

“Rather busy.” Betan commented.

“They look to be preparing to break camp, Captain.” Dem replied.

The army camp was a blue and yellow blur of activity as Reigh's force returned, the jagers at the lead. Camp marshals moved ahead of the column to keep the main road that lead to the marshaling field clear. Reigh and his staff were preceding the body of the force into camp, Reigh's head swiveled as he took in the tumult.

“General must have received reports from agents in Podansir, sir.” Derver opined.

“I can't imagine the news that would cause us to advance our plan so-”

“Rider approaches, Brigadier.” someone called. A staff officer was galloping toward Reigh. He skidded his horse to a halt bare feet in front of Reigh's staff, causing some of their mounts to shy away.

“Brigadier Reigh, General Pautark bids you to ride ahead for a counsel of war.” the staffer said. Reigh grumbled and gave orders for Colonel Bransim to take charge before putting his horse into a trot.

The journey to the marshaling field was short and the jagers were the first off.

“Shall we make camp, Captain?” Dem asked her once they regained their company area.

“I rather think we should wait, Lieutenant. We'll keep the men in the company area for orders. I imagine that Brigadier will have word for us when he's finished with General's counsel of war.”

Betan's boudoir-tent was still raised, Ratkando sitting in a folding chair in front of it. Betan chuckled to herself, imagining him holding that exact position for the entire expedition. He stood to take hold of Arkor as Betan dismounted.

“Any notion of what's going on?” she asked.

“Rumor is we're moving out.” he said. “Quartermasters are issuing ammunition, food and fodder. Past two days.”

“Don't bother unsaddling him, then. Reigh is meeting with Pautark right now.” She entered her tent and went straight to her chest. She might have not long to update the company's records.

An hour and a half of diary and ledger updates gave her a few minutes of rest before Ratkando announced she'd been summoned to Reigh's tent.

“Messenger birds have arrived.” Reigh began, to the shock of his audience. Ensorcelled messenger birds, able to find a moving destination, were only used for the most portentous messages due to the expense of hiring them.

“So General Pautark is making his move.” A stunned silence greeted the announcement. “The Yellow leadership hopes that we can stir the Bad King into advancing before his army is ready. Even with limited training the rookie battalions at the Chassels acquitted themselves with honor. With our advantages in artillery and cavalry, not to mention the murderous rifle company fortune has provided us-” Betan flushed at that. “- we now have the advantage.

“The Bad King is in a froth at the loss of his brigade of Retatans, and the failure of the Second Tryan. Reports are that half of the brigades in the army he is raising are so composed. Only the remainder of the Retata and the Wi-Bandro are firm.

“The army will march in two columns. The first will leave tomorrow at dawn under General Pautark's command. The bulk of our cavalry, all of the heavy and half of the light artillery will be part of that. I will take charge of the balance of the Army, which will be leaving the day after tomorrow. All personnel at the Chassels engagement will rest. Colonels Hantor and Goldopan will continue to handle all watches. Captain

Lebornier, please remain. Everyone else is dismissed.”

Betan waited while the rest of the officers, except for Derver, filed out of Reigh's tent.

“General Pautark was very pleased with your company's performance at the Chassels. I have not forgotten my promise to personally congratulate them.” Derver was unrolling maps, Reigh stepped to the table the adjutant stood before. Betan moved to join him. “You are going to be busy the next day, but I want your men to rest well. We'll have great need of them in this next phase of the war.” He bent over the map.

“This is the route of the first column, which will be the majority of the army. It will take the Kingsways towards Podansir. This maneuver will tie down a portion of the Bad King's army. Most of it, we hope. The second column will travel overland into the valley of the Fral river, a tributary of the great river.” Reigh looked up from the map. “This, Captain, is most secret.”

Betan spent most of the next day sequestered with Puymora and Hantor, who she didn't know as well as the other battalion commanders, Rilmoran and the lancer captain from the Chassels, whose name was Tellin, working out the details of the march. After the first column's departure was well under way a short wagon train arrived at camp from Lamelian's country estate bearing several gross of bottles of wine that were distributed among the men as a reward for their action at Chassels. The Durannians were more appreciative of this gesture than of Reigh's address. The line soldiers only got a few cups' worth but the jagers had a bottle each. Dem reported that many stowed theirs. Additional fresh food rations were provided to accompany the wine.

None of those in Goldopan's tent were able to partake of the largess until Goldopan's valet Grindol and Ratkando appeared with platters. They all stumbled to their cots just before dawn. Reigh delayed march for a few hours so they could rest.

The first days were spent in the dusty, churned up trail of the first column. It was retracing the route of Reigh's force to the Chassels. When the column rose to begin the second days' march the 4YB, half of the light artillery, some of the lancers and chasseurs and most of the Yellow Army's engineers turned off the road and began picking their way along farm paths, heading into the valley that the Chassels battle had been on the verge of. Betan rode with the vanguard, her jagers frequently off with dragoons screening the column past firewood stands and large hedges. A few times she lead a larger portion of the company to clear sizable woods and once she took the entirety of her command to screen a ford of the Fral.

The valley floor was the richest farmland in Dorway, which was one of the great agricultural producers of Predoparante. The landscape was ruled by farms of varying size, the fields of which were separated each other by short walls of stone or by hedges. These were well kept and not the overgrown rubble and bracken barriers that were common to farms. *Not surprising, considering their neighbors.*

The column took up the major road that serviced the area, connecting it to the distant kingsway. As usual no civilians were to be seen. Not to Betan's eyes, not to the dragoons and not to the birds that Felpor kept constantly orbiting the column.

Set into this rich soil was the first target of Reigh's temporarily independent command. The road was perfectly straight, the terrain flat. The roadblock was patently visible for miles. A dragoon reported it to Betan when it was a faint blur, expected but

not identified. Updates streamed back as the column neared. Turned over carts, light cannon on swivel mounts, troops with musketoons and swords, protected by cuirasses and helmets. If the ground surrounding the road were level Reigh simply would have ordered artillery forward deployed to blast the roadblock to splinters. But the walled fields were impassable to the gun carriages and would greatly hinder the infantry of the line, they were already causing the cavalry some trouble. The situation called for haste, so blocking the road to bring the guns forward was not an option.

But they had Betan, and her rifles.

Betan turned Arkor over to Amol and nodded to Ayfrin, the captain of the grenadier company that marched second in column. She surveyed the scene ahead with her looker and called Alman, who was already close by, for orders.

