

Foreword



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This is my personal retelling of the story of *Fire Emblem: Awakening*. I've consolidated all the chapters into this single document (as I've finally discovered how to use tabs). Please message me via Discord (@eir_force) or Twitter/X (@TactfulLevin) for any questions, issues, comments and concerns.

Now then: just in case this needs to be said... *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is developed and owned by Intelligent Systems, and published by Nintendo. All material henceforth is NOT mine.

Anyway...enjoy!

- Gale

0 Premonition - Invisible Ties

[Premonition - Invisible Ties.]



A mighty battle begins as the blue-haired lord exchanges blows with a most sinister looking dark high-priest. I focus my energies into charging up a thunder spell, the mage as my target. Suddenly, he teleports upwards--summoning a large purple orb of dark malice. As he sends it down to the earth, I trade off with an attack of my own.

However, just as my spell hits only an apparition, his impacts the ground before the exalted lord and I--sending us tumbling to the floor.

("Damn! Missed...") I say to myself, looking for the bastard. My eyes glide over to the exalt, who used his sword to anchor himself back to his feet.

And out of nowhere, the mage reappears already prepared to send another orb of magic his way. As quickly as I could, I managed to conjure another counterattack--successfully intercepting and causing his spell to dissipate. But now...he looks my way. I seem to have gained his attention.

{"This is it! Our final battle!"} Chrom states, as he rejoins my side. {"You're one of us, Robin, and no 'destiny' can change that. Now let's kill this dastard and be done with it!"}

{"I couldn't have said it better myself, Chrom,"} I add on, ready to advance.

The dark mage... Validar... He calls out to us, pure venom in his voice: {"Ha ha ha! Why do you resist?"}

Chrom and I close in on him, readying our weapons. He looks back at me, triumph glistening in those navy-blue eyes.

{"Let's move in and strike!"}

With that, he brandishes Falchion and attacks once more at Validar. The flashes of steel colliding with amethyst blasts of dark magic overwhelm my vision. But I bide my time--preparing yet another thunder spell to hurl towards the dark mage.

{"Gya ha ha! Fools! Struggle all you want! You cannot unwrite what is already written!"}

The fiend bellows, mocking our advances.

Slash after slash, Chrom begins to go on the defensive. Validar manages to land a blow on him, sending a blur of dark magic that causes the young lord to yell in pain.

{"I'll take over from here, Chrom! Now watch out. HAH!"}

I commanded, as I sent out a charged bolt of Thoron towards Validar. It makes direct contact with his body, and causes him to stagger back from the force of the spell. He convulses as electricity travels through his body, rendering him utterly useless.

He's surrounded by shadowy fumes, dissipating from his body. A low groan escapes from his dying breath, and Validar collapses to the floor. He was finally done for...or so we thought...

{"This isn't over! Damn you both!"}

He curses, hurling one more magic spell at us--at Chrom. I manage to shove him out of the way in time before I'm struck. I tumble backwards for a moment, my body searing in pain from where the spell hit.

{"GAH! Nghh..."}

I wince in pain, guarding my side. Chrom rushes over to me, cradling me in his arms.

{"You alright?"}

He asks, and I manage only a small nod of my head. I was in too much pain to speak at the moment. My chest was tight, with a pulsating sensation coming from the spell's point of contact. We both look over to see the dark mage finally waste away, the last of his purple aura fading.

{"That's the end of him. Thanks to you, we carried the day. We can rest easy now... At long last..."}

But...his voice starts to muffle. A-And my vision! My eyes become bloodshot, and everything turns into a crimson red. As if by some demonic force willing itself onto me, I am filled with...this unspeakable rage. Only one word--an urge--drove me forward.

{"Kill... Kill... Kill... KILL HIM!"} I grit my teeth as I animalistically tear myself away from Chrom's arms. My face contorts in rage.

{"What's wrong?! Hey! Hey, loo--GAH!"} He manages to get out before I stab him in the stomach with a bolt of lightning made tangible. All I could see in his eyes were shock. And at once, the rage that overcame me disappeared--as if it never happened. But it was too late, for the exalt stumbled back. I look back at my hand, with tiny sparks jumping from one finger to the next.

{"Ngh... This is not your...your fault... Promise me...ugh... That you'll escape this place... Please, go..."} With one last look at me, pleading for me to leave, Chrom, too, collapses...

I stare in horror at what I had just done. He was killed...by /my hand/! Chrom, my other half!

{"HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!"}

Vile laughter erupted from out of nowhere, but I recognize it from anywhere: Validar. Chrom was right. This wasn't /my/ doing, but his!

Ah, my vision... Everything...is slowly fading to black. To emptiness.

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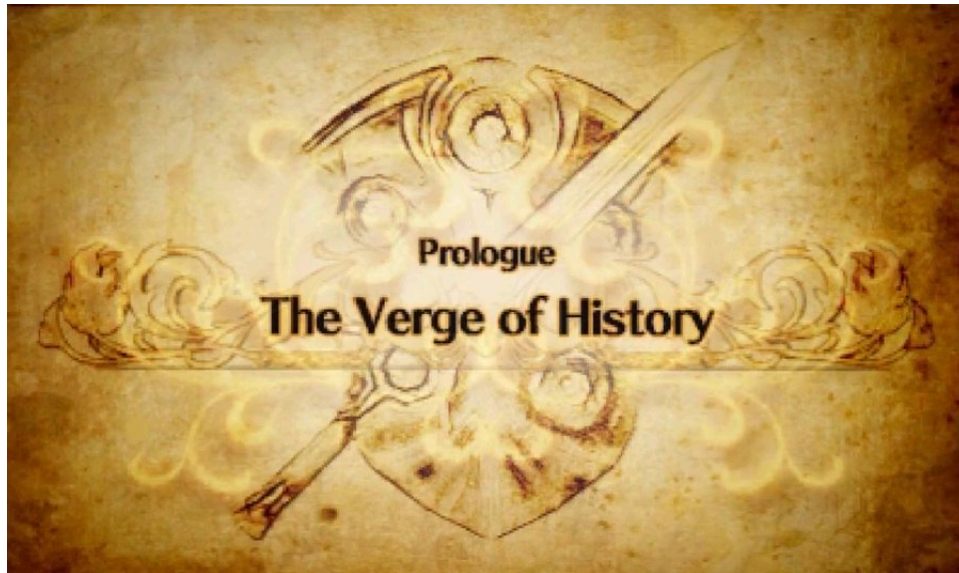
1 Part 1: Ylisse-Plegia War

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Ylisse-Plegia War

Prologue - The Verge of History

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I soon found myself in a comforting blackness.

No sights...no sounds...it was a void in which I somehow /knew/ I still existed.

How much time had passed?

Since...when? Since...what?

I don't think I know anymore.

Where am I, exactly...?

I-I don't...

{ "Chrom, we /have/ to do something!" } A female voice spoke, unfamiliar to me. She seemed to be concerned. For me? But that name: 'Chrom.' I feel like...I've heard it before.

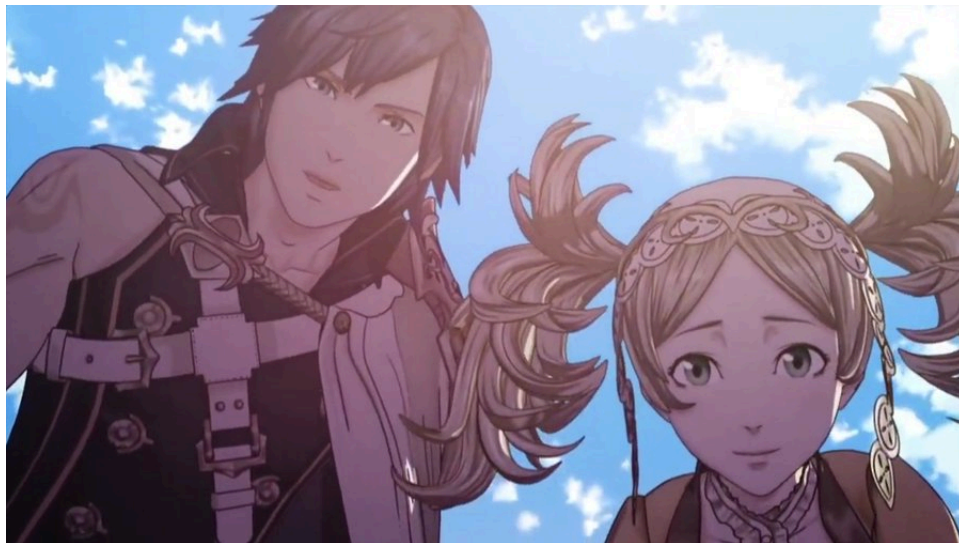
{"What do you propose we do?"} Now, it was a man's voice. One I've heard before... Was.../that/ Chrom?

{"I... I don't know!"} The female exclaimed, clearly at a loss.

I was emerging from this darkness... The more they spoke, the more my sense of self manifested into existence. The nothingness that was all I knew dissipated, giving way to a vibrant, blue sky. My eyelids fluttered, still heavy. In fact, my entire /body/ felt heavy.

My vision came to, and I was greeted by two people: a blonde-haired female with rather outrageous pigtails...and a man clad in blue...

Both heaved out sighs of relief upon seeing me.



{"I see you're awake now,"} he gently spoke.

{"Hey there,"} the woman chipped in with a soft chuckle.

{"There are other places to take a nap than on the ground, you know. Give me your hand."} He proffered his hand.

I placed mine in his, and with a tug, I managed to get on my feet.



I couldn't help but notice a strange marking on the dorsal side of my hand. It was a purple brand of six rather ominous looking eyes. How'd /that/ get there?

Not that it mattered for the time being. What does though was this headache... Gods. I can barely turn around without getting winded. It's probably for the better if I take it easy for the time being.

{"You all right?"} The blue-haired lord asked, concerned for my well-being.

{"Y-yes... Thank you, Chrom,"} I say, unable to hide my smile.

{"Ah, then you know who I am?"} He asked, puzzled that I--seemingly a stranger--knew his name.

{"No, actually, I... It's strange... Your name, it just...came to me..."}

{"...Hmm, how curious. Tell me, what's your name? What brings you here?"}

{"My name is... It's... Hmm?"}

A shake of my head did nothing to sway the clouds of confusion in my mind. Everything seemed so fuzzy that it was almost infuriating. How did I not know my own name?

{"You don't know your own name?"} Chrom questioned.

{ "I'm not sure if... I'm sorry but where am I, exactly?" } I muttered. None of this was making much sense...

{ "Hey, I've heard of this! It's called amnesia!" } The woman in the dandelion garb chirped.

{ "It's called a load of pegasus dung." } Another stranger chipped in. Farther away from me was another man--a knight, I gather--from his armor. Unlike the other two, he was not as amiable. He glared at me with suspicion wrought in his expression.

{ "We're to believe you remember milord's name, but not your own?" }

{ "B-but it's the truth!" } I insisted, in which it /was/. But I may as well be talking to a wall. I doubt I can convince him. Not anytime soon.

{ "...What if it IS true, Frederick? We can't just leave her here, alone and confused. What sort of Shepherds would we be then?" } Chrom retorted, willing to give me the benefit of the doubt.

{ "Just the same, milord. I must empathize caution. 'Twould not do to let a wolf into our flock." } Frederick coldly stated.

They must all be from the same group, then... 'Shepherds,' huh?

{ "Right then--we'll take her back to town and sort this out there." } The lord suggested. Seems like Chrom is the one in charge here.

{ "Wait just a moment. Do I have a say in this?" } I chimed in. I realize I'm probably in no position to argue what's to be done with me, but it seemed a bit unreasonable to drag me around as they pleased.

{ "Peace, friend--I promise we'll hear all you have to say back in town. Now, come." }



With that, our small party made for the small town in the distance. Such a strange place to be found in: a field in the middle of who knows where. Should I be fortunate that it wasn't, instead, some hellscape?

{"What will you do with me? Am I to be your prisoner?"}

{"Hah! You'll be free to go once we establish you're no enemy of Ylisse,"} Chrom reassures me.

