

Avingail Estate, home to Lord Arthur Penburrow, Count of Livery on Avin. Avin being an important river that runs through the flax producing Morgan Hills and feeds into the Ullux River that runs to Victory Bay, though through the Alexine Cannal. An impressive home with thirty-two rooms on three and a-half floors where he manages his growing holdings and family.

The Penburrows were a relatively new family, spawned from Archaia's expansion into the East in the past century and a half. Lord Arthur has built them up to become a very powerful force here in the lands of Eastern Archaia. It is a land rich in resources and trade opportunities, seized from the former kingdoms and nations that had once inhabited it. Its position doesn't come freely with the increasingly dangerous Alliance of Western Human Kingdoms on its Eastern border and the constant influx of settlers and immigrants from the West.

A tall man with distinguished features, Lord Arthur had been described as handsome, but like a humble man he only took his wife serious in such matters. He was striding through the second floor side hall that led to his personal study, lit by gas lamps. He stops by the desk that sat at the end of the hall in a small nook for his Butler-secretary James which was currently empty. He shrugged and went into his study knowing that James would check in when he got back from whatever business had him away.

Lord Arthur's study was kept modestly in that it was only the second largest room in the house. He used it as a way to intimidate visitors that needed to be intimidated with his power and grandeur even though his estate was already impressive. He found that he wasn't against the use of any advantage he could use to get what he wanted. Tonight was not a night he needed to use that, for it was a night for celebration as his plans within plans came together. In his study, he kept his best crystal and liquors.

A bottle of 50 year old Dwarven Wine, which was actually a curious type of Brandy, had been something he had been coveting. He also had used a few more resources than he should have to obtain. It had been crafted by a now long dead Brewmaster for the Illyric King who had never cared for Dwarven Wine, which most people don't.

Lord Arthur had developed a taste for it, especially such a rare bottle, and opened the bottle as to pour its contents into a crystal tulip glass. Setting the bottle down and gazing out at the moon lit landscape out the window, he takes a sip of his drink wincing at the bitterness the Dwarfs enjoyed but then enjoying the strange aftertaste they somehow are able to produce.

"They say it is better with Lilian Ice, though I do not see how that would make any difference."

"What" he says turning around to face the person in his study who had just spoken.
"Who? How did you get in here?"

"I let myself in" the stranger says stepping forward and gestures to the chair in front of him. "May I" he asks.

"I would be a terrible host if I said no; and who do I have the pleasure of hosting?"

"A friend" he says sitting down in the chair. Lord Arthur sits in his, taking another sip of his drink before setting in down in front of him while reaching for his Army Service Revolver that he kept under his desk, only to find it wasn't there. "Oh, and I already took the liberty of checking the room for weapons so as not to spoil the moment."

"How interesting, I do not think I have had the pleasure, but it is always nice to know I have more friends than previously thought of." He leans back stretching himself taller. "Pray tell, what brings you to my humble estate?"

"Oh my, your estate is anything but humble, but I came to have a chat."

"A chat you say? What would topic would you choose for discussion?"

The guest shifts in his chair, propping one leg on top of the other. "It seems Her Majesty has heard quite a few troubling tales about you" he said looking to straighten his stylish dark blue suit. "She of course dismissed them at first since you were such an adamant support of her."

"Of course, and I still am. Her Majesty will find no greater an ally than in me."

With a chuckle the guest says "Please, Lord Arthur, do not take us for fools. We know full well of your ambitions."

"I know not what you mean."

"Oh, really do you now" he says planting both of his feet on the ground. "Then perhaps I should enlighten you of your own devices. The first starts with your movement to increase your family's power here in the east by consolidation of your possession and those of your relatives. Marrying of your son to the only daughter of the Baron of Conlear, your daughter to the son of the Baron of Winslex, and your youngest to the only child of the Count of Gryphon. You are now in possession of the largest land holdings and wealth industries in the East, by proxy of course. This has allowed you to create a considerable House army and alliance."