“The entire company will leave the road and flank the roadblock from the right.” she ordered.

“Yes, Captain.” Alman began shouting orders. Betan stepped onto the dirt bank that described the road. Her looker brought the view to her eye, two wagons had been turned into their sides, the axles facing the column. Odds were the interior had been packed with barrels or some such. Two swivel guns stood behind the barrier. Maybe on carriages, the wagons wouldn't be much of a mount for them. She counted twenty men on the roadblock itself with equal amounts in echelon on either side, providing security from the fields.

“How long will they stand?” Betan muttered. “These are private guards, not the Bad King's men.” She put her looker away and checked her pistols. Alman had the company into three skirmisher lines and it only took seconds to get them over the wall into the fields. The first field they crossed as one of some vegetable with dark blue bulbs and puckered leaves. A soapy scent was released when the bulbs were crushed underfoot. The company crossed four boundary walls getting into a good shooting position. “First Sergeant, keep the company to stand off range.”

“Yes, Captain.” he replied from the other side of the skirmisher lines.

“Enemy moving!” Sergeant Todel called. Betan ran to the front of the company. A clutch of Oldsters had moved away from the road. She drew her looker and saw they carried what looked like long musketoons. Judging from reports and their craftsmanship they weren't the equal of her rifles but they were quite more accurate than the standard muskets or musketoons used by Brannans. There were a dozen of them. *Which means they don't know what they're facing.* She would pit a dozen rifles against a company of standard Brannan light troops, if only to slow them down. “First Sergeant, halt the company at long musket range.”

Not quite a minute later, Alman gave the order to halt.

Betan looked over the jagers. Each line had about twenty men in it. “Choose a skirmisher line to give fire on the Oldster detachment, the rest will continue to march on the roadblock.” In a moment two thirds of the company were continuing. Betan stayed with the group behind.

“Form lines and fire at will.” She ordered Kren, who had been placed in charge. Kren relayed the orders and most of the oncoming Oldsters were felled in the first volley.

“You call that shooting?” Kren bawled as they reloaded. “More than half missed?” The next four shots finished the Oldsters.

“Double time to catch up, Sergeant.”

It was another ten minutes and two more boundary walls before the company was

where Betan wanted it. Her looker showed her the consternation of the remainder of the roadblocks' guard. It was possible she were within range of their carbines. Her mens' weapons were longer which usually meant more accurate. But if the carbines' enchantments were stronger that would negate the usual advantage.

“Yes, Captain. Double time!” Betan trotted along with her men. They weren't far behind the rest of the company, catching up in less than a minute.

Only one way to find out.

“First Sergeant, company to firing lines, fire at will, quick rate.”

The drill was one that could be performed in a jager's sleep, within seconds the three lines were staggered for firing.

“Aim carefully!” Betan shouted as rifles were leveled, remembering the earlier performance. Five of the first six shots struck or nearly missed Oldsters, who were quick to return fire. No one fell and the jagers poured fire into the roadblock. The party guarding the roadblock's left flank was quickly devastated, the last survivors ducking below the road bank. Fire automatically shifted onto the roadblock itself, throwing splinters into the air around the heads of shirking Oldsters. Return fire was hasty, blue and white figures standing long enough to point and shoot, ducking to leave only smoke behind. Betan watched the grenadiers advance on the roadblock. The plan had called for her fire to be more effective, but the group in Goldopan's tent hadn't known how deep the road was sunk into its lane. Betan was under orders to keep her men firing at a distance to minimize the risk to Reigh's valuable light troops. But she wasn't sure she could cover the grenadiers from this distance.

“First Sergeant!” a grunt and a cry announced the first Durannian casualty of the shootout. Alman reported to her. Betan watched the company's physics rush to the downed man, then tore her attention away from the scene. “Detail the best shots in the company to fire on the swivel guns. The rest will shift to harassing fire.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Betan called out to him again as he started to leave. “Would opportunity fire avail us here?” She was asking if she should also post men to anticipate the pop-up Oldster shooters.

“We're far out for that, Captain. It might work.”

“Hrm. Do so if you think it prudent.”

“Yes, Captain.” He was off. Betan watched. Another jager was hit as Alman told off the sharpshooters. She didn't think any Oldsters fell during the same time. Turning her looker toward the road, Betan was the grenadiers a quarter mile or so from the roadblock. The road was straight and the swivel guns would cause tremendous losses among the rushing grenadiers. Another jager was hit and Betan cursed. Much more of this and she'd split up the company and order them to advance by bounds.

On the road, parties of grenadiers leapt out of the lane on either side, running just off the embankment that sloped to the fields. The hedgerows would slow them but make for fewer targets for the swivel guns. In fact the Oldsters might not even- no, there one went. A sharp boom between the crack of a musket and the ringing thunder of larger artillery. Heads and shoulders appeared to fire on the grenadiers off the road and became the prey of the Durannian sharpshooters. The swivel gunners, however, were protected by fixtures of the roadblock. They continued to work as the harassing fire kept everyone else's head down. The small cannon didn't need their help. Reels of smoke drove waves of grapeshot that tore into the grenadiers, alternating between those in the road and those

in the fields. "Sergeant Kren!" He appeared shortly. "Take your squad closer to the road, where you can get shots at the crews of those swivel guns. If you can't find an angle, return here." Kren nodded and ran off, calling to his squad. "First Sergeant! If we keep taking casualties I'm advancing the company. Plan to split into two groups for advance and cover."

"Yes, Captain." Alman didn't move, peering at the company, deciding which squads would form which group.

Kren's group stopped, formed a firing line and began shooting through the silver haze. The booms from the swivel guns stopped and Kren's squad was taken under fire, but as the Oldsters rose to take their shots the jagers' harassing fire began to tell. Betan watched as the roadblock's right flank guard was pulled from over the embankment to reinforce the roadblock. Some were struck by shot from her company, but most made it to the road just as a grenade sailed over the wagon. It burst with a shuddering blast and thick black smoke. Another grenade was thrown and then the grenadiers were at the roadblock. "CEASE FIRE!" Betan yelled as the assault troops in the fields swarmed around the roadblock, leaping over barrels with mounted bayonets while their comrades in the road swung their enchanted hatchets through the wagons, making short work of the reinforced wooden beds and going through to join the melee. Betan's orders were to advance and form a perimeter around the fight and with a shouted command to Alman the company surged, quickly establishing a ring around the victorious grenadiers even as the line battalions approached. A few Oldsters attempting to flee were shot.