{"Is that where we are? Ylisse?"} I ask, perking up at the mention of the name. It still wasn't ringing any bells, though...

{"You've never heard of the Halidom?"} The strict armored knight gawked. {"Ha! Someone pay this actress. She plays quite the fool! The furrowed brow is especially convincing..."}

I am wrought with discomfort, to say the least. I've no place to argue right now; I'd better keep to myself. I truly was confuddled beyond belief. With no way to prove otherwise, I can see why /he/, out of the three of them, needs to stay vigilant.

{"Frederick, please."} The lord gave a stern look towards the knight, before turning to me. {"This land is known as the Halidom of Ylisse. Our ruler, Emmeryn, is called the exalt. I suppose proper introductions are in order..."}

First, he motions towards himself and then to the young woman beside him: {"My name is Chrom--but then, you already knew that. The delicate one here is my little sister, Lissa."}

{"I am NOT delicate! ...Hmph!"} Lissa whined, huffing and pouting to herself. Well...case in point, I suppose... {"Ignore my brother, please. He can be a bit thick sometimes."} She retorted, smirking in a teasing manner at Chrom.

{"But you're lucky the Shepherds found you. Brigands would've been a rude awakening!"}

She /does/ have a point. Better to have been taken into custody for questioning, instead of having my head chopped off by some bloodthirsty lowlifes. But there was that name again: 'Shepherds.' From what I /can/ recall, aren't shepherds simple farmhands? What business do they have to dress in garb suited for combat?

{"Shepherds? You tend sheep? ...In full armor?"} I question, still unsure of what these people were.

{"Heh,"} Chrom chuckled at a seemingly silly question. ("It's a dangerous job. Just ask Frederick the Wary here.") His gaze led to the armored knight before them, who shook his head at his nickname.

{"A title I shall wear with pride."} He said, bowing. {"Gods forbid /one/ of us keeps an appropriate level of caution. I have every wish to trust you, stranger, but my station mandates otherwise."}

The mention of his true intentions does lift the weight off my chest, if only a slight amount. While I seem to have found myself in good, friendly company, there's still the matter of who /I/ am. But I appreciate that he took to a more logical approach to my situation.

{"I understand, sir. I would do no less myself. My name is Robin,"} I say before realizing that it finally occurred to me. I'm beginning to surprise myself! {"...I just remembered that. How odd. I suppose that's one mystery solved."}

{"'Robin?' Is that foreign?"} Chrom inquired, before shrugging off his own question. {"...Ah, well. We can discuss it later. We're almost to town. Once we--"}

{"Chrom, look! The town!"} Lissa screamed in a panic, garnering all of our attentions to the town they were to escort me to. It was...a ghastly sight. Not a living soul, save for some dastardly brigands running amok in the streets. Buildings were on fire, plumes of smoke rising in the air.



{"Damn it!"} Chrom cursed, anger firing him up. {"The town is ablaze! Those blasted brigands, no doubt... Frederick, Lissa! Quickly!"} He was quick to act, ready to jump into the fray with no further thought.

{"What about her?"} Frederick asked.

{"Unless she's on fire as well, it can wait!"}

{"Aptly put, milord."} The knight said with a bow of his head. I suppose that was a sufficient enough answer...

{"Let's go already!"} The blonde woman exclaimed.

Chrom led the way, with his sister and retainer following suit. Meanwhile, I was left in the dust, trying to make sense of this entire situation.

{"But what about-- Hmm..."} I stammered, but they were already gone. What fortuitous timing... But if innocents are in trouble, I /can't/ just let them be... If I'm to prove my intentions to them, I'd better go with them and help out. I dash in their direction, trying to catch up.

I'm not exactly armed to the teeth, but I'm not completely defenseless, either. Strapped to one side was a tome, and the other, a middling short sword. I'd woken up with them, with no idea of how they had gotten there. For the time being, they'll have to do.

("I'm not quite sure just how much I'll help, but it's better than nothing!")

{"Gwa ha ha! Get to it, lads!"} A commandeering brigand ordered, barking orders at his underlings. {"Grab anything shiny, and put the rest to the torch! We gots an example to set for these Ylissean types!"}

He then turned to the poor maiden in his arms, whom he was fondling much to her discontent: {"Ain't that right, lass?"} He licked his lips and smiled at her like a rabid animal preying on his latest victim--hungry to satisfy himself.

{"S-stay away from me! Please! Someone! HEEEEEEELP!"} She screeched at the top of her lungs, struggling to break free of his grasp.

And just in the nick of time, the heroes of the hour have arrived.

Chrom and company made it to the town square, following the string of chaos to its roots. Buildings were on fire with plumes of smoke tainting the air. The stench of burning oil stung the nares of any and all in the vicinity of the village.

Lissa and Chrom arrived on foot, staff and sword in hand. Meanwhile, Frederick followed suit upon his mighty steed. They looked around for any survivors, for /anything/ to help them sort this mess out.

{“Chrom, we have to stop them!”} Lissa exclaimed, pointing to the group of brigands at the other end of the plaza.

{“Don’t worry--after today, these bandits won’t be bothering anyone ever again...”} Chrom said with determination.

{“Wait!”} I called out. I’d finally caught up with the rest of the group, at the expense of struggling to catch my own breath.

{“Robin!”} The lord yelled back, running to my side. Seemed he was surprised to see me here.

{“You followed us! Why?”}

{“I...I’m not certain myself,”} I replied, unsure of why indeed I decided to join their fight. It wasn’t mine to take part in by any means, but I just couldn’t sit idly by.

{“But I’m armed, and I know my way around a fight, if you’ll have me.”}

Chrom was heartened by my words. A complete stranger who knew nothing of her past, let alone her own name until just a short while ago, was willing to protect the innocents of Ylisse. Where I hailed from was a matter for another time. He was more than relieved to come across a new, stalwart ally.

{“Of course--strength in numbers. Just stay close!”} Chrom commanded.

{“Remember, Robin, we face practiced thieves and murderers.”} Frederick warned.
{“They will grant us no quarter. It’s kill or be killed.”}

(“My memories are all still fuzzy, but I feel confident enough in my combat prowess. I’m not so powerful a mage to down an entire army--oh, no... But one bandit or two? I think I can handle myself,”) I mused, brandishing both tome and blade.

{“So, Robin, I see you wear a sword. Is it--”} Chrom said, pausing upon seeing the book in my other hand. {“Wait, is that a tome? ...You know magic?”}

{“I...believe so?”} I stated, uncertain myself. {“I suppose I should check.”}

{“You believe so?”} he questioned, unnerved. {“Perhaps I’ll just keep a few paces behind you for the time being...”}

{“No, I can control it, I’m sure.”} I reassured him, though he probably felt otherwise. {“Now, how did this work again? Ah, yes...”}

I looked dumbfoundedly at my arsenal. A tome? A sword? Now is as good a time as any for a refresher, though I’d hoped it wouldn’t have involved downing real-life brigands. But this is no time for hesitation.

What we needed to do right now was clear a path to reach the other side of the plaza. Looks like that’s where the bandits’ leader operated from. In the distance, I see a number of enemies before us. Some with axes... Some with blades...

Suddenly, an idea struck me like lightning. It didn’t seem they had any way of retaliating from afar. If I was able to whittle them down with a spell from my tome, then Chrom or Frederick could charge in and finish them off!

My first target was a sword-wielding ruffian wearing light armor. Whatever I do, I’ll need to be fast; he looks to be quick on his feet. Amidst my calculations, he takes notice of me and charges forward. There was a look of pure malice in his eyes.



Chrom and I look at one another, a silent agreement shared between us: {"I land the first move, and you finish them off."}

("Frederick's right. This isn't some kids' game; I'll really be killed if I'm not careful. Every second counts—every move matters.")

I focus my magic into my tome, attuning myself to its essence of lightning energy. Gold sparks grow in size, condensing into a sphere of raw, unfettered electricity. I cast my eyes upon the advancing adversary, and unleash my spell.

{"There, I've got you! Thunder!"} I yell, pushing my attack out with all of my might. It makes contact, causing the bandit to stagger. His body jerked, muscles convulsing beyond his control. It had given Chrom enough time--the perfect opportunity--to follow-up with an attack of his own. He took his mighty sword and slashed in a wide arc, cutting the dastard down.

Lissa and Frederick take this chance to catch up. She wasn't equipped with a weapon like the rest of us, however. Despite being only armed with a humble, curative staff, she continues to make a presence on the battlefield.

{"We'll see who's delicate!"} The cleric asserted. {"I may not be able to attack like Chrom, but when you get injured? /I'll/ be the one stitching your bones back together, thanks to my trusty staff!"} She proudly waves it around like a baton.



She turned to me, eager for my next command. {"You just tell me where to go, Robin."}

I notice Frederick behind her, silently awaiting my next order as well. Though, it was difficult to gauge what he was thinking. His expression was unreadable to me. I--foolishly--held on to the hope that he was warming up to me. Perhaps I was beginning to earn his trust?

With our goal in mind, we slowly cleared the way to the other end of the town square. One by one, each brigand we face falls. Every attack was well-coordinated. Chrom and Frederick pushed forward, giving way for me to come in with another Thunder spell to finish the job. It was so effortless, the ebb-and-flow of battle. Even I/ was amazed by our synergy. Now I wonder if this was truly the first time we all had fought together.

{“Still with us, Robin?”} Chrom asked, checking in on me.

{“Hmm... It’s strange. Here on the battlefield, I can... Well, I can /see/ things.”} I remarked.

{“See things? Like what?”}

{“The enemy’s strength, their weaponry, the flow of battle... I must have studied this somewhere.”}

{“So, you’re saying you can size up the enemy at a glance?”}

{“Yes, it would seem so. And perhaps more, if I apply myself...”}

At long last, the only one left standing was the brigands’ leader. He cackled at the top of his lungs, ready to face us down. How arrogant he must be to think that...

For a brief moment, I feel my heart skip a beat. My fighting was rusty, to say the least. But we’ve done well so far, so I’ve faith that this, too, shall pass and be over with.

{“Are you all right, Robin?”} Chrom asked, putting a comforting hand on my shoulder. {“Don’t rush into danger.”}

{“I’m fine, Chrom. Don’t worry.”} I assured him. I look him in the eyes, solidifying my statement.

{“You’ve lent us your strength, and that makes you a friend. Having an ally by my side gives me courage.”}

{“Thank you, but...I think there’s more to it than that.”}

{“What do you mean?”}

{“I believe there’s a tactical advantage to fighting side by side... It’s fuzzy... Wait, yes: working in pairs improves strength, defense, speed.... Yes, yes, I’m sure of it!”}

{“I see... Then, let’s put your theory to the test,”} the lord suggested, hopeful that it /might/ just work. He then turned to his sister and retainer.

{“Lissa, Frederick! I’ll need you two to scout around in the meantime. Make sure there are no more brigands about. Lend your aid to any villagers you see. We’re putting an end to this--/now/!”}

{“Of course, milord. A knight of Ylisse serves to protect.”} Frederick promptly responded, bowing his head to acknowledge his new order.

{“We hear ya loud and clear!”} The ever so sprightly Lissa chirped. She gave Chrom an informal salute, and led the way outside the town square. Our attention now turned to the adversary before us.

{“Here, sheepy sheepy! Come to the slaughter!”} the commander mocked, incessantly cackling like a banshee. It was grating to the ears, much as he was unpleasant to look at. All I knew was that I wanted him out of my sight, and to save these poor villagers from his tyranny.

{“My strength is yours,”} Chrom said. His very words imbued me with a power--a drive--to fight. To push forward. To win.

I channel energy into my tome once more, this time calling upon a more powerful version of my thunder spell. The golden hues of lightning morph into a brighter, more intense lavender. I even feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

{“Eat shite, ya whore!”} The brigand screamed charging at us. Chrom intervened to exchange blows with him. Compared to his subordinates, the bandit leader was trickier to fight. Resorting to all sorts of underhanded tricks was typical for a lowlife such as he.