"I don't see why my family's wellbeing and security should be the concern for the Queen. I am sure any respectable father would ensure their children's future. I cannot be blamed for that."

"No, you cannot. However, using them to bully your neighbors into submission is. This of course puts you in prime position to take over the Archduchy and turn it into a kingdom all your own." Lord Arthur starts to make a protest "However, please let me finish because I know you are going to say that you would have to first eliminate the Royal Regiments stationed in the East on the border. You also would say then you would have to march on Victory Bay and capture the Royals there, and as I must know it is the host to multiple naval squadrons which are headquartered there, the Eastern Admiralty, and its own detachment of Marines. Am I correct in my deductions?"

"Yes, very spot on assumptions. Since you have just laid out why such a plan would be foolish because of the formidableness of the targets that would have to be attacked, then please explain why it is that someone has showed such concern as to invite you into my home to discuss it with me."

"My master bade me here because the loophole had been found that would allow these plans of yours to be carried out. It seems that a very impressive deal, truly we are impressed, was struck that would garner you the strength to not only assault the troops in the East and to capture Victory Bay, but also to fortify and defend against the onslaught that would be the response from the West. Hold on for a second, and let me explain why I am here.

"You see, your Lordship if you carry out your plan you would incite a rage amongst the Nations of our fair Kingdom through your dastardly alliance and your actions. You know that the Andalusians on the Western border of your new kingdom will be upset as they always have united against threats from without, but you did not calculate the response of the other Nations. The Saxons, the Francians, the Teutons, the Vandilians, and even our dear friends the Rus will unite under the Queen like in a unity never seen before in our history. They will come here and your allies will abandon you."

"That really is a nice story but I must interrupt you as it is just that, a story, and..."

The guest flew up from his chair into the Count's face "Your messenger to the Marconian King was intercepted my fair Count. We know of your traitorous plans to ally with the Humans! We know you conspire to make a hybrid kingdom here in Europa with you as the king! It will fail and we will push forward and destroy the Alliance!" Collecting himself he sits back down in the chair. "However, that is something we cannot afford at this moment. It will be too hard to hold what we gain. It is too soon to force this issue, so for the good of the Kingdom your traitorous plan must be stopped."

“Traitorous” Lord Arthur shouted, throwing his hands up in the air. “That woman is not my monarch, she will never be fit the rule, the way she humiliated my father before his death! Besides, what are you going to do about it?” He took a sip of his drink and leaned back in haughtiness.

“You seem to have a problem understanding the situation you are in” he says with a smirk. He always knows this part, where people should know better. He use to sit there in disbelief at their foolishness as they sat there thinking they were the ones with the checkmate when it was the other way around. He pulls a sheet of paper from within his jacket and puts in on the desk. “You should know what this is.”

Lord Arthur looks at and his eyes widen in shock. “That is, but how!?”

“Your suicide note” he asks as to complete the Count’s thought. “Our scribes are very good. They just needed a sample.”

“If you think I’m going to kill myself you are dead wrong!” He tries to stand but is unable to.

“Do not try calling for your man James. He looked tired so I gave him the night off. He will be resting for a few hours more soundly. I was wondering how long the Ithycum root was going to take.” He stands up and slowly walks over to Lord Arthur’s side of the desk. “There is this Saxon doctor who has started to study the minds of his patients. He has an interesting theory about grief in that we go through it in stages. You have already been through two of them and the next is where you start to beg so please have some dignity and honor and skip to where you accept your fate.”

He draws and ornate flintlock pistol from his inside his coat. “I believe this was your father’s. I found it while disarming your study earlier. I felt it would add a nice touch, it is such a lovely firearm.”

“Who are you?”