Betan stood on the embankment and looked toward the oncoming line battalions. They were approaching slowly, attempting to pick their way around the fallen grenadiers. Blue and yellow lumps had turned the oiled dirt road red in spots, sheets of blood running into the drainage ditches on either side. Betan was chilled, imagining her men lining that road.

"Captain?" a voice asked insistently. Betan looked and saw a grenadier sergeant. Betan cleared her throat.

"Yes?"

"Can we turn the roadblock over to you, sir? So we can tend to our fallen?"

"Of course, yes."

"Thank you, Captain." he ran down the road, calling to his fellows. Betan watched the operation, pulling aside the bodies of their comrades torn half apart by grapeshot. A few limbs were left for the line soldiers to step over. Alman reported the company in perimeter, Betan acknowledged his report in a daze. Goldopan leapt his horse onto the embankment and jumped a few boundary walls to reach the roadblock in advance of his battalion.

"How bad are the grenadiers hurt?" he asked Betan quietly when he was close.

"Rather badly, Colonel. There are perhaps twenty five in the road, I can't tell how many fell on the sides. I don't see any of their officers."

"I kept their officers with me, their captain is rather a hothead. *Damn*. We'll have need of this company." Goldopan turned to the road. "First Sergeant! Clear the road, then quick time!" At the First Sergeant's order some of the battalion's battlers ran forward to shove the chopped up remnants of the roadblock aside. At another order, the entire battalion shifted to a rapid loping pace.

"Captain, will you screen us along the embankment?" Goldopan asked.

"Yes, Colonel." Betan shouted the order to Alman, who hustled the jagers into

columns on each embankment.

“Do you know where the dragoons are, Colonel?”

“Not precisely, Captain. Near the manor house I'd imagine.”

“Yes, Colonel.” Betan turned around. “First Sergeant, at double time.” The jagers began jogging, rifles at port arms. Betan put one hand on her sword and fell into pace.

The manor house was screened from the road by a thin wall of bulbous broad-leaved trees. The dragoons were supposed to be harassing the remainder of the local Oldster troops, but Betan didn't hear any shooting.

The road lead straight to a gap in the screen of trees. Betan checked behind, a decent gap had opened between the jagers and 4/4. She ordered the jagers off the embankment, placing squads on either side. “Watch the trees! Fire on target!” she yelled. It was a clear day and the trees created a lot of shade that sun-dazzled eyes had trouble seeing into. Betan used her looker and could see figures lurking, but it was still a long musket shot on them.

Betan called Alman. “There are Oldsters hiding in those trees.” she said when he arrived. “I don't think we can aim closely into the shadow, but I want to keep them busy. I imagine Brigadier Reigh would want us to minimize our exposure as well.”

“Can I have a look, Captain?” Alman asked.

“Of course.” Alman took it and scanned the trees ahead. “Not many, Captain. I'd say we just up and at them but Brigadier wouldn't like that.”

“Indeed, no. What would be the next best thing? Parties to the flanks? Take cover behind these low walls?”

“Yes, Captain. Spread the company out, fire into the tree line until 4/4 gets here.”

“Very good, First Sergeant. Do it.”

Alman handed her looker back to her. “Yes, Captain.”

Squads were dispatched, running across the fields to set up behind the low walls sitting a hundred yards or so from the trees. It wasn't the best position to fire from, pouring powder was difficult while kneeling, but it offered protection from return fire. Alman left two squads on the road, the others spread out to fire from cover. Betan watched through her looker. After a few minutes the Oldsters returned fire, muzzle flashes giving away their positions. One of the jagers on a flank party took a shot in the face after a minute of fire. Three Oldsters fell before another Durannian was injured with a ball in the shoulder. “Captain, 4/4 approaches!” Alman called over the fire. Betan shied away from a whizzing ball flying past her ear. The vanguard of Goldopan's battalion was within shouting distance. They were going to advance straight through the Oldster fire.

A fresh volley came from behind the trees. Betan whirled to see more Oldsters coming, but there were none. More shots, she lifted her looker and saw horses wheeling behind the trees. Horses with blue dressed riders with ostentatious yellow trim.

“Cease fire!” Betan called. “Bayonets!” She took a pistol from under belt and drew her sword. She bounced on the balls of her feet for the agonizing five seconds it took for all of her men to affix their sword bayonets. “Let's go!” she shouted before she ran for the trees and the dragoons. She could feel the company surging behind her.

One more fell before they reached the tree line, then it was too close for shooting. Betan slashed one from hip to shoulder, then dodged a rifle swung like a club, booted a knee and a quick thrust to finish him. A green coat went down and she shot the Oldster hanging over him. Then Betan found herself facing an Oldster with a nicer uniform than

most and a basket hilted Brannan broadsword. He tossed her a quick salute then struck a heavy handed diagonal slash that Betan parried. She similarly knocked away a swipe at her legs and riposted to cut along the arm. Her opponent recoiled for a moment and Betan ran him through.

The dragoons came in close, swinging swords and clubs. Flashes of gunfire made stiff echoes under the trees, Betan chopped at a blue leg, swinging around to slash through the kidney and spine. Then another officer, better than the last, Betan blocked, riposted and he took a rifle butt to the back of the head. Betan moved on, advancing on a billman who swung the pole at her like a quarterstaff, then reversed to bring the blade into play. She cut at his hands and he drew back, she leapt after him to grab his billhook and stabbed him in the chest.

Then there were no more.

Betan whirled, looking for targets, for enemy, but they were all fallen or surrendered. The metronomic pounding of feet signaled Goldopan's approach.

Reigh's going to be furious at me. Betan thought.

"Colonel!" a dragoon officer yelled. "The Lord is almost escaped! He has the remainder of his guard behind the house. We're trying to pin him down, but their carbines, sir!"

Betan didn't hear Goldopan's response, but the 4/4 went into double time, following the dragoon. Betan took a moment to clean her blade and a horse was in front of her.

"Remain as rear guard." Goldopan sniffed at her.

"Yes, Colonel." But he hadn't waited for her response.

"Shit." Betan slammed her sword back into scabbard. She looked around, Alman was nearby, looking a little chagrined. "It appears that I may have gotten us into a little trouble, First Sergeant."

Alman shrugged. "If I may, your highness." he spoke in (Durannian). "It's damn stupid of the Brigadier to keep us from harm. We're soldiers, we fight, we die."