Chrom’s swordsmanship was nothing to scoff at, however. He executed well-rehearsed move after move, often putting the brigand on the defensive. Finally, he was able to

cause a standstill by holding back the enemy's axe with his sword. I had bided my time, awaiting the chance to strike.

{“Arctthunder!”} I shout, hurling the sparking ball of electricity towards the bandit leader. Chrom jumped back in time to avoid being hit, and watched as my spell landed squarely on his enemy's chest.

{“Bwaaargh!”} He wailed in agonizing pain as electricity overwhelmed every cell in his body. {“Damn...you...”} The brigand managed to mutter, until he was no more. He fell to his knees, having breathed his last. His lifeless body laid there, not unlike the ones of his former comrades scattered about in the streets.

Chrom and I exchange glances, reveling in our victory. I couldn't wipe the smile from my face. It was an exhilarating battle--one I have gleaned much and more from.

Just then, I hear the galloping of horse hooves over pavement. We turn to see Frederick, with Lissa in his saddle, riding over.

{“Milord,”} the knight greeted Chrom, professional as ever. {“We have carried out your order.”}

{“Heck yeah we did! Looks like we managed to scare off the rest of those bandits,”} said Lissa. {“No one was /too/ hurt, either...”}

{“Well, that's the end of that,”} I huffed. All my concentration had gone into that spell, so, needless to say, I felt quite winded. But more than anything, I was relieved. Our heroics today saved the village, for which I am truly grateful...

{“Lucky for the town, we were close by,”} the cleric added. {“But holy wow, Robin! You were incredible! Swords, sorcery, /AND/ tactics! Is there anything you can't do?”}

A blush crept up to my cheeks, flushing them into a light pink hue. She flattered me; they were much too kind words.

{“You're certainly no helpless victim, that much is sure.”} Chrom said.

{“Indeed. Perhaps you might even be capable of an explanation for how you came here?”} Frederick brought up, coldly. He sized me up and down, as if he were expecting to find one loose thread on my coat. The knight's face was wrought with suspicion. Despite all the effort I had gone through to fight alongside them, and to defend these

people, it was still not enough.

("I see I've yet to completely convince him... Figured as much, really...") I thought to myself, admittedly downhearted.

{"I understand your skepticism, Sir Frederick,"} I say, once more reiterating the truth: {"And I cannot explain why only some knowledge has returned to me. But please, believe me. I have shared all that I know."}

{"You fought to save Ylissean lives. My heart says that's enough,"} Chrom assured me, who was much more open to believing me. Or in Frederick's perspective, giving me the benefit of the doubt.

{"And your mind, milord? Will you not heed its counsel as well?"} The knight advised, urging his liege to /rationalize/ his decision.

{"Frederick, the Shepherds could use someone with Robin's talents,"} he insisted. {"We've brigands and unruly neighbors, all looking to bloody our soil. Would you really have us lose such an able tactician?"}

("Huh? Me, a 'tactician'? I'd rather not with the lofty titles, but if that's where Chrom believes my capabilities lie..."}

{"Besides, I believe her story, odd as it might be."}

I was touched that he was so willing to proffer his hand to a stranger such as myself. I wouldn't want to take advantage of his kindness, after all...

{"Th-thank you, Chrom."} I stutter, taken aback.

{"So how about it? Will you join us, Robin?"} He asked. Without hesitation, I knew what my answer was...

{"I would be honored."}

Prologue - Interlude

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The humble village of Southtown had been overrun by a rather nasty group of bandits. Fortunately for the villagers, the Shepherds had arrived just in time to save the day. Chrom, Lissa and Frederick have been joined up by their newest ally: Robin.

Though she had no memory prior to being found in the fields just outside of the town, she courageously lent her aid to their cause and protected the poor innocent townsfolk. While Chrom and Lissa were convinced that they had made a new, stalwart friend, Frederick still felt otherwise.

Despite his wishes to trust in this stranger, his station demanded that he keep his distance. But, truthfully...he was grateful that she decided to join them--as well as protect Chrom and Lissa. Gods forbid if /anything/ happened to them.

As for the townsfolk...

Thankfully, no one was egregiously injured. Lissa had patched up whatever minor wounds there were, but everyone had made it out just fine. As such, this was the /perfect/ to celebrate. Taking what resources weren't pillaged and destroyed, the villagers had decided to throw a feast to show appreciation to the Shepherds for their heroics, as well as to lift the spirits of the townsfolk themselves.

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{“Did you notice, milord? The brigands spoke with a Plegian accent.”} Frederick spoke with a worried expression.

The word, ‘Plegia’, however, caught my attention... I’d never heard of it before. At least, not that I remember...

{“Plegian”? What’s that?”} I ask curiously.

{“Plegia is Ylisse’s westerly neighbor.”} Chrom answered. {“They send small bands into our territory, hoping to instigate a war.”}

{“And it’s poor townsfolk who suffer! Totally innocent, and totally helpless...”} Lissa pointed out, clearly upset about it.

{“They do have /us/, milady: Shepherds to protect the sheep,”} the knight said. {“Do not be swept up in your anger. It will cloud your judgement.”}

{“I know, I know...”} She sighed, waving a dismissing hand. It seems they’ve had this conversation before... {“Don’t worry, I’ll get used to all this.”}

An unfamiliar voice calls out to us, a male one at that: {“Milord, please! You must stay the night! We are simple folk of simple means, but we would gladly toast your valor with a feast!”}

We turn to the source of the sound; it was a villager who looked none too worse for wear.

{“A most generous offer, sir, and no doubt your hospitality would be grand...”} Frederick said, politely declining. {“But I’m afraid we must hurry back to Ylissol.”}

On the other hand, the sprightly cleric was more than eager to take the offer for free food...

{“Dark meat only for me, medium well, and no salt in the soup. I simply--”} Lissa started, before realizing they were, in fact, /not/ planning on partaking.

{“Wait, what?! We’re not staying?! But, Frederick, it’s nearly dark!”} She whined, insisting they remain.

{“When night falls, we’ll camp. Eat off the land, make our bed of twigs and the like... I believe you mentioned you would be ‘getting used to this’”?} He sarcastically remarked. I suppose even the strict knight had a dry, albeit cruel, sense of humor.

{“Frederick? Sometimes I hate you.”} The cleric pouted.

{“You’ve quite the stern lieutenant there.”} I added.

{“Yeah, well, ‘stern’ is one name for it. I can think of a few others!”} Lissa said, sticking her tongue out at him.

{“Frederick only smiles when he’s about to bring down the axe.”} Chrom points out with a chuckle.

{“Duly noted.”} I mutter.

The man in question, Frederick, clears his throat for all to hear: {"You do realize I /AM/ still present?"}

{"Oh, we realize."} His liege points out with a smirk. He looks to me, unable to hide his laugh.

{"Heh heh."} I share in the moment with him, giggling along as well.

The tension in the air dissipated, if only slightly. There was something about the dynamic that these three share... Being part of the Shepherds wasn't the only thing that brought them together. It extended beyond that; they were family.

A sigh escapes the lieutenant's breath.

{"Milord remains as amusing as ever."} He deadpanned, already fed up with Chrom's little jab. {"Now then, shall we be going?"}

{"All right, all right."} Chrom said, wrapping up this japery.

{"Ready to go, Robin?"} He asked me. {"The capital isn't far."}

{"Yes, let's get going."} I reply with a nod of my head.

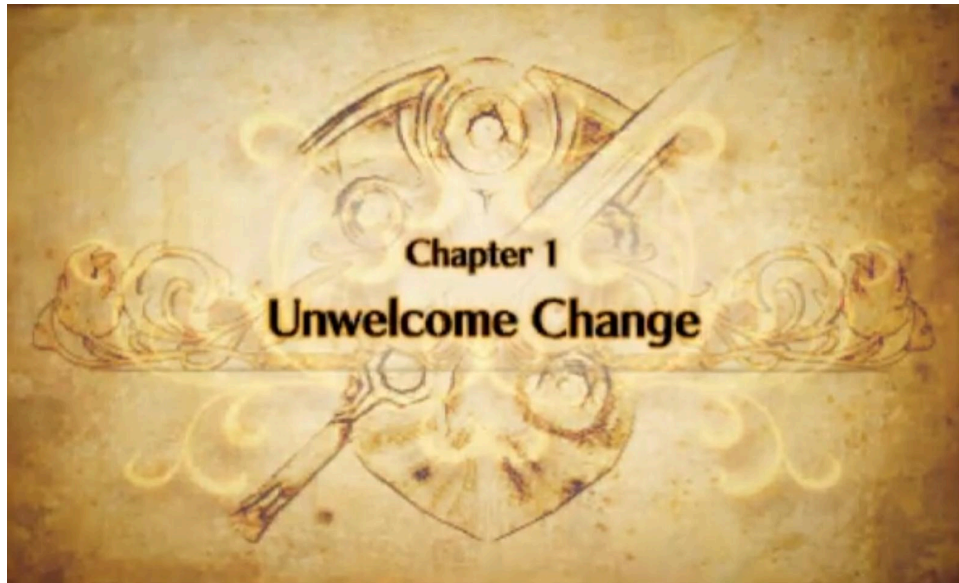
Our small party begins the trek back to the capital, Ylistol. Chrom and Lissa lead the way, murmuring more inside jokes amongst themselves. Frederick, atop his horse, lags behind to keep his eyes on us. On me, I'm sure.

I look back to see that he was watching, ever the vigilant one. While his hard expression doesn't change, he acknowledges me with a subtle head nod.

Have I finally won him over?

Chapter 1 - Unwelcome Change

[Chapter 1 - Unwelcome Change.]



Night had fallen, but we were still a ways from Ylistol. Weariness had begun to creep up on everyone. It was high time for us to camp and rest for the evening.

{“I told you--it’s getting dark already!”} Lissa whined at Frederick. She was visibly irked, futilely trying to swat away any insects that got too close to her.

{“Ech... And now the bugs are out! Noisy, disgusting bugs that buzz around and crawl all over and bite you when--“}

She was rudely interrupted by a mosquito that flew right /into/ her mouth. {“Agh! Won goph in my mough! Blech! Ptooy!”} The cleric screamed, spitting it out.

Unperturbed, Chrom says to Lissa: {“Aw, come on now, Lissa. Hardship builds character.”} He pats her on the shoulder in a joking manner.

{“Want to help me gather firewood?”} He asks.

{“Tpht! Tpht! Yeeeeeeuck!”} She exclaimed. {“...I think I swallowed it... Ugh... I’ll pass on finding firewood, thanks. I think I’ve built /quite/ enough character for one day!”} A stomp on the ground from her.



Just then, I felt my stomach grumble like a rabid animal.

{“Erm... We should probably think about food,”} I pointed out, patting my tummy. {“I don’t know about you guys, but I’m /starving/.”}

{“Yes, I should think a little hunting and gathering is in order. Now, who wants to clear a campsite?”} Frederick asked, hoping one of the three of us would volunteer.

We looked at one another. This campfire wasn’t going to set itself up. We’ll need to divide and conquer our tasks to make sure we can have some sort of shelter.

{“Hm, let’s see...”} I ponder, taking some time to figure out what we can do.

{“Lissa and I can get this area cleared out for our camp. Chrom, you should set out and see what sort of game you can capture for food. And Frederick; I think I’ll leave the firewood gathering to you.”} I delegated. {“That work out for everyone?”}

{“Yep. You’ve got it, Robin.”} Lissa said with an informal salute, eager to get started.

{“Sounds like a great plan. Hopefully I’ll find something with lots of meat on it...”} Chrom replied.

{“Very good. I’ll set out at once, and procure some suitable firewood.”} Frederick added. And with no hesitation, he, too, went off.

--

With no time wasted, the Shepherds took to their assigned tasks. Roughly an hour or two had come and gone when Chrom returned with a comically large bear slung over his shoulder.

On the other hand, Frederick returned much earlier to set up the bonfire with the newly acquired firewood, set up a tent, clear away the pebbles from the campsite, /and/ surround our shelter with a menial wall of rocks. How he had accomplished so much in such a short time, I'll never know.

I had offered to help, but he politely declined. He sure had his own system of doing things...