“Why, my dear Count, you still don’t know” he says leaning down so that he’s by his ear. Whispering his says “we have gone by many names, but we are of the oldest order. From the mountains of Germanicus, we came.” He says starting the old poem. The Count’s eyes widen again in realization. “The Akkadian Knights, the Justinian Blades, we’ve also been known as the Royal Shadows.”

“The Lupus Cohort” the Lord Arthur musters.

“Sure, if you want to use our traditional name” he puts the pistol in the Count’s right hand and starts to move the stiff arm it was attached to up to a firing position. “To those whom I hold most dear, I sadly have realized the error of my ways and the foolishness of the actions I was to carry out. I had tried to lead my family down a path that I can now see was only going to lead to ruin. I have shamed myself and those who have come before me, and I know now the only path that will lead to redemption and restore honor to my posterity. I am sorry. Lord Arthur II, Count of Livery on Avin. I bet you even believe the note I wrote for you.”

“Assassin of the crown, I thought you weren’t real.”

“We get that a lot, but that is the point. Warriors of the light, we fight from the shadows to illuminate the misdeeds of traitors like you. We are eternal servants of the kingdom. Now my fair Count, would you kindly count to ten before you pull that trigger, if I recall that model of pistol the way I loaded it is rather loud.”

“One” says the count, the Ithycum root forcing compliance. His guest, the assassin, turns to walk out of the study and leave before the trigger is pulled.

“Two” he says as a tears form in his eye, the guest striding soundlessly from the room.

“Three” was the last word the man of the Cohort heard of the count, he continued to count for himself. He had reached the other end of the side hall and the window there when he reached ten and heard the gunshot, whispering “Sic semper traditoribus” while not looking back he slips out the window and down to the ground where he sneaks quickly across the lawn and to the place that his comrades await as the commotion of the estate ignites.

“Hail brothers” he says, “let us away from here and report back to the Alpha, another successful hunt for us.”

This meant a several days ride to Everston and the home of Lord Traianus Nervae, Duke of Everston and pater of the Ulpii. Duke Traianus was also the head of their order in Eastern Archaia. His estate is more modest than the counts and a fusion between Eastern and Western styles. They arrived at night and were led into the courtyard and up into the Duke’s study which overlooked where said courtyard.

Inside was the Duke, an established middle aged man with a wife and children, his oldest son who was a man himself, and another younger man. The study was large enough to house the three of them plus the assassin and his three companions. It was furnished well with black oak furnishings as well as a portrait of Queen Honoria II over the mantle of a modest fireplace which wasn’t lit since it was nearing the end of spring and the nights were warm.

"I take it you were successful" the Duke opens in his general flat tone that meant that they must have succeeded if they were returning to his home. They looked at the stranger not wanting to answer in front of him. "You of course remember my son Trajan" he said gesturing to the young man who was finishing his studies at the Academy and would soon be in search of a wife of his own, "but allow me to introduce our esteemed guest, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Arturius Maximus Justinian Constantinus, Archduke of Eastern Archaia, Duke of Usuria, and Count of Sadowium." They quickly bowed to the next King of Archaia.

"Please, stop this royal nonsense. Did you kill him or not" spoke the Prince.

"It has been done."

"Good, now I can return to mother and tell her that her cloak and dagger rubbish worked."

"I take it, Your Highness that you do not approve of our methods?"

"That is not your place to question" stated the Duke.

"It is alright Traianus, they have the right to question their monarchs. No, I do not. Of this shadow business, I am not a fan. I believe combat, and everything a government does, should be out in the open. I would have called up the Dragoons and the Centurions and arrested Lord Arthur and used it as a way to get what we wanted. The Alliance would have been quick to back down when we stirred the pot a bit and garnered a united Archaia."

"You would have used the man as leverage to strong arm them?"

"Yes, I think my philosophy of always walking softly and carrying a big stick is just what we need. Flex our muscles to the other states. We are the biggest one now and we should start acting like it if it means a better place for us. Now if you excuse me, I think I will start my trip back to Victory Bay."

"As you wish, your Highness."