dared to take up the name of our glorious ancestors, the Verokian dragoons, and make a mockery of them.

Gruntwalt is ending its centuries of history here, is it not? And at the same time, the long-held role of the Verokian royal family is ended.

Ordeze. You, as a member of the Verokian royal family, have a duty to see for yourself what fate ultimately awaits this nation you've led. You have a duty to see for yourself, until the very end, what you have brought about, burn it into your eyes, and pass it on to your descendants.

Therefore, you do not have the right to die here.

Surely, it would be much easier for you to die here among your soldiers, yes? You are to watch with your own eye what end you have led your followers into, down to the very last man. Once that task is completely finished, you may meet your end in whatever way you think is most virtuous, yes? You may resist down to the very last bullet, as you've spoken of time and time again. Or you may end your life by your own hand, in the manner of royalty.

But that is only after you've completed your royal duty in full.

That is why, right now, you do not yet have the right to die. Do you understand, Ordeze?

"Your excellency, let's pull back the command post! We're already in enemy firing range!! ...Your excellency?!"

Pestalozzi taps on my shoulder, and I regain consciousness once again amidst a storm of the sounds of battle.... Altiria's words are only a bluff. In a losing battle, everyone's hearts are troubled.So, even to hear such words coming from the mouth of my sister who was so kind before..... is nothing to be worried about....

".....McCoy. ...Would you say I was mistaken?"

"You are not mistaken about anything. ...You have done well to lead us here, your excellency. There is nothing to criticize yourself for."

Pestalozzi, thinking the question was intended for him, answers thus. ...The adjutant I expected an answer from is no longer here. ...Everything that transpired up until now runs through my head. The time of my childhood, when I aspired to be Verokian cavalry. And then the time when I revived it and felt proud of it.

The victory of my first battle. And then, my many victories in battle on the Berre river. And then... today. There was an explosion right nearby. Was it a mortar, or a grenade? I was knocked over by the blast and scraped my cheek against the ground. ...Everyone else was hunched over, holding their head in their hands. For some reason, it's incredibly silent. ...Everything looks calm. The sounds of battle and the blasts from just a moment earlier are all gone..... and it felt almost as if a typhoon had passed through in a nightmare. Then, I wonder, if I lift my head and look up to the sky... will there be a beautiful blue Verokian sky spread out above?

Yes. Perhaps, at long last, today will be the day when the veil is swept away and a blue sky can be seen. I felt as if I'd heard the call of a bird that I hadn't heard in so many years. I stand up. Seeing this, the officers try to shout something, but I couldn't hear it.It was just so very beautifully silent and still. Through the thick black smoke ahead, a big blue sky could certainly be seen. I could see it myself. And then, memories of my days running around the grasslands with my beloved horse came back to me... and I remembered the vivid, strong wind blowing back my hair, and an insect hitting me in the head.

...Clunk.

I hallucinated that my body was being sucked up into the vast sky. The blue sky, really, truly filling everything from the sky down to the earth, right before my eyes. The earth supporting me against my back feels so nice, so refreshingly cool.....

December 21, 1942. Late night. Gruntwalt, the capital of the kingdom of Verokia, has fallen.

Field marshal Ordeze, commissioner of the dragoons, is struck by a stray bullet, killed in combat. As the fascist troops couldn't identify her body, they suspected that her death in combat was faked so she could make her escape. Afterwards, a bounty was offered on her whereabouts.

...Because of this, a fairy tale was born, in which she faked her death so she could keep up an underground resistance against the puppet government even after that.

The fact is that, afterward, the "citizen dragoon regiment," hailed as the foremost resistance organization, received the support many citizens who believed in her, insisting that she has once again taken command while hiding underground.

The Soviet troops that occupied the land in 1946 thoroughly suppressed the resistance organization and made every effort to apprehend Princess Ordeze, but in the end they couldn't find her, and wrote in their report to Moscow that "Princess Ordeze perished in 1942 and thus cannot be recognized as the mastermind."

The stories about Ordeze's heroic struggles are too many to count, but there are also some unusual accounts, if only a few, that she was manipulated by the ultra-nationalists in the military and used in an all-out war against the fascist empire.

In the 1990s, an elderly woman appeared claiming be Princess Ordeze, and it made headlines in European media at one point. It gave hope to the many people who'd claimed that she had survived, but unfortunately, she couldn't produce a single piece of hard evidence proving she was Princess Ordeze.

The last time she was seen alive, according to several witnesses, was the afternoon of December 21, 1942. She was hit by a stray bullet near the front line command tent, dying in combat....

So, this whole story is a slideshow. This story is a slideshow of the brief days of the Verokian dragoons, whom Ordeze birthed and ultimately drew the curtain on herself....