Meanwhile, Lissa was falling asleep. Like all of us, she also had quite a long day.

When all was said and done, dinner was ready, our campsite was finished, and Lissa was woken up.

Never having bear meat before, I dig in with no care for etiquette or decorum. Chrom joins me, while Frederick and Lissa simply stared at their food.



{“Mmm... It’s been so long since I had bear meat. Delicious!”} Chrom commented, chowing down on his chunk of meat. He paused to see that his sister wasn’t partaking in dinner.

{“...What’s wrong, Lissa?”} He asked with food still in his mouth. {“Dig in.”}
{“Pass! ...Gods, couldn’t you spear us an animal /normal/ people eat for once?”} Lissa whined, nose wrinkled in disgust over her portion.

{“I mean, come on! Who eats bear?! You’re meddling with the food chain. Right, Robin?”} She asks, though, her words fell on deaf ears. While I heard/ Lissa, I wasn’t exactly /listening/. She called out to me again.

{...Uh, Robin?”} Lissa repeated, but no coherent answer.

I was too engulfed in my meal to pay attention. After who knows how long since my last meal, I was famished. I suppose I hadn’t really thought about eating amidst the battle earlier. But since that business was over with, my appetite finally caught up to me. The only sound that I mustered were slurping and munching sounds from how juicy this bear meat was.

A sigh escapes from the cleric’s breath. {“I suppose a person would enjoy just about anything after not eating for days.”}

{“Just eat it, Lissa.”} Chrom tells her. {“Meat is meat.”}

{“Since when does meal smell like old boots?! Wait, I take that back--boots smell /better/!”} Lissa blurted out, clearly not satisfied with tonight’s meal.

{“Every experience makes us stronger, milady. Even those we don’t enjoy,”} said Frederick, though...he hadn’t touched his food either.

{“Hah, oh really? Then why don’t I see /you/ eating, Frederick?”} The young woman pointed out.

{“Me? Oh, well...”} The knight paused, attempting to come up with some answer. {“I’m not hungry. I...I had a large lunch! Yes, quite.”} How odd that he wouldn’t eat. I was more than happy to take his portion if he didn’t want it...

{“Yeah right, Frederick!”} Lissa scoffed in an incredulous manner.

--

Even more time has passed now. The moon had risen to the middle of the sky, providing a scant amount of light to the land below. I was fast asleep, especially after my grand feast. And in case you were curious, yes: I did, in fact, finish Frederick's portion. Why he was hesitant to finish it was beyond me. After all, I couldn't let it go to waste...

Chrom was still awake, insisting that he keep watch while the rest of the group slumbered away. The lord stared at the withering ashes of their fire. It was for the best that he did not maintain it; he couldn't risk giving away their position while they were all in a vulnerable position. He kept silent, scanning our surroundings with vigilant eyes. Suddenly, as if by instinct, the hairs on his neck stood up. While there was nothing within their immediate vicinity that warranted attention, it was a feeling he couldn't shake off.



{ "...Huh?" }

He shuffles to his feet, waking Lissa up in the process. Barely awake, she mumbles.

{ "What's wrong, Big Brother?" } She asked, yawning.

{ "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you, but... Something is amiss..." } The lord said.

{ "Define 'something.'" }

{“I’m not sure... I think I’ll have a look around.”} Chrom responded, keeping a hand on his sword.

{“Not alone, you won’t! I’m coming too.”} Lissa asserted, picking up her staff.

Far be it from Chrom to refuse her company--not when it was only the four of them. But, he appreciated it all the same.

{“Heh. Thanks, Lissa.”}

The two opted to leave Frederick and I at the campsite for now.

--

Lissa and Chrom made their way to the main road, keeping close watch for anything out of the ordinary. Only the nocturnal wildlife stirred, though, Chrom insisted that there was something....more sinister afoot. However, once they arrived at a particular spot, Lissa also felt off.

{“It sure is dark. .../And/ quiet. Where did the birds go?”} She commented, worriedly looking around. She hugged her staff and held it closer to her chest.

{“Something is wrong here...”} Chrom noted, grimacing.

Suddenly, a large explosion disrupted the silent evening. The very ground beneath them shook with might, nearly toppling them over.



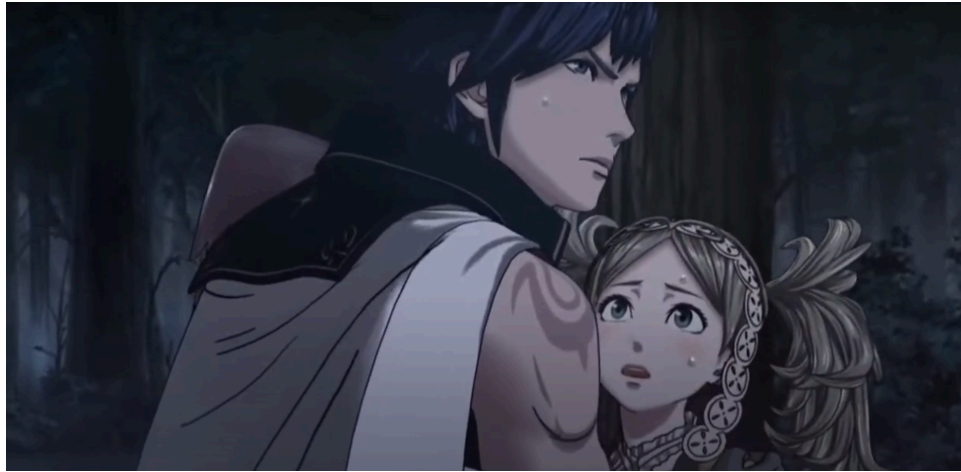
Lissa clings to Chrom, who, in turn, kept her steady.

{“Aaah! Chrom!”} She screamed, eyes shut.

{“Gods, what-- Agh! What is this madness?! Lissa, stay close!”}

The rumbling grew in terrifying intensity, causing the trees in the distance to violently tremble. The once hidden birds in question burst forth into the sky, scattered in every which way possible. The two look on in horror of what could possibly be the cause of all this chaos.

{“...Lissa. Run!”} The lord instructed. He shoved her, urging her to move quickly. She stared at Chrom like a deer in headlights--frozen in fear.



{“I mean it! /GO/!”} Chrom screamed, repeating himself.

{“R-right!”}

Taking no more time to hesitate, she dashed in the opposite direction of the earthquake. The cleric ran as fast as her legs could carry her with Chrom following close behind. He kept a close eye on both her, and the rumbling in the distance.

As if things couldn't get worse, lava began to spew from the cracks of the earth. The forest was cast into a blazing inferno as any and all plant and wildlife caught on fire. Meteors of flame hurled themselves to and fro, nearly hitting Lissa.



Chrom, able to catch up to his sister, yelled at her to follow his lead.

{“Hey! This way!”} He beckoned.

Smoke filled the air, making it awfully difficult to breathe. It obstructed their view, and obscured the low cliff before them. Chrom braces himself as he jumps down, with Lissa following after.

{“AAAHH!!”} The cleric screamed.

The duo ran as quickly as their tired legs mustered, weaving in and out of the maze of trees. They dodged what burning boulders they could. Minutes that felt like hours stretched on and on as the forest never seemed to end.

But finally, they were able to reach a clearing. Chrom and Lissa took this brief reprieve to catch their breath, but it would do nothing to wipe away their expressions of horror as they watched the madness continue to unfold.

{“...What’s happening, Chrom?”} Lissa asked. Though it was plain to see there was no logical explanation for all this.

{“I... I don’t know...”} He heaved, drenched in ash and sweat.

Suddenly, magic began to manifest in the sky above them. White sparks collapsed together until the space distorted, which resulted in a bright, mighty flash. A circular glyph appeared, giving way to a portal. From the portal, two humanoid creatures emerged, wearing unfamiliar attire not native to Ylisse. They dropped to the ground, limbs breaking from the impact. And yet, they shuffled to their feet--unbothered. A low, gurgling growl escaped from their breaths. Red eyes, sinister in their eerie glow, honed in on the duo.



Chrom shielded Lissa from their view, brandishing his blade before them.

{“Lissa, you’d better stand back.”} He said, eyes observing the elegant sword. {“Looks like Falchion and I have some business to take care of...”}

His younger sister backed away until she was a safe distance away, and watched the fight unfold.

{“RAAAGGHH!”} One of the monsters roared. It twitched before rushing towards Chrom. He braced himself as the monster prepared to strike. The lord dodged its attack just in time to counter with one of his own. Success! He was able to land a crucial blow; surely that was enough to kill it...right?

Chrom looks back in triumph, only for his face to turn into disbelief as the creature’s head turns completely around to look back at /him/.

{“Huh?!”}

It swiftly attacked, causing Chrom to stagger backwards. He regained his balance, poising himself to exchange blows with it. There was a standstill as both combatants pushed their weapons against one another, metal grinding against metal. Chrom broke stance to shove the creature away with all of his might.



As it clumsily fell to the ground, Chrom prepared to land the finishing blow. Falchion glimmered with a brilliant light blue color.

("Here goes nothing!") He thought to himself, as he launched himself into the air. He turned his blade towards the enemy's head, and allowed the force of his fall to connect the blow with such devastating force. Its body dematerialized into a hazy black smoke. That was one of two creatures defeated.

Suddenly, an earsplitting screech resounded.

{"Aaahhh!"}

{"Lissa!"} Chrom called out, as he hadn't realized that the other creature was closing in on his sister.

The cleric backed up against a tree, the creature looking over her. She stared up in fear, unable to fight back. Lissa cowered and trembled, clutching on to her staff with dear life. ("This can't be happening! Chrom, hurry up!") She thought, panicking.



The creature raised its weapon in the air, ready to end the cleric's life. That was, until the portal in the air quivered. A man clad in blue was attempting to pass through.

{“Almost...there!”} The stranger grunted, extending his arm through the threshold. At last, he had completely traversed the portal. He gracefully landed on his feet, wasting no time as he rushed to Lissa. Most striking about this stranger was the butterfly-shaped mask he wore. It obscured his eyes, and, thus, his facial expressions. He managed to halt the monster's attack by binding its blade with his. Though, it bore an all too uncanny resemblance to Chrom's own Falchion...



Lissa looked at the stranger in amazement as he struggled to hold back the creature's advance for much longer.



{“Help!”} He yells in a gruff voice, looking to Chrom.

The lord, without hesitating, rushes in to aid. Just in time, the stranger releases the bind by pushing the creature back with all of his might. In a graceful dance of Falchions, the two swordsmen deliver the final blow to the monster by slashing its torso into half--causing its dismembered chest and legs to tumble to the ground.



Lissa could do naught but stare bug-eyes at the whole ordeal. For a brief moment, she scans around to see if there were any more of those vile, undead creatures about. Confirming that they were in the clear, at least for now, she turns to the mysterious stranger that had saved her life.

Chrom takes time to catch his breath before saying to the masked man: {"...Quite an entrance. What's your name?"}



{"..."}

The stranger merely turns around, not responding. His expression was indiscernible, though one could say there was a slight sigh of relief...

{“Milord! Milady!”} A familiar voice rang out, accompanied by the galloping of horse hooves.

The trio turn to see that it was Frederick calling to them with me close behind him.

{“Frederick! Robin!”} The cleric gasped.

The reunited group watch in horror as more portals appear from the sky in the same fashion as the first, dispensing new of these queer, undead soldiers. Soon enough, we were sorely outnumbered by the monsters. The mysterious stranger, seeing us four reconcile, took this opportunity to flee. For now...

I grimaced, perturbed by this new turn of events. {“Are such horrific creatures commonplace in these lands?”}

{“They’re not from Ylisse, I promise you that,”} said Chrom with a scowl. Meanwhile, the lieutenant knight scans his lieges for any visible injuries. And much to his favor, they were both unscathed.

{“No one is injured, then? Thank the gods...”} He said with a sigh of relief.

{“Thank the masked man who saved me! If it wasn’t for him, I’d be...”} Lissa said, trying to look for him--but he was nowhere to be seen.