"Indeed." Betan took a deep, ragged breath. Her hands shook and she felt near close to tears.

"That's just your blood up, your highness. Don't mind it any." Alman said. Betan squeezed her fists and took another deep breath. Alman sounded almost kindly, hardly First Sergeant-like. Especially not from the absurdly accomplished veteran sent to keep her out of trouble. She wasn't sure he'd **ever** addressed her as royalty. She met his eyes and started a bit. It was respect, this familiarity.

"Thank you, Master Orno." At this Alman actually laughed, Betan almost wet her pants.

"Hardly `master`, but I appreciate it your highness." He stiffened suddenly.

"Rear guard, yes, Captain." He swiveled on one foot and walked away, shouting orders. Betan rubbed her forehead and correctly guessed some of the jagers had come close. She straightened her uniform and turned around. There were casualties to count and a rear to guard.

"Captain, I don't think you grasp how important your company is to this army." Reigh said. Betan had been right, he was angry. He had taken her into a small room in the ground floor of the occupied manor house for chewing out. "Your company is all the light troops my brigade has and this is the **most** experienced brigade in the army. A great

deal has been placed on this Brigade and even more will be expected of it as the campaign progresses. I can **not** lose you and your men in some damn skirmish!”

He paused. Betan wondered if he expected a reply here. Betan met his eyes. The pause continued, so she stepped up.

“We are soldiers, sir. We can't be expected to keep remote from the fight.” Reigh took a breath and Betan continued. “I sensed a critical moment in the engagement, sir. The dragoons had arrived and it was our chance to break the pickets. There were forty of them, sir. They'd have shot up the 4/4, your most experienced battalion, sir, very badly. As it was I only lost two killed and three wounded in the fight.”

“Unreplaceable men!”

“The men from Colonel Goldopan's battalion are likewise unreplaceable, Brigadier.”

“Don't reason with me!” Reigh roared. Then he caught himself and he rubbed his face and sighed. “As it happens you are correct. The dragoons had distracted the pickets in the trees, but they were too few to take advantage. Your charge broke what would have been a devastating attack on 4/4.” Reigh dropped his hand and put his look on Betan again. After that day's skirmish and the Chassels, it didn't feel as heavy as it had been. “But, and I must be frank here, I can not yet tell if this was luck or if you truly have tactical instinct. Thus the orders to limit your company's exposure. Orders that will continue. Be cautious with my light troops.”

Betan wondered if he realized that companies like hers were often used to bait the savages of the forests back home into attacking. If he'd seen their drills with sword bayonets and bucklers.

“I will, Brigadier.”

“Now, let's go meet the Lord of Dorway.”

Reigh lead Betan out of the room, Derver for once had been excluded, and walked through a foyer so heavily decorated it almost hurt Betan's eyes to the front lawn of the house. It was a hell of a house. Giant windows of the clearest glass Betan had ever seen took up most of the exterior walls. *Bloody expensive to keep the temperature steady in there.* Betan thought. *But that's likely the point.*

The Lord himself was a study in ostentation, even kneeling on the lawn, arms bound behind him. His stockings were a cloudy gossamer fabric of some sort Betan had never seen before. They were muddied and had been torn. His flared breeches of some silvery metallic fabric had withstood Goldopan's rough treatment better. One sleeve of his jacket, made from the same material but black and brocaded with silver in what looked to be an abstract pattern, had torn loose and was hanging on around an elbow. His hair was a shocking red held into a silky mass of twists by a myriad of small jeweled barrettes. Goldopan was using his sword to cut them loose. A ransom of them already lay on the ground.

“Colonel.” Reigh prompted. Goldopan finished using the tip to saw away the clump of hair he'd been working on and sheathed his sword.

“Brigadier.” Goldopan stood aside. The Dorwain Lord looked up at Reigh. His fellow Lord's rough treatment had failed to dislodge his obscenely bored mien. He said nothing. Reigh was likewise silent.

“Kill him, Budet.” At Reigh's command Goldopan uncoiled and Betan jumped as his sword was buried in the Lord's chest almost too fast for the eye to follow. Blood spurted from his mouth, drops landing on Goldopan's sleeve, who had leaned closely to

the dying Lord face, meeting his eyes. He twitched once, then again and fell limp. Goldopan removed his sword and straightened. A flip of the wrist splattered most of the Lord's blood onto his body. Betan turned away when Goldopan followed it up with a gob.

“We'll camp here.” Reigh said before walking away. “Empty the house of anything useful, then drag his Lordship inside and fire it.”

“You were unnerved by Colonel Goldopan's actions?” Derver asked.

Betan looked up from the company diary. She sat in her tent before the officer's mess opened. The jagers were mostly out on the pickets as sharpshooters. She put her pencil down and stood.

“Surprised, more like. Will you come in?”

“Thank you.” Derver entered. Betan held her hand toward a camp chair and he sat, shifting his sword to his lap. “Milord Goldopan was always an enthusiastic supporter of the reformation, when it was a political club. There's nothing like a parliament or congress in Branna, but parties do form for the purpose of acting in concert while at court. The reformation, however, was not welcome to do so. In Branna, only nobles have any standing before the king, so Milord Goldopan was recruited in our early stages by some of his functionaries. Once he grasped the idea, he supported us entirely.” Derver chuckled. “I say 'our' but in fact Milord was participating long before I was. He was not favored for it. But as one of the few hereditary nobles in Branna, he could not be divested by the Bad King. When the reformation grew and the persecutions began, he suffered mostly politically and economically. He, obviously, was not subject to the, ah, purges.” Derver paused.

Betan had known some of what Derver was telling her already. Her royal father had suggested the Brannan reformation as a place for her first adventure, reckoning the Central Lands safer than any other for his daughter. Details were hard to come by through the Beddisae channel and Dray hadn't dared send agents to Branna before the decision was made. A few of his people had been posted to the few merchant ships Durannia had and gathered news, but her knowledge was sketchy.

Derver wasn't continuing, his eyes unfocused.

“Sir?” Betan prompted. Derver started slightly.

“Ah, yes. I was, distracted for a moment.”

“Cider, sir?” She had brought a few casks from home.

“Please, sir.”

Betan made to rise but Ratkando entered the tent and poured from a chillpot on a small folding table in one corner of her boudoir. He handed a tin cup of cider to Derver and left again.

“Efficient.”