{“Hey, where did he go?...”}

{“We can worry about him later, AFTER we put these.../things/ to the blade.”} Frederick dismissed, unsure what to make of the monsters. He then turned to the other two: {“Eyes open, now. We know nothing about this enemy.”}

{“Right,”} Chrom said as he faced me. {“I’m glad you guys came just in time. Thank you...”}

{“Of course,”} I responded. {“That ungodly rumbling woke Frederick and I up... We’d no idea where you two were! I’m just relieved to see you and Lissa are OK... But now...”}

We face our next trial: the horde of the undead monsters scattered about. Something, however, caught my attention. Dilapidated stone buildings with what appeared to be remnants of a watchtower stood in the distance.

{“Hmm? Are those...”}

{“Abandoned forts?”} Frederick interjected. {“Yes.”}

{“Then we should take shelter in them. We’ll need to get to cover as we thin their numbers.”} I suggested.

{“Alright, sounds good.”} Chrom said. {“Lead the way, Robin!”}

{“We’ll be right behind you.”} Lissa added. She was still shaken up, but with everyone back together, she regained some of her sprightliness.

{“Er, right!...”}

Things were still hazy for me, as I wasn’t /too/ confident about my ability to fight--and lead, for that matter. But if Chrom put that much trust in me...then, I mustn’t back down.

We force our way through the burning woods, taking down wave after wave of these monsters. This time, though, I’d decided to focus on using my sword. With so many fiends coming every which way, it was difficult to concentrate my magic without being interrupted. Even if my swordplay was nowhere near as refined as Chrom’s, I was still able to stave off the enemy’s attacks.



We neared the abandoned fort when a voice cried out from behind us.

{“Captain Chrom! Wait! I’m coming!”} The red-haired cavalier exclaimed, before muttering to herself: {“...Agh, I knew I shouldn’ta left ‘em...”}

She charged into the fray, spear brandished. {“All right, you ash-faced /freaks/! Which one of ya wants to try my lance on for size?!”}

{“I know /just/ the spot for it: shoved right up your--“}

And before she could finish her rather crude remark, another man joins the fray. To contrast the rough, tomboyish cavalier who came before, this newcomer had the look of a refined noble. With long gray hair in such pristine condition, he looked as though he hadn’t seen one battle--were it not for the bow he carried with him.

{“Hold, milady!”} He yelled with a posh--and an unironic one at that--tone.

{“Muh?”} The cavalier woman muttered.

{“Life may be long, attraction is fleeting.”} The archer said, trying to woo her. {“Would you leave me in your sweet dust? Leave war to the warriors, dear bird! A beauty such as you need wage only love.”}

{“...The hell are you?!”} She rudely blurted, clearly displeased by his sweet words.

{“Ha!”} The nobleman heartily chuckled, flipping his hair. {“Is the lady intrigued? Of course you are--it’s only natural! I am myth and /legend/! I am he who strides large across history’s greatest stage! The man who puts the ‘arch’ in ‘archer’! My name, dear lady, is Vi--”}

The more he rambled, the more the woman in crimson lost interest in him. Finally, she interrupts his boastful, dramatic speech: {“Sorry, Ruffles--no time for this! Onward!”}

Her horse reared as she heroically charged forward, leaving the archer in her dust.

{“Virion! ...Er, my name. It’s Virion. W-wait! Where are you going?!”} He said, yelling after her. With a sigh and a shake of his head, he runs to catch up.

--

Meanwhile, we were able to reach the fort. It looked to be a humble outpost with its furnishings and supplies gutted out by bandits and misfortunate souls. Still, it will afford us /some/ protection from the incoming horde of the undead soldiers. We ushered Lissa first into what was left of the guardhouse. Chrom, Frederick, and I took our positions as we began to whittle down the enemy's numbers. We managed fairly well for ourselves until we heard galloping from the distance.

{“Hey, Captain! I’m here!”} Announced the gruff red-haired woman. Her lance was crusted with blood and dirt, much like her and her horse’s armor.

{“Sully!”} Chrom called out, relieved to finally see a friendly face. {“Help us defend this post and mow down these dastards!”}



{“Took the words right out of my mouth!”} The cavalier exclaimed. With a second wind, she joins Frederick to weave in and out of another incoming wave. {“YAAARRGHH!”}

With her staff, Lissa was using healing magic to imbue us with more vitality. As a result, we managed to stay on the defensive without a lull in between.

One of the undead creatures managed to sneak up to Chrom’s flank. It was too far for me to attack, so I took out my tome to cast a bolt of Thunder. I shouted to get his attention: {“Hey, watch out!”}

{“Huh?!”} He looked to me first, before turning around to see that the monster had raised its weapon against him.

Just as I was about to land a hit, it looked like I was beaten to it when a lone arrow whizzed past and decapitated the monster. The arrow landed on a pole that once was part of the fencing around the guardhouse, pinning the creature’s head to it.

We turn to see that it was the nobleman who nocked the arrow. He bows as a way of greeting.

{“My lord...”} Virion said to Chrom, before his attention turned to me. {“And my lady.”}

{“Virion; pleased to be of service.”}

Chrom and I looked at each other, flabbergasted. Yet another fighter joins us--for which I was grateful for.

We all fought tooth and nail until none of the undead soldiers were left standing. With a collective sigh of relief, we gathered together. Sully jumps down from her horse to inspect it, giving her pets for a job well done.

{“It seems all the creatures are vanquished. This young man too care of the others.”} Frederick announced, turning to the masked stranger who appeared as if from nowhere. He didn’t seem familiar to me, but I see that Chrom and Lissa had met him before.

{“You.”} Chrom said. {“So, you’ve been fighting alongside us this entire time--just out of sight.”}

As stoic as ever, the stranger said nothing. {“...”}

The cleric walked up to him, sheepishly. {“Um, I never got to thank you...for before. So...thank you. You were very brave.”}

{“You saved my sister’s life..”} The lord said with a thankful smile. {“My name is Chrom. Might I ask yours?”}

The stranger paused for a moment, before answering: {“You may call me Marth.”}



Chrom perked up the mention of the name. {"‘Marth’? After the heroic king of old? You certainly fight like a hero. Where did you learn your way with a sword?"}

{"I’m not here to talk about me. This world teeters at the brink of a horrible calamity."} Marth stated, coldly.

Now, everyone perked up--alarmed, even.

{"What you saw tonight was but a prelude. You have been warned."} And just like that, he walked away without another word...

{"Huh? What’s teetering where now? Hey, wait!"} Lissa cried.

{"Hm. Not much for conversation, is he?"} I remarked.

{"It appears his skills lie elsewhere. I wager we’ll hear his name again... But for now I’m more concerned about the capital. We should make haste."} Frederick suggested.



We checked ourselves over to ensure no one was /too/ injured to carry on. But with everyone in decent shape, albeit tired, we set our sights on Ylisstol, which was still quite a distance away.

{“We probably won’t get there until the sun’s over our damn heads...”} Sully noted.

{“Perhaps so, my lady. One so fair as you /needs/ their beauty sleep, after all...”} Virion added, clearly trying to woo her. Of course, as with his last attempt, his dulcet words fell on deaf ears.

{“Can it, Ruffles, or I’ll shove this lance down your--”}

{“Now, now...”} Chrom interjected, wanting to keep the peace in the group. {“Let’s at least save the bickering until /after/ we get there. There’s a long way to go.”}

Sully only huffed, slightly hastening her horse’s pace to distance herself from the nobleman.

{“Ah... Love can be so fickle...”} Virion sighed with a shake of his head.

--

With the defeat of the last undead, the chaos that ensued in the woods was no more. The embers from the inferno were beginning to flicker out; a smoky stench was the only thing that filled the air now.

The moon was low in the horizon, and it was bound to be morning within the next few hours. Conversation helped to wile the evening hours away, with Lissa recounting the attack with dramatic gestures and postures.

{“...My very /life/ flashed before my eyes! I thought I was dead meat, I tell you! Marth saved my life. Not to mention he was a skilled swordsman! The way he and my brother worked together. It’s like...they learned from the same teacher.”}

{“Lissa, please...”} Chrom insisted she stop with the praise, which caused him to blush. I couldn’t help but giggle; it was quite amusing to see him get flustered.

{“A strange turn of events this night was. I thank the gods neither of you were hurt...”}
The lieutenant knight said.

--

Dawn had finally broken over the horizon when the group arrived at the outer gates of Ylistol. The gates were lifted, allowing them to pass through. The morning crowd had begun their day as the streets were filled with townsfolk of all manner of occupation. A large castle loomed over the city from a distance; no doubt the exalt and her family resided there.



{“So this is Ylistol, capital of Ylisse... I’ve never seen so many people!”} I commented, looking around with wide eyes. If anything, it was a bit overwhelming to be surrounded.

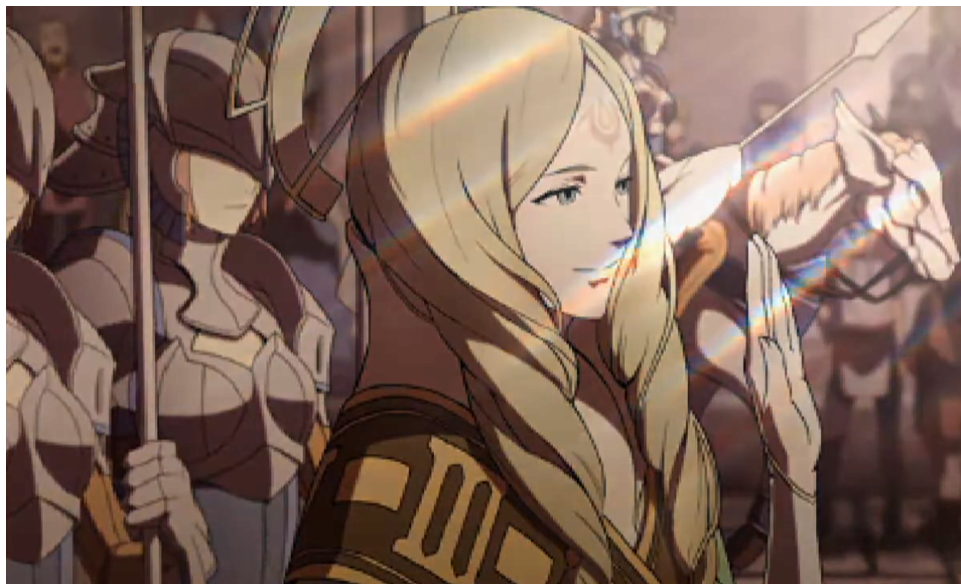
{“It appears the capital was spared the chaos we encountered, thank the gods. I see no evidence of the great quake. It must’ve been limited to the forest,”} said Frederick.

{“Well, that’s a relief!”} Lissa chirped. She looked more than happy to be back in the city; no more bear meat for dinner or flying buzzards to swat away.

Among the numerous voices, an old man shouted over the others: {“Look! The exalt has come to see us!”}



I perked up to see what he was talking about. A crowd formed along the sides of the main road, making way for a caravan of soldiers following a woman clad in green. It's like she resonated this pristine aura that made it difficult to turn away. She bore an exquisite headdress, befitting someone of the title of 'exalt'.



She waved from side to side, giving one and all a graceful smile.

{“The exalt is your ruler, yes?”} I ask, remembering what Chrom had said earlier about Ylisse.

{“Yes,”} Frederick responded. {“Her name is Lady Emmeryn.”}

{“Er... Is it safe for her to walk among commoners like this?”}

{“The exalt is a symbol of peace--Ylisse’s most prized quality. Long ago, at the dawn of our age, the fell dragon tried to destroy the world. But the first exalt joined forces with the divine dragon and laid the beast low. Exalt Emmeryn reminds us all of the peace we fought for then.”} The knight spoke, briefly recounting their country’s history with pride.

Chrom added with a smile: {“With Plegia poking at our borders, the people need her. She’s a calming presence, when some might otherwise call for war.”}

{“I see. Then the Ylislean people are indeed lucky to have her.”} I said.

{“She’s also the /best/ big sister anyone could ask for!”} Lissa chirped.

{“Yes, I imagine she...”} I paused before her words actually set in. {“Wait, what? She’s your... But wouldn’t that make you and Chrom...”}

(“Does that mean I was in company with the prince and princess of Ylisse this /whole time/?!”) I thought to myself, utterly flabbergasted.

{“The prince and princess of the realm, yes.”} Frederick finished, with an all too incredulous tone. {“You remember Chrom’s name, but not this?...”}

{“You said you were “shepherds”!} I proclaimed in my defense. I truly believed they were /literal/ shepherds!

{“And so we are...in a manner of speaking,”} Chrom said, clarifying. {“We just have a /LOT/ of sheep.”}

At once, I began to panic. How rude I’ve been to be so casual in front of royals! I bowed, in hopes they’d accept my meager apology. {“C-Chrom... I mean, /Prince/ Chrom! Sire! Forgive my dreadful manners!”}

He put up a hand to stop me. {“Just Chrom is fine. I’ve never been one for formalities.”}

{“The prince and princess... That explains why Frederick tolerates all the teasing, eh?”}

{“Indeed.”} Frederick said, craning his neck up with a sarcastic sigh. {“Oh, the sacrifices I make for the good of the realm...”}

{“It looks like Emm is returning to the palace. Would you like to meet her?”}

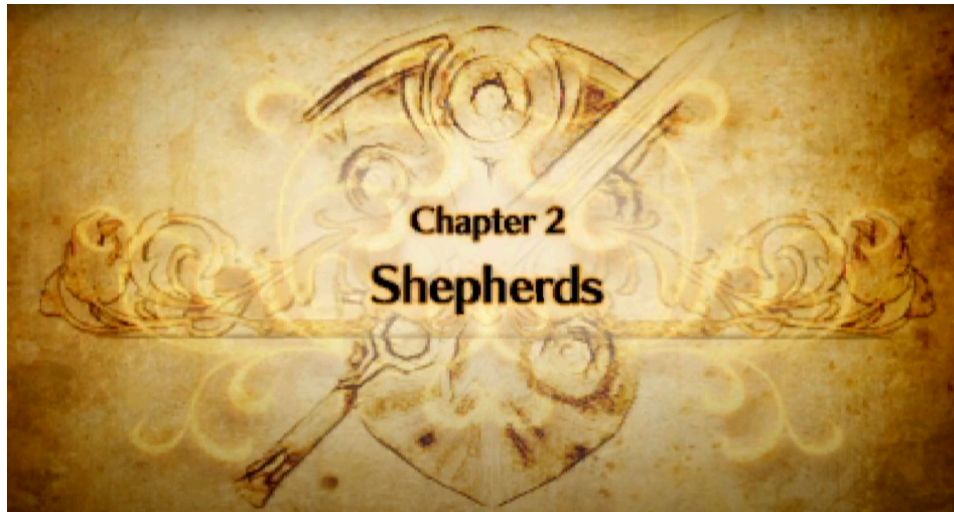
My heart nearly beat out of my chest. I felt nervous at the mere prospect of meeting royalty! Though, if Chrom and Lissa were anything to go by, it's possible Lady Emmeryn was just as welcoming as they were.

("It would be rather disrespectful /not/ to meet their sister. After all, I'm only a guest--a foreigner--in their nation. Just to show a good face, I reckon I'll have to... Besides, we'll need to fill her in on what transpired yesterday evening...") I internally mused.

{ "...Yes, I'd love to. Lead the way Pr-- Er... /Chrom/!" } I said, stopping myself from using his title.

Chapter 2 - Shepherds

[Chapter 2 - Shepherds.]



Shortly after meeting with the Exalt, Lady Emmeryn, I was graciously shown a guest suite at the castle. Chrom, Lissa and Frederick had left me to my own devices (the latter of the three, begrudgingly so), which provided me with the opportunity to finally rest. I hadn't realized how harrowing our time was outside of Ylissol.

But tomorrow, they were to introduce me to these so-called 'Shepherds.' I wonder what they'll be like...

--

The next day, we made our way to the Shepherds' headquarters: a fort located at the foot of the castle. Of my three escorts, Lissa seemed the most eager to introduce me to the rest of the organization. As we stepped inside the main hall, I'm greeted by a number of unfamiliar, yet friendly faces.

Lissa started: {"Here we are! The Shepherds' garrison. Go on, make yourself at home."} She gestured for me to come in, arms wide with a smile even more so.

A noble woman in pink dashes up to Lissa—clearly worried.

{"Lissa, my treasure! Are you all right?"} The belle hollered, voice echoing in the room. {"I've been on pins and needles!"}

The cleric turned over to her, nonchalantly acknowledging the noble. {"Oh, hey, Maribelle!"}

{“Oh, hey’ yourself! I’ve sprouted /14/ gray hairs fretting over you!”} Maribelle fussed, evidently more concerned for Lissa’s sake than she was.

{“Aw, you worry too much. I can handle a battle or two!”} Lissa brushed off, then added under her breath: {“...Although I could do without the bugs and the bear barbecue...”}

Another, a wild-looking, scruffy man, calls out to the cleric. {“Hey, squirt!”} He greeted, waving his arm to her with gusto.

{“Where’s Chrom? I bet he had a rough time out there without ol’ Teach and his trusty axe!”} The fighter, letting out a hearty laugh.

{“Oh, so you’re ‘Teach’ now, Vaike, is that it? Hee hee!”} Lissa pointed out, giggling at Vaike’s amusing overconfidence. {“And here I thought people were just born lacking wits. It can be taught?”}

{“Ha! Never doubt the Vaike!”} He proclaimed, beating a fist against his chest. Shortly after, he took a moment to actually consider what Lissa had just implied. {“...Wait, was that an insult?”}



I stifled a chuckle, though no one else seemed to notice.

{“Beg pardon,”} a meek knight butted in, {“but when might we see the captain?”}

Maribelle publicly noted: {“Poor Sumia. She’s simply been beside herself with concern... Her eyes were scanning the horizon all day during training. ...She might have earned fewer bruises fighting blindfolded.”}

Lissa turned to the concerned knight. {"Aw, Sumia, that's so sweet of you to worry about Chrom."}

{"Worry? Well, I... He's our captain and our prince—of course I'd worry!"}

At that moment, everyone's eyes turned to me. Vaike breaks the ice, asking aloud: {"So, who's the stranger?"}

{"No one's stranger than you, Vaike..."}

 Lissa said with a mischievous grin, {"But allow me to introduce Robin! Ta-da!"}

She gestured to me, showing me off to her friends as if I were some spectacle. I modestly bowed, as a show of good faith.

{"She just joined the Shepherds. Chrom's made her our new tactician. You should see all the tricks she's got up her sleeve!"}

 Lissa continued, practically boasting about me. Admittedly, I was beginning to feel a tad bit embarrassed.

{"Oh yeah?"}

 Vaike said, stepping up. {"Can she do /this/?"}

The fighter let out a loud, obnoxious burp—one that could surely have caused the entire castle to tremble in its wake.

I couldn't help but laugh, all tension and nervousness leading up to our meeting relieving itself. {"I'm sure I have much to learn in the belching arts, 'Teach.'"} }

{"In any case, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintances."}

 I say, turning to Mirabelle and Sumia.

The former of the two was, on the other hand, NOT amused at all by Vaike's show of ability. {"Ugh, Vaike! That was /abhorrent!/ Must you baseborn oafs pollute even the air with your buffoonery?"}

{"And /you/, Robin!"}

 She cast her fiery gaze at me, accusatory finger point and all. {"Don't encourage him! I'd /hoped/ you were cut from finer cloth. Hmph!"} And with that, Maribelle stormed away—huffing and puffing.

I stood there flabbergasted, unsure of what to say. Meanwhile, the other Shepherds seemed to scoff at the noble's departure. Sumia perked up, trying to cheer me up.

{“Don’t take it to heart, Robin. Maribelle warms to people slowly.”} She reassured me with a sigh.

Lissa added in: {“Or burns too quickly! Hee hee!”} She giggled. {“But yeah, just give her time.”}

Just then, we hear the hall doors open. A familiar man, clad in blue, stepped in—waving at our small gathering. Sumia was the first to greet him.

{“Ah! Captain! You’ve returned! I was— I mean, we were so—”} She started, beginning to stumble over words. Speaking of... Sumia hadn’t taken nary a single step towards Chrom when, all of a sudden, she tripped over who knows that and fell face flat on the floor. The loud thud caught all of us by surprise. The pink knight, just as quickly, rose up and dusted herself off as if nothing had happened.

{“Sumia!”} Chrom said, {“Are you all right? ...Those boots of yours again?”}

{“No! I mean, yes! I mean...”} She began, stuttering once more, sighing at her own clumsiness.



Our attention turns back to the prince as he makes an announcement. {“All right, listen, everyone: in the morning, we’ll be marching to Regna Ferox.”}

Another unfamiliar place... I ask him: {““Regna Ferox?””}

{“It’s a unified kingdom to Ylisse’s north. Inhabited by barbarians, or so it’s said.”} Sumia answered in his place.

{“Warriors are what they are,”} Chrom clarified, {“and we’ll need their strength to quell this new menace. Typically, the exalt would request such aid in person. But given recent events... Well, the people might worry should my sister suddenly leave the capital. So the task has been passed to us.”}

He gives us a sweeping glance, almost expecting something from us. {“Now, this mission is strictly voluntary. So if, for any—”}

{“I volunteer!”} His younger sister chirped, enthusiastically hopping.

{“Me too!”} Vaike sounded, bumping his chest with his fist once more. {“You’ll be needin’ ol’ Teach along for such a delicate mission.”}

{“I’ll go as well,”} an unfamiliar voice chips in. We all look around for the source. {“...What I’ve been here the whole time!”}

The meek voice came from a hulking giant of a man, wearing armor probably twice as heavy as me!

{“I... I, um...”} Sumia began to mumble.

{“Yes, Sumia?”} Chrom asked, concerned.

{“It’s just that... I’m not sure I’m quite ready for a proper mission just yet. I’d probably just get in the way.”}

{“Well, you could stay behind the main group, and if a battle is met, just watch and learn?”} He suggested. {“Your choice, of course, But some lessons can only be learned on the battlefield.”}

{“W-well, if you think it wise, Captain.”} Sumia muttered, still very much uncertain.

{“Just stay by me and you’ll be fine.”} Chrom reassured her, offering a comforting smile.

{“Oh, yes! I mean— Yes, sir, I’ll do that!”}

--

Preparations were made, with the volunteers gathering their personal weapons and supplies to bring along. Meanwhile, I discussed with Chrom about how to disperse our forces. Sumia and Kellam (the ginormous armored knight from earlier) were assigned to

the rearguard; they would catch up with us at Regna Ferox after the vanguard, which consisted of every other Shepherd—including myself, secured the Northroad. Intelligence from Ylissean scouts inform us that there's been sightings of enemy forces there. But in what manner, they were unsure. Perhaps they were the same ones we faced not all that long ago...



With no time wasted, we all agreed to meet right outside of the Shepherds' headquarters. After a headcount, the following were volunteering for this mission: Frederick, Lissa, Vaike, Sumia, Kellam—though I can't seem to see where he is here, Sully, Virion, and myself. The eight of us gather around closely as Chrom makes an announcement.

{“Is everyone ready? We've a long march ahead.”}

{“W-wait for me!”} Someone yelled out, rushing over to reach our gathering. I turn around to see a knight in green, wearing armor not unlike Sully's. ...Hm—another cavalier, it seems.

{“Stahl?”} Chrom asks.

{“Why am I the last to hear about this expedition to Ferox?”}

Lissa, confused, said: {“Huh? Vaike was supposed to... Vaike! Did you forget to tell Stahl about our mission?”}

On the other hand, Vaike insists he did otherwise. {“The Vaike /never/ forgets! ...I just don't remember, is all...”}

{“Ugh... I swear, you’d forget your own name if you weren’t constantly saying it yourself!”} She grumbled, clearly frustrated with his forgetfulness. {“Speaking of which, are you /SURE/ you remembered your axe this time?”}

The warrior began to fume, feeling insulted. {“Hey! That was one time! ...Okay, twice, but training sessions don’t count. Anyway, I got it right here. Teach is loaded and ready for action!”} He took out an intimidating axe and slung it over his shoulder. {“Glad to have you along, Stahl, ol’ buddy.”}

{“That makes one of us.”} Stahl started as he rubbed his rumbling stomach. {“I was in such a hurry, I had to miss breakfast! There were muffins, and cakes, and... Well, I can tell you all about it while we march...”}

{“Your name is Stahl, right?”} I ask, turning to the hungry cavalier.