“As he is taciturn. His service is on loan from my, ah royal father.” She hated bringing up her station, the difference between that and her rank still caused confusion.

“I imagine.” Derver sipped the cider, his brows rose in surprise. “Quite good, sir.”

“Thank you, sir. From a firm-fleshed sweet fruit. I'm not sure you have them in Branna.”

“It is strange to us, you realize.”

“Sir?”

“We have tales of lady adventurers, but they are far distant. Let alone princess adventurers. Please do not be offended, you have proved yourself among the Yellow Army. The Oldster Army as well, I imagine.” He sipped again from the cup and, having sufficiently mastered himself, continued.

“Milord Goldopan bitterly protested the first arrests. The actual purges didn't begin until he'd had to retire to his lands on business. They were kept secret, for a while. It was some months before they were widely known to be occurring. And when word reached Milord, he, well, he began the Brannan civil war. He incited rebellion in the army camp nearest his lands and marched on the capital, gathering more as he came. I daresay if he could have gotten to the Bad King then this whole mess would not be happening. But there were still enough misguided officers to support the Bad King then and Goldopan satisfied himself with a raid on the prison estates before retreating to the meadowlands. That was three years ago. Many, many gentlemen have since converted to our cause.” Derver chuckled. “Some of them were even trustworthy. Enough for a small army and war board, anyway.” Derver drank more cider. “Milord could have lead the reformation, instead of Master Aplel. But Master Aplel was a better diplomat and Milord never much liked commanding anything larger than a battalion. When Brigadier Reigh, in fact he was a Marshal then, when he joined us, well, they were a natural fit. Thus, the 4YB became the shock troops of the Yellow Army. And here we are, sir.”

“Indeed, sir. Were Brigadier Reigh's reasons for accepting a reduction in rank the same as Colonel Goldopan's?”

“They were, sir. General Pautark is a good strategist and an excellent logistician. He was always Brigadier's assistant,”

Betan's brows rose. “Indeed, sir?”

“Oh, yes. I daresay Brigadier was happier about the arrangement than General. In fact, when victory is ours I doubt he will ever be chivvied into a rank higher than Brigadier ever again. A brigade of rifles, I should imagine. He's quite taken with them.”

Betan flushed for some reason. “I'm not surprised. He seems, transported by battle.”

Derver finished his cider and placed his cup on Betan's field desk, his movements suddenly jerky and awkward. *An uncomfortable topic, obviously.*

“I must return to my duties.” He stood, Betan stood with him.

“Thank you, Major.” Betan said.

“You're welcome, Captain.” He nodded formally and left, the ultra-efficient adjutant once more.

Betan said again. She looked at the company diary, she should continue updating but she was suddenly rather tired.

The force, which Reigh somewhat amusingly had taken to calling a flying column, marched away from yet another smoking manor house. It was the third such noble that the reformation had revenge upon in what had become a somewhat depressing jaunt for the Durannians. But as the spirits of the foreigners sank, those of the natives rose commensurately.

A staff ensign had joined Betan at the head of the column. As usual the dragoons were far ahead, making sure no warning of their march preceded them. Brigadier's map marked them in extreme eastern Dorway, near to Chiton, the province south of Previtch.

“Another raid, sir?” Betan asked wearily.

“No, sir.” the ensign replied. “Brigadier advises that this road will fork shortly, certainly before highsun. Brigadier orders that you lead the flying column to the left. Brigadier also bade me tell you he will come forward late this morning to brief you in detail.”

“Very well, sir. Thank you.” Betan returned the ensign's salute and he turned to walk along the road embankment back to Reigh.

“I'll be glad to get out of this cursed hedgerows country.” Dem growled.

“Indeed. It's most vexing.”

“Pain in the ass is what it is.”

Betan turned on Dem and he nearly blushed. “I, I apologize, sir, I-”

“Never mind, Lieutenant. I assure you I have heard worse. It was only surprise that made me react so.”

“Thank you sir, still, I am sorry.”

“You are also correct. But our ability to move quickly has been most appreciated in this country. I quite imagine the subjects of our attentions had expected to easily evade an army.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Like you-” Betan looked around. She could see a few jagers in the fields, particularly in those made up of brightly colored crops, but none were close by. “- like you, sir I feel that we have been put to poor use.”

“But this *is* a civil war, sir. I daresay neither of us had any business being surprised.”

“You are quite correct, sir.”

Dem cleared his throat. “I wonder what the main body has been up to.”

“Bearding the Bad King's army, I suppose. I more wonder where we're bound.” Betan took another look around, then pulled her latest map from her satchel. She had quite grown used to folding and refolding them, so she made it into a square. “There's nothing particularly important in front of us that I can see. Alvendor is quite far to the north.”

“No major towns or cities, sir?”

“None. The closest is, ah, I can't quite pronounce it, but it's in Chiton, two weeks' march distant.”

“We could be bound for the river, sir.”

“The river? Yes, the river. It's barely three days' march from here.” Betan unfolded the map, which covered the western provinces of Branna, less the meadowlands. “The main body could have followed the kingsway through Chassels, then turned south to take kingsway 7.” she traced a line along the kingsway on the map. Dem leaned in to look.

“A few noble estates nearby. But I believe that area is quite more open than this. That wouldn't matter if, if the main body was a distraction.”

“Thus Reigh calling us the flying column!”

Dem laughed. “A flying column of a hundred or more leagues.”

“But it makes sense.”

“You are quite right, sir. The main body must have been screening our move through Dorway to the river.”

“If, we get to the river, we could, let's see.” Betan traced over the map.

“Here, sir.” Dem said, his greater experience as an officer read the symbols much

faster. "This is a river port. But defended."

"On the road Reigh ordered us to lead the army onto. Speaking of which." Betan lifted her caller and blew "Recall Sergeants." When they arrived she ordered an advance party to scout for the fork in the road.

"The splitting of the army, Captain has been somewhat of a ruse." Reigh said in a low voice. He and Derver walked with Betan and Dem along the road, having turned down the fork several hours prior.

"Sir?"

"These vengeance raids we have undertaken were not the main reason the flying column was dispatched on this path. I understand you have been uncomfortable with the nature of these raids and I thank you for your forbearance."

"I am under orders, sir. Comfort does not factor into obedience."