{“Oh, I’m sorry, Robin. This is Stahl, one of our finest.”} Chrom responded, making way for introductions.

Stahl greets me with a friendly nod. {“Hello, Robin. Miriel told me we had a new Shepherd. Er, Miriel’s one of our mages. She should catch up soon.”}

(“Hm, I see... This will be my first official mission with the Shepherds. I hope I’m ready...”) I keep to myself. Admittedly, all of this was still a lot to take in, so I still felt unsure of my own abilities.

(“It’s time to see what I’m truly capable of.”)

--

We began our march towards Regna Ferox, heading north of Ylisstol. It was here that our group reached the Northroad—the section of land just close to the Ylissean-Feroxian border.

Chrom issues the company an order to halt as the area before us was...eerily quiet. No signs of animal life anywhere, and the breeze was oddly absent. I felt it in my gut, too—something was amiss here... The stone settlements ahead were devoid of any life. Beyond them, an impressive bridge split the area in two. No doubt we would have to secure it and cross if we’re to advance towards the borders.

Over the horizon, we begin to hear distant moans and groans. Many of which I recognized.

{“Gods, have the Risen spread /this/ far?”} Chrom asked, perturbed.
{“Risen?”} I ask, curious. Is that what they called those...undead abominations we faced?

Frederick pitches in to answer my query: {“We needed a name for this new threat, so the council gave them one.”}

{“Everyone,”} the prince called out, {“remember what we’re up against!”}

{“Mya ha! They’ll remember ME once I drive my axe into their...”} Vaike started, before realizing that he had, indeed, forgotten his weapon. He looked around frantically for it.
{“Wait... My axe. Where’s my axe?! I had it a second ago!”}

{“Vaike, this is no time for jokes...”} Chrom sighed with a shake of his head.

{“I’m serious! It’s gone, but I /JUST/ had it! It’s got to be around here somewhere...”}
The warrior insisted, literally getting on his hands and knees to search the ground. I sense that the rest of the group has dealt with this buffonery before, as they nonchalantly turn their attention to the true problem ahead.

Perhaps the undead foes heard all the commotion Vaike was making as they finally noticed our presence. Many began to make their move...

{“Keep to the rear, then!”} Chrom ordered. {“The battle is nigh!”}

{“All right, listen up. ...Especially those of you who /BROUGHT/ weapons!”} Frederick announced. {“All weapons have strengths and weaknesses to bear in mind. Lances have an advantage over swords, for example, while swords best axes. We’ll want to work this into our strategy whenever possible.”}

(“...Hm. Good point to keep in mind. I’ll have to be wary of the types of weapons those Risen wield, then. I wouldn’t want to lead the Shepherds into a disadvantageous battle...”) I think, mentally preparing myself.

The prince charges ahead of everyone as the Risen liven up their pace—ready to take our forces head on. An undead swordsman, from the looks of it, is the first to make contact as he rushes up against Chrom.

CLANG! Two blades clash against one another with the Risen swordsman delivering quick, precise blows against the lord. He counters each attack with ease, breaking down the undead's defenses slowly—but surely. I then see my own chance to strike. I build up energy and channel it from my tome. A bolt of lightning should do... I rush in, the static electricity growing even too intense for me to handle is ejected from my hand, as I aim the concentrated energy at the swordsman.



{“Thunder!”} I bellow, putting my all into my spell.

The spell makes successful contact. Chrom gives me a nod of approval, thankful for backing him up.

Behind us, two more Risen make their advance: an axe-wielding warrior wearing a dead animal skull adorned on its head, and a disheveled lance-wielding soldier. Just when Chrom and I barely had time to take notice, we heard thunderous hooves booming.

Frederick, Sully and Stahl coordinate a three-way attack to take out the impending forces. Frederick and Stahl deliver a one-two blow against the skull-wearing warrior and send it tumbling to the ground. Sully manages to swoop in from the lanceman's flank and stab it squarely in the head with her weapon before yanking it back out.

{“YEAH! Got yer asses!”} The red-haired cavalier cries out, pumping her lance up in victory.

{“A magnificent display, milady!”} Virion complimented, {“Now, witness true art...”} He readied his bow and let loose an arrow that flew in a quite magnificent arc, indeed, over the field. It was aimed at an incoming Risen who stopped dead in its tracks, the arrow piercing the center of its chest. He haughtily laughed, flipping his long silver hair in victory.



{“Tch, show off...”} Sully murmured, clearly unimpressed by the noble. She rode off in the direction of the other cavaliers to catch up, leaving Virion in the dust—who desperately chased after her.

{“Did that not please you?! W-wait for me!”}

The Ylissean vanguard advanced up the Northroad, effortlessly taking down Risen after Risen. There's strength in numbers, and we clearly outnumbered the undead occupying the region. That is, with the exception of Vaike—who was lagging behind and grumbling to himself for forgetting his weapon.

{“I guess that makes /THREE/ times you've forgotten your axe.”} Lissa teased, sticking her tongue out at him.

{“Can it, squirt! Ol’ Teach can still rough up a few Risen, just watch!”} Vaike boasted, confident as ever.

Just then, a portal begins to form nearby. Its blue and purple energy convalesce, opening a threshold just large enough for a meticulously groomed woman to step through. The aforementioned mage has finally reached her mission destination.

{“Splendid! It seems I’ve caught up... Now to extirpate these brutes...”} The mage said, pushing up her glasses.

{“Hey, Miriel! Glad to have you join the party!”} Vaike greeted with a wave of his arm.

{“Yes, yes. As we would have it, I believe /this/ belongs to you?”} She asked, retrieving his axe from behind her. {“I presume you mislaid it before you ventured off for the mission. I’d not thought such dereliction permissible among the Shepherds. Still, I’d be remiss to not return this implement to you. I believe a stern word or two of disapprobation is in order, Vaike.”}

{“Whoa! My axe! Thanks, Miriel! ...Er, for the axe, anyway.”} The warrior said gleefully, eagerly taking it from Miriel’s hands.

A sigh escapes her breath. {“And here I wondered what manner of ignoramus would misplace their weapon... Perhaps next time I’ll use a spell to fasten it to your hands...permanently.”}

By now, the vanguard had secured nearly half of the area. The coast seemed clear as everyone had come to play their part, ridding the Risen from this side of the bridge. We have earned a brief moment of respite, in which Chrom takes an opportunity to update me with our situation.

{“What next, Robin? Guide our swords.”} He asks.

{“Might I advise patience, milord?”} Frederick intervenes, much to my surprise. {“Robin is a fine tactician, but we have been working her mercilessly. Even the best of us needs rest.”}

(“What’s this? Frederick, vouching for /me/?”) I mused, still taken aback.

{“Yes, of course, I’m sorry.”} The blue-haired lord said, giving me an apologetic look. He turns to me, saying: {“It’s true. We’ve been over-relying on you. You’re a splendid tactician, Robin. We’re grateful you’re here to fight with us.”}

{“Aye.”} His lieutenant chimed in. {“Perhaps Robin would prefer we choose our own actions at times.”}

{“But how will we know?”} Chrom asks in return.

{“We could use a simple command that lets us fight on our own. So long as she realizes such a strategy does not guarantee victory.”} Frederick suggested. {“Acting as we see fit may not always lead us to the best course of action.”}

{“That’s much appreciated, Frederick. Thank you.”} I say to him with a smile. {“We can certainly work out the details later...provided we survive this mission first.”}

{“I believe we are well on our way, milady.”} He noted. {“But let us not rest on our laurels, there are more Risen brigands to be had.”}

Everyone turns to the path ahead, with more Risen about. Not so many seem to be left...perhaps five? But we can make short work of them, so long as we stick to our original plan.

The cavalier trio can take the front to help us gain ground. The rest of us infantry units will have to follow behind, thinning out the numbers. Vaike, Chrom and I led the way, while Virion, Miriel and Lissa remained behind to provide long-range support.

In no time at all, the Shepherds cleared the way—with only the Risen chief being left. It was a grisly looking fellow, also adorned with a dead animal skull as its headpiece. The axe in its claws featured blood crusted on the blade. More powerful the chief may be than the rest of our assailants, but it was no match for all of us.

It let out a terrifying roar, not dissimilar to a cry for help. Yet it didn’t have a chance to even move.

{“Miriel! Virion! Now!”} I commanded, ushering the two to attack.

Virion let loose a perfectly aimed arrow that pierced the chief’s leg, crippling it. Miriel came right behind him to cast Fire, and hit the chief squarely in the chest. The foe cries in pain, weakened as the spell seared into its very flesh.

They opened the way for Chrom to finish the job, who brandished Falchion and readied a powerful attack.



{“Your end has come!”} He yelled. The lord jumped into the air, lifting his sword and plunged his blade into the throat of the Risen chief.

It gurgled and choked on its own blood before tumbling to the ground. A cheer from the Shepherds erupted as Chrom retrieved his sword from the corpse. He swung Falchion to sling off the blood from its steel.



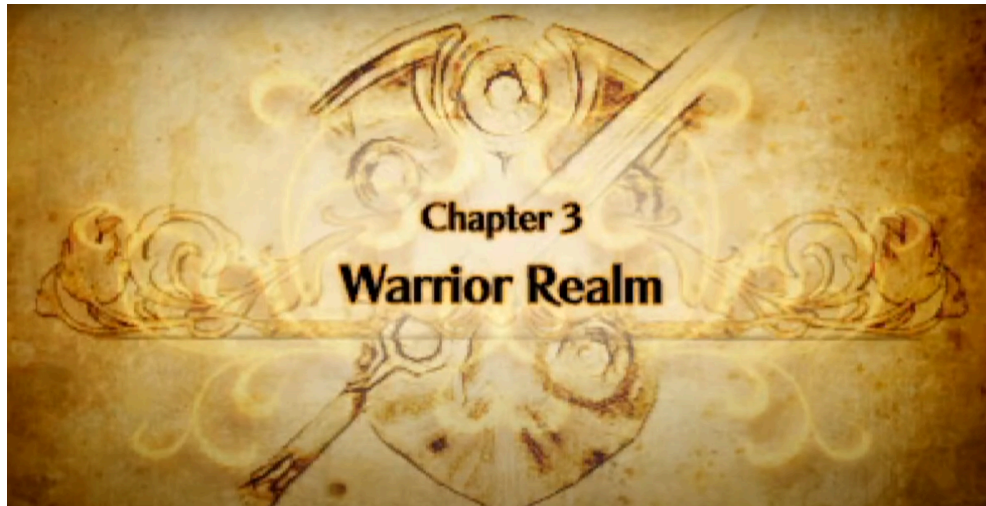
{“Finally, and good riddance!”} He sighed, heaving. {“But if they’re appearing this far up the Northroad...”}

{“Then no path is safe. We’ll need to stay wary.”} His lieutenant cautioned.

{“For now, we should rest. The road ahead will be long...and cold. Let’s set up camp.”}
Chrom said.

Chapter 3 - Warrior Realm

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From the Northroad, it was a three days' march towards Regna Ferox. On the second, the icy winds of the north began to sweep over the lands—slowing everyone down. Thus did it give the rearguard ample time to catch up with our group, reuniting the Shepherds in the process. We continued on as one unit now.

Day three had finally dawned upon us, and the Shepherds were in the home stretch. It was late morning when we had reached our destination: the fort that stood at the precipice of Regna Ferox's borders, as well as the Halidom's. Were it not for Frederick keeping time, it would've been difficult to ascertain the time of day.