"Nonetheless, we are grateful and do not wish to impose upon his Durannian Majesty's generosity." Reigh said. "As I was saying, the route-" he paused for Derver to hand him a map pinned to a light board. "- we have been taking has been leading us to this point." he indicated the destination with his finger. It was the defended river port Dem had discovered earlier, a place the map noted as Brailot. "Where we will assault a small fortification that commands the port. The main body of the Yellow army is already bound for this location. We will embark upon craft that have already been arranged and thus flank the entirety of the Bad King's army by a wide margin. In fact they will be far to the rear when we march on Zhatano."

Betan was chilled by the news, even though she and Dem had guessed it.

Zhatano was the capital of Branna.

Three days of uneventful marching saw the hedgerow country give way to a region of leisure estates, all deserted. Abandoned servants huddled in their mean villages, watching the flying column marching past. *Apparently someone slipped ahead to bring news to these people.* Betan thought. *But they left their underlings behind.*

The column flooded one estate and Reigh called a counsel of war.

Felpor set an unusually large scrying dish on the ground that showed the assembled commanders the target. It was a very small fort, two bastions right on the river bank with only a short wall of the (main part of a fort) exposed between them, but with a long rampart and a wide ditch that was turned into a moat from the river. A riverwall had been built with piers stretching from it under the gun's field of fire. The entire affair looked to have been cut out of the bank.

"From the land, it's more intimidating than formidable." Reigh said. "It was designed to guard the port from an attack from the river. It's defenses from the land are intended to defend the port master's residence from raiding parties. It was not intended to hold the port against an army.

"There are few cannon facing the land side and the ones that do are mounted on barbets rather than inside the ramparts, which are made of brick, cheap brick at that, and covered in sod. The muskets and swivel guns of the garrison are more dangerous than the cannon.

"However, it is still too strong to be taken by storm without considerable casualties by the flying column. And we must have it taken by the time the main body arrives." Reigh turned to another table where a large plan of the fortlet was pinned down.

His audience moved to watch him.

“Fortunately, we have an inside source of intelligence. Alas he is there-” Reigh pointed to one of Puymora's company commanders “- so we have no inside *agent*. Still. This is the plan.”

“Do they know we're here?” Betan heard a jager whisper in the dark.

“They must.” his comrade whispered back. Both were acceptably quiet but their sergeant even more quietly shushed them nonetheless. The company was moving in a crouch to the left side of the fortlet, Betan at the lead. A stake had been driven into the ground outside of the fortlet and she was making for it.

She found it and halted the company by letting them bump into her. Alman spread them out and they waited for sunrise.

As the sky began to turn pink the clatter of carriages could be heard. Betan looked and could see shadowy movement. *That will be the cannon.* she thought. Betan caught herself chewing on her lip as a few dim lights appeared on the parapet. A few jagers shuffled but were stilled by their sergeants. She made herself calm, releasing her lip. Then she was tapping her arm. A shout from the wall announced that there was now enough light to see by. To see fifty and more green and gray coated soldiers and a battery of field guns.

She didn't like this plan, but she had her orders, so she ordered her men to their feet and waited for the guards to appear on the wall. It took a few minutes, then at least a score of blue and white coats appeared over the parapet. “First Sergeant, aimed and harassing fire, by platoon.” Bethany ordered. Alman relayed the order to the first and rifles rose then swung down. Sparkstones popped and charges exploded into smoke. About half of the Oldsters fell. Alman ordered the second platoon to fire and most of the rest of the enemy were gone. The allure had filled again when the third platoon's volley dug in. After that it was individual fire, at heads and shoulders when they appeared, into the stonework of the parapet when there were none. Some bold Oldsters returned fire but they fell one in three when they did.

The jager firing line and the Yellow artillery detachment were facing the left bastion of the fortlet. The garrison had also turned out along the curtain and the right bastion, though they had nothing to fire at. The cannon crews on the target bastion soon realized that they weren't taking fire and made to engage with their gun. But Aelion himself was taking angles and measuring ranges and as soon as the two cannon that could bear on the Yellow attackers began to move, he ordered his four guns to fire. Betan noted they had been placed at a very high angle, propped up with chocks. The angle was more suited for mortars than cannon. Reloading proceeded very slowly, it seemed the powder men were measuring very carefully.

The first balls impacted the glacis several yards short of the cannon. The balls kicked up sod and pinkish-yellow brick dust. Betan returned her attention to the parapet, still only scattered return fire. The Yellow cannon resumed firing, Betan could actually see the balls, much blurred by speed, in their flight. A high, arcing trajectory that brought them onto the lip of the barbette. The fourth shot actually landed in the battery area. Aelion supervised the reloading and a jager cried out in pain. Betan returned her attention to her men and saw one had been hit in the leg.

“They're bringing up guards from the curtain.” Alman announced. Betan looked

and could see troops running along the allure toward the left bastion. It had only been ten or so minutes since the engagement began and reinforcements were being called already.

Alman approached Betan. "Will they sortie?" he asked in a low voice.

"Reigh thought it unlikely. There's a sally port near where this bastion and the curtain meet. It's under observation, and-" Betan turned to look to the rear. "-there is 4/4 and the lancers if they do."

"Are we to retreat if they sortie?" Alman asked.

"Not unless they press us. But if they do press us we are to retreat with haste. How is the wounded man?"

"Through the leg. Physic is checking him out. It looks like it mostly hit meat."

"Well, if it hit bone have him evacuated to the surgery immediately."

"Yes, Captain." Alman departed.

Betan had missed the third and fourth volleys from the cannon, dropping bombs directly onto the barbette. A hit on the expense magazine could possibly make the breach they needed to take the fortlet quickly, but that was considered a long shot.

A call came through. It was "interrogative". Reigh was asking if the next phase could begin. Betan looked at the parapet, it was being rapidly depopulated and she could see no other troops approaching from the curtain allure. Betan picked up her own caller and replied "affirmative".

The rifle and cannon fire continued. Betan spent a wind charm to clear the smoke from her company's eyes. The barbettes looked to be well-cleared. The explosive power of cannon bombs was small, the bomb fragments were far more deadly than the explosion itself, if they couldn't start secondary fires or explosions. So far, Aelion was having no luck with that.

"The grenadiers approach, Captain." Alman called. Betan turned to look. The grenadiers had been reduced by a quarter at the roadblock leading to the Dorwain Lord's mansion. They were moving forward in two columns, accompanied by engineers. Slung from ropes between the two columns was a timber footbridge. "I want more fire, First Sergeant." Betan ordered. Alman shouted a command and the pace slowly picked up. Betan used her looker and could see bullets impacting on the stone atop the bastion. Oldster return fire was light and blind. Most of it was way overshoot or put into the moat.

The grenadiers left the cover of the jager company and increased their pace with the footbridge. Behind the grenadiers with the footbridge were more carrying large dowels and then more with bags of grenades. They crossed the open field quickly, lining up under the jagers' fire. The dowel porters laid down their loads in a line. The bridge was set on the dowels and rolled forward over the moat, which was only about 12 feet wide. Some grenadiers stood on the back of the bridge to balance it.

The last group of grenadiers lit fuses on their grenades and swung them around on slings before lofting them over the bastion. Muffled blasts came from the interior of the fortlet. Another cry from another wounded jager. Betan watched two grenadiers fall from the blind fire of the garrison that was inadvertently following the slope of the glacis.

The footbridge was now over. It had handrails and was sturdily built, the first idea to simply thrown long planks over had been defeated by lack of proper wood, so this heavier construction was fashioned from small trees. The grenadiers went over it with boxes on straps over some of their backs, climbing the glacis. Grenades continued to be flung and the jagers continued their harassing fire. Betan watched carefully, judging the distance, but the grenadiers stopped as planned. Her looker showed them close enough to

be showered by stone chips from the bullet impacts. The boxes were removed and opened. Fresh grenades were passed out and a grenadier lieutenant turned to sit on the glacis facing Betan. He waved and she gave the order to cease fire. She could almost hear his shout that sent grenades up over the parapet. The cheap pots burst and the solutions inside exploded on contact with the air. Then, hatchets in hand, the grenadiers went over the wall.

Betan waited. Alman ordered the jagers to reload and stand ready. She could hear 4/4 moving up from the rear. A wagon with a larger bridge would be accompanying them if the fortlet didn't immediately surrender. Gunshots sounded from over the bastion, muffled explosions were heard and small clouds of black smoke were seen. Betan found herself tapping on her belt buckle and didn't even try to make herself stop. A horse came up behind her and she turned to find Goldopan behind her, looking at the fortlet. He said nothing, so she joined him in watching.

Several minutes passed, then the 4/4 began marching past the Durannian's position, the wagon carrying the heavier bridge preceding them. The wagon was pushed up to the edge of the moat and the bridge shoved across, soldiers again standing on the back to keep it balanced. It landed on the opposite side of the moat, canted upward slightly, having landed a few feet higher on the glacis. The wagon was withdrawn and without further orders Goldopan's battalion started to unfold into a narrower column and cross the bridge. Betan noticed that it had been separated into the battlers, the musketeers and the pikemen, sans pikes. Battlers with their armor and swords went over first, then some musketeers, then more battlers.

It took about twenty minutes for the entirety of 4/4 to cross the bastion and join the attack. Goldopan joined them after the first company's worth of men were inside. The sounds of battle from inside the fortlet grew as more men were added to the conflict. 1/4 marched past the jager's right flank and took up position in front of the gate. Failing to achieve a surrender, the next objective would be to open the gate from within. Like 4/4, the 1/4's pikemen had stacked their main weapons in the rear.

Betan caught herself lifting her hand to her mouth, she latched it onto her sword belt and made herself still, apart from the nervous tapping on her belt buckle.

Her mind conjured nightmare images of the fight inside. Narrow hallways filled with choking silver smoke, floors slippery with blood and clogged with dead and dying. Screams, curses, pleas. She shuddered with the intensity of the images. She'd seen the aftermath of assaults on forts from the defender's side from wars with the savages of her homeland. A few particularly loud explosions sounded. Then the grate protecting the drawbridge slid up and the drawbridge fell with a crash to the ground outside the moat. Immediately Colonel Hantor ordered the 1/4 to double time.

Another hour passed. Betan stood stock still and watched. 3/4 took its position to attack but was never called in. Finally the Brannan flag that flew over the fortlet was lowered. A few minutes later Goldopan came out of the gate with it in his arms.

It was late afternoon when the fortlet's flag had the requisite yellow panels attached to it and was reflowed over the structure. Betan entered the fortlet shortly before and saw much of what she'd expected. Immediately inside the curtain between the two bastions was a fairly spacious parade ground. To the right were the river side gun batteries in casemates. Opposite the gate were barracks and to the left of the barracks, the furthest point from the river casemates were the houses of the fort officers and the lord of

the port.

The grenadiers had simply tossed burning bombs in until the structure, a light wooden building imitating a country home and wholly unsuitable for a fortification, was engulfed in flames.

Most of the fighting had taken place inside the walls that formed the interior of the curtain and bastions. Vaulted chambers had become abattoirs for the defenders as the grenadiers, all veterans, simply tossed smoke pots and air-fused grenades into each chamber instead of fighting directly.

Betan placed sharpshooters up on the bastions overlooking the field they'd just stood on. The grenadiers were already there, resting and breathing clean air. To a man they were covered in soot and dust.

“Damn lucky none of the magazines blew up.” she heard one of them say.

“That would have ruined a right good scrap.”

“Has anyone seen Roffo?”

“They'll take roll as soon as we find our officers.”

“Glad they didn't keep Firebrand back.” someone said to chuckles. Betan started for a second. Firebrand must be a nickname for one their officers, probably the hothead Goldopan had held back from the attack on the roadblock. It also happened to be her royal father's pet name for her.

“Did you see that young subaltern? Plano or-”

“Brano. I saw him, right bastard he is. He'll go far.”

“If he doesn't get himself killed.”

“Be our new officer, I dare say. I'm pretty sure I saw Hotfoot go down.”

“No!”

“Pray I'm wrong but I don't think so.”

Betan moved away from their chatter. A few grenadier officers appeared on the curtain and began taking roll. Before long an aide de camp found her with orders to report to Reigh in the barracks. She found him with the contents of his headquarters tent set up on the parade ground. He was standing before his map table with the battalion commanders and Aelion.

“Reporting as ordered, Brigadier.” Betan said with a salute. Reigh returned it.

“Another excellent performance, Captain.” Reigh said. “Your men prove themselves more valuable with every engagement.”

“I've never seen a garrison so hobbled.” Colonel Hantor said. He was a tall somewhat pear shaped man, with a mustache, uncommon in the Central Lands, and a tailored uniform with a bit more decoration than was regulation. “Outstanding shooting, Captain.”

Reigh looked impatient while Hantor spoke.

Betan nodded. “Thank you, Colonel.”

“Now.” Reigh followed Betan hastily. “We wait. The main body of the army will join us here. Only our farthest sighted bird can see them and barely at that. We should expect to be here for three days at least. Captain, maintain your men here in the courtyard, our dragoons will maintain a patrol. In this open country there is little need for pickets, so if oncoming Oldsters are found your company will be called out.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Colonel Hantor, position your company across the road, you may take over the Gilandor estate. Colonel Goldopan, make camp in front of the riverwall. Colonel

Bransim will blockade the road in the direction we came and Colonel Puymora will do so in the other direction. Each battalion will be detailed artillery. Questions?" Reigh paused only a moment and made sure he couldn't see Colonel Hantor, who was opening his mouth to ask one. "Very well dismissed." Reigh said as he began to walk away.

Betan coughed to cover a laugh. *Now I know why I haven't spoken much with Hantor.*

Three days passed. The local estates were thoroughly and systematically looted of wine and food. Some of the local servants were coaxed into serving the officers of the flying column by an outlay of Yellow cash.

Betan and Dem sat in a large pavilion set up on the lawn outside the fortlet along with a few other field officers. Some kind of white soft fleshed beast unfamiliar to Durannians had been roast by some absent noble's cooks. Dem finished a slab that had been coated with a sweet sauce with chunks of spices and fruits. Neither of them had any idea what they were eating, but it was delicious.

Dem pushed his plate away and a servant appeared like a mummer's trick. "More, Lieutenant?" he asked.

Dem kept his mouth closed while he worked his tongue over his teeth (one of the reason's he'd been selected to accompany Her Highness) and sneaked a glance at Betan's still laden plate. "I will, thank you." The servant spirited away the plate and another plank was carved from the animal, more sauce was poured over it and the plate was returned with another helping of steamed vegetables (some kind of pod, a bulky grass that was surprisingly salty and an assortment of kernel vegetables that Betan and Dem knew) and a dense bland bread that Dem tossed behind him as soon as the servant's back was turned. Betan, who had indulged in some wine, stifled a giggle.

"You know, Lieutenant, they know you're doing that."

"I suspected as much, Captain." Dem said without a trace of concern in his voice.

Betan choked down another titter, then reached out and put her goblet in front of Dem. "I think I had better stop that." She waved a servant over. "That bubbly stuff, can I have some of that?"

"Most assuredly, Captain." the servant hustled away, Dem finished Betan's wine at a gulp and lifted the glass.

"You aren't contemplating-?" she let her voice drift away as Dem quaffed the wine.

Dem set the goblet down. "I'm not sure what you mean, Captain." he lied before returning his attention to his third helping. She followed his example. Her glass of fruit flavored bubble water arrived shortly.

There was little conversation in the pavilion, even if a senior officer entered, it would take something impressive to interrupt the eating. Very few of the officers were used to such fare. Goldopan, certainly. Reigh, probably. The rest were considered commoners in Branna, even physics and overseers were counted no more highly placed than teamsters. Fine cuisine was thought to be wasted on them.

The attention they paid to eating gave the lie to that thought.

Betan, of course, was used to eating impressively, but the Brannan nobility considered absurd decadence a birthright and even she felt indulgent with some of the fare.

This dish, for instance. It was wonderful on the tongue both in taste and feel but

she had barely eating half of her, steak or whatever it was and her stomach was giving her hints that she was full. It was the sauce, she reckoned. Mostly sweet but with irregular overtones of tart and salt. It was heavy, sticky even.

The bubble drink helped and by the time Dem was three quarters finished with his third plate, Betan had conquered her first.

Betan leaned back, accepted a second glass of bubbles, declined a second helping of meat and surveyed the tent. There were a half dozen officers of the flying column. Most of them were from 4/4, encamped not a quarter mile away. Tales of the other battalions' mess did not indicate they were deprived by comparison. The soldiers were eating only slightly coarser fare, vastly superior to anything any of them had eaten before. Betan chuckled at the thought of a beast like the one she had dined on roasting on a bayonet tripod, canteen cups filled with the rich chunky sauce for dipping.

Dem finished his plate, leaned back in his chair and sighed as he hefted a fresh goblet.

“The main body will be beastly jealous.” Dem said in (Durannian).

“If there's any left when they get here.” Betan replied in the same language. She drained her bubbles then shifted to Brannan. “I'm going to see if there's any news of those unfortunates.”

She wiped her mouth then rose, dropping a five eye bead into a pot used for servant's gratuities on her way out of the pavilion toward the fortlet, where Reigh's headquarters had been fully established in the courtyard. Betan walked toward the ramp leading to the interior of the fort preceded at a short distance by a party of uniformed gentlemen in long coats and odd steeply peaked hats. Betan saluted the ramp guards and followed the party toward the headquarters tents. They immediately entered Reigh's tent. Betan walked toward the staff tent and found Goldopan and his adjutant, Shrian, standing in front of it.

“Good day, Captain.” Goldopan greeted.

“Good day, Colonel.” Betan replied before greeting Shrian in turn. The quiet officer Betan had only met a few times returned the compliment in a small voice.

“Do you know who those gentlemen were, Colonel?”

“You didn't recognize them, Captain?”

“Were you acquainted with them, Colonel?”

“I don't know any of them personally but they were naval officers. Does Durannia not have a navy?”

“It doesn't as such, Colonel.” Betan replied.

“It was the coats, sir.” Shrian offered.

“The coats, sir?”

Goldopan answered. “Yes, the coats. I'm sure you've noticed that none of us wear such long coats, although they are somewhat popular in civil society.”

“I had noticed.” Betan said. “They're too hard to put on and take off with satchels and harnesses and whatnot.”

“Indeed.” Goldopan agreed. “Plus one needs several coats, for rain, for snow, for fashion. Too much fuss for the field, even for Branna. On ship, however.”

“A different matter entirely.” Betan said.

“Precisely, Captain.” Goldopan said. “So, the coats always mark a naval officer.”

Betan frowned. “But, Colonel, Branna is landlocked!”

“I'd noticed.” Goldopan's voice was very droll. “Even though the Flar delta is

legally in Garansha we control it by treaty. Thus, the Royal Brannan Navy.”

“Lead by gentlemen, Colonel?”

“Indeed, Captain.”

“Our ride to Zhatano.” Betan muttered, turning to look at Reigh's tent.

“Precisely. If the main body will ever arrive.”