The sun was shrouded by a wicked white blanket of snow and wind. But the intimidating structure before us, stretching out on both sides as far as the eye could see, stood visible for miles around. Soldiers lined up between the crenellations of the walls, looking down suspiciously.

Not an inviting display in the slightest...



{“Brrr! F-F-Frebberick! I’m f-f-freebing!”} Lissa cried, shivering away as her teeth clattered.

{“Stand beside my horse, milady.”} The lieutenant beckoned. {“She’ll shelter you from the wind.”}

My eyes glaze over the impenetrable stronghold. With its imposing stature, and the cold, insufferable weather, it’s no wonder why Regna Ferox has an unfriendly reputation...

{“So this is the fortress?”} I inquire. I swat away the snowflakes that have landed on my hair. It seems the snowfall has only increased since we’ve arrived...

Chrom replies with a nod: {“Yes, the Longfort. It stretches along the border of Ylisse and Regna Ferox.”}

{“The khans that rule Ferox have grown quite wary of foreigners. Still, don’t mistake a lack of hospitality for open hostility.”} Frederick added. {“This simply calls for a bit of diplomacy.”}

(“So, these Feroxians would rather speak with their blades? This will be interesting, if things turn out for the worst...”) I thought, keeping that in mind.

{“Negotiation’s not my strong suit,”} Chrom said with a nervous chuckle, {“but I’ll do my best.”}

The prince then makes an announcement to the Shepherds, eyes darting back and forth across numerous frost-bitten faces. Yet he held firm and strong, seemingly unbothered by the cold.

{“Remember, everyone: your actions here reflect back upon Ylisse.”}

{“Excuse me,”} the knight lieutenant interjected. {“There’s trouble in the wind, milord: the Feroxi Guard are mobilizing.”}

Just as he said, I look up to see that, indeed, they have begun to take up battle positions atop the fortress walls. My brows furrow in concern.

(“This can’t be good... They must think us a threat, unless this is their country’s version of a ‘hello...’”)

{“What?! Why?”} Chrom asked in distress.

{“Who can say? But they look ready to let fly at a moment’s notice.”} Frederick noted. {“We’d best prepare for combat, just to be safe. Perhaps we ought pool our supplies and select which Shepherds to deploy?”}

He gives me a deprecating look, eyeing me up and down as if to look for a single hair out of place. {“Loath as I am to trust her, Robin might offer some valuable insight in this...”}

{“Very well.”} Chrom said as he turned to me. {“Indeed, she /IS/ our tactician, after all. So, Robin? What do you suggest?”}

{“Hmm... Let me think...”}

--

The chosen few who would parley with the Feroxi Guard stepped forward, while the rest held ground a considerable distance away.

Chrom, leading our small group, leads the way as we stop just outside the gates. A hearty, deep-feminine voice shouts to grab our attention.

{“Halt! Who goes there?!”}

A woman clad in heavy armor presents herself from just above the gate. I can't quite make her face out in this weather, but the scornful aura she radiated is all I needed to know that we weren't welcome.

{“In the name of House Ylisse, I seek audience with the khans!”} Chrom yelled in reply.

{“Not another step, my bold lad! I’ve lancers at the ready!”}

{“Hold, milady! We are not your enemy!”} Frederick joined, rallying behind Chrom.

{“Exalt Emmeryn herself sent us to discuss matters of mutual interest!”}

{“My only interest is keeping you out of Regna Ferox, brigand!”} The Feroxian general responded.

{“B-brigand?!”} He angrily stammered, taking full offense. {“Now see here—”}

{“You think you are the first ‘Ylisseans’ to try and cross our border?”} She interrupted, scoffing in disbelief. {“I have the authority to fell such /impostors/ where they stand.”}

{“How dare you!”} Frederick cursed. {“You are in the process of Prince Chrom, the exalt’s own blood!”}

{“Ha! Yes, indeed--and I’m the queen of Valm!”} The general mocked, ushering laughter from her troops. {“You do realize impersonating royalty is a capital offense, yes?”}

She then muttered under her breath. {“Mmm... Then perhaps we should settle this...the /Feroxi/ way.”} The woman raised her voice: {“You claim to be the prince of Ylisse? Then prove it on the battlefield!”}

Chrom grit his teeth, tensing up.



{“Rgh... Emmeryn won’t like this at all... Please, good lady! If you’d just listen—”} The prince insisted, but to no avail.

The general cuts him off, issuing the end-all, be-all command. {“I’ve heard quite enough! Soldiers: attack!”} She motions with a steady arm for the lancers to launch spears from their ranks, each one aimed at our heads...

{“RUN! Take cover!”} I shout, urging Chrom to follow suit.

Troops scattered to and fro as a storm of spears impaled themselves on the ground. Knights stormed in from entryways on both sides of the gate: an opening if we can manage to push through.

Chrom hesitated to move when the Feroxian lancers threw their spears towards him. Just as the tip was about to pierce his skull, a flash of feathers swept him up.



I look towards the sky and see Sumia atop her winged steed, having saved the captain from his demise. The weight of my heart is lifted, seeing him safe and sound.

Then, a flash of inspiration runs through my mind upon seeing this gallant display.

("Hm... This gives me a /brilliant/ idea! I'll have to confer with Chrom once he returns.")

--

{"Sumia...?"} Chrom gasped, out of breath from his near-death encounter.

{"Better hold on tight, Captain, Could get bumpy."} She instructed.

{"Uh...right."}

{"You'll be fine."} The pegasus knight said as she turned around to give Chrom a reassuring smile.



Sumia instructed her mount to regain altitude in order to re-assess the situation. Feroxi knights continued to pelt Ylissean forces below with their countless weapons. Frederick managed to shield Lissa with his horse, swatting away the spears with his axe.

Robin issued orders to the troops to regain formation. Until Chrom returned, she took it upon herself to hold the line. The prince was touched to see his new tactician ever so ready to stand strong; she was a true ally.

{“Up there! Shoot those impostors down!”} A Feroxi knight bellowed, casting their attention to the pair in the sky.

{“Sumia!”} Chrom yelled to her as lances were now aimed in their direction.

{“Right!”} She acknowledged, steering her pegasus to dodge the incoming attack.

--

{“Milord!”} Frederick yelled from below as Chrom and Sumia descended. {“We await your orders.”} Lissa and I accompanied him when we saw that they were returning to the ground.

{“Ah, right.”} The prince said, turning to Sumia. He lowered his voice for a brief moment. {“Many thanks to you and your pegasus, Sumia.”}

{“O-of course, Captain! I’m just relieved I made it in time.”} She replied, a tint of a blush appearing on her cheeks. From flattery, or the bracing cold—it was hard to tell. Chrom hopped off the pegasus, and gave it a much-deserved pet.

Suddenly, everyone turned their heads for it was a collection of bellowing shouts from the Feroxi soldiers. They were beginning to mount another attack as the infantry troops prepared to initiate a head-on assault. More knights continued to spill out of the fort's ingresses.



{“Chrom, they’re coming!”} I warned, readying my tome.

{“Alright, then. The Feroxi way it is. Now: Clear a path! Let’s show them who we really are!”} The prince commanded. He raised Falchion into the air, drawing our scattered troops to him.

The fighting commenced, and how terrifyingly mighty it was. The Feroxi fought with an aggression that left the Ylisseans with no choice but to mimic. ‘Warrior realm’ was right, for the only truth this land knew was only brought about by how close the tip of the blade was to your throat.

Sumia continued her aerial assault on the Feroxians, effortlessly weaving through the air with her pegasus to dive down and land a blow or two against an unsuspecting knight.

Frederick whisked Lissa atop his steed, proving to be a fearsome duo. As he swung his axe from flank to flank, clearing the area, the cleric rose her staff in the air to create a healing aura and nourish the Ylissean troops fortunate enough to be in its radius.

Chrom and I decided to stick side-by side in this fight. With my tome, I used Wind spells to ward off attackers, and he, with Falchion, provided coverage during my incantations.

{“Hmm...”} I mumble, managing to clearly think now that there was a lull in the fighting.

{“What is it, Robin?”} asked Chrom, looking me over to inspect for any wounds.

{“I’m fine. I’ve just been thinking about how you rode with Sumia earlier... Do our units always have to fight one-on-one?”} I ask him. We looked over to our other comrades, who were practically in pairs. Sumia and her pegasus... Frederick and Lissa...

{“Are you suggesting we pair up?”} The prince said as a follow-up. {“That’s an interesting thought... I admit, I’d resemble a pincushion right now if it weren’t for Sumia and her mount.”}

{“Exactly! By pairing up, we could make up for each other’s weaknesses with our own strengths. This will certainly open up all sorts of strategic possibilities. We should try it whenever the opportunity presents itself.”}

Speaking of, another wave of Feroxi lancers—weapons raised— quickly approached.

{“Hah, speak of the devil. Alright, Robin,”} Chrom said with a smirk. {“Let’s see you put this plan into action.”}

Like always, we fought valiantly together against the impending Feroxians. The Shepherds eventually managed to disable most or, if not, all of the Feroxi Guard. It was a stalemate at least. Some of our troops were injured but, fortunately, there were no casualties.



Before long, all that stood in the way between the Shepherds and the Khan of Regna Ferox was the very same general that called for battle.

{“Allow me. If she wants to face off against the true prince of Ylisse, I’ll let my blade do the talking.”} Chrom said, urging the rest of us to back off from their duel.

{“That’s more like it! Now come at me, boy—and give me your all!”} The general shouted, eager to test his mettle. However, with that heavy armor, it slowed her down considerably. An idea—another one, at that—hatched in my mind.

{“Attack from her flanks and rear, Chrom.”} I instructed, hoping this would provide him with the opening he was searching for.

They began their duel with the prince launching himself at her with great speed. If he was to land a hit, Chrom would need to evade her attacks. She successfully parried his sword strikes, giving him no leeway to do so.

In brute strength, the Feroxian might have had an advantage over him. Unlike the lower-ranked rabble, she was clearly more skilled than the rest. With rehearsed, well-timed strikes, she eventually had Chrom on the defensive.

But her strikes were beginning to slow down. The general’s stamina diminished as the fight went on, until it finally afforded the young prince the opening he was searching for.

He managed to make her stumble by slamming the hilt of Falchion against her side. Before she was able to regain her stance, Chrom pointed his sword at her face—ready to strike.

They locked eyes, sweat beading down both their faces. It was a fierce battle for both parties, but even the Feroxians had to admit that they were beaten on their home turf.

{“Enough! You have proven yourself to me, and my soldiers. Men: stand down.”} She ordered. The Feroxi knights obliged, laying down their weapons—a complete departure from mere minutes ago.

{“A thousand apologies, Prince Chrom,”} the general said with a respectful bow. Her tone of voice drastically changed, too.



{“I am Raimi; general of the Longfort. I truly took you for brigand impostors. We’ve had nothing /but/ troublemakers outside Regna Ferox lately, so please forgive us for being suspicious. No frauds could ever wage battle as you and yours just have. If you will it, I shall send word of your arrival to the capital and escort your entourage personally.”}

{“That would be...most appreciated. Thank you.”} Chrom said, still taken aback by the sudden shift in behavior.

{“A-amazing... Her whole demeanor changed.”} I pointed out, taking this moment to sheathe my own weapons.

{“Indeed, it is. In Ferox, strength speaks louder than words. I should have known better than to overestimate the value of diplomacy here,”} said Frederick.

{“What’s done is done. Let’s just be thankful we’ve won them over.”} I say.

{“You think they’re able to provide some blankets for us during the escort, too?”} Lissa asked, hopping off Frederick’s mount. {“I’m still /f-freezing/! Let’s get going already, Chrom.”}

{“Right. It’s not getting any warmer...”} He muttered, the cold finally getting to him. As the other Shepherds followed the Feroxi Guard escort, Chrom drew in closer to whisper something to me.

{“Uh, Robin...”} The prince started.

{“What is it, Chrom?”} I asked, turning to him.

{“Thank you for your help. I would have never been able to catch her off-guard if you hadn’t told me. Plus, you held the line today. I’m very grateful.”} He said with a smile.

{“As your tactician, it’s my duty.”}

Chapter 4 - Two Falchions